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College Advisor

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April 2011

Seniors – Final acceptance letters should arrive this month

Juniors – Visit colleges

Prepare for AP Exams

9th - ACT and ACT plus Writing

Seniors – compare offers of admission; revisit top choices

Seniors – evaluate financial aid packages and explore college funding options

May 2011

1st – Common reply date for college enrollment

7th – SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests

(register by 4/8 - late registration 4/22)

2nd–13th - AP exams

Juniors – work on resume

Juniors – speak to advisor about military colleges or ROTC programs

Seniors – notify colleges that you will not attend

Choosing Which College to Attend

The waiting is over. Admissions decisions have been made. And some very happy students now have the enviable problem of deciding which college they want to attend.

From now until the May 1 notification deadline, the tables are turned as admissions officers try to win over newly admitted students. There will be flattering letters, phone calls and invitations to fun-filled programs designed to get prospective freshmen excited about attending their school.

Remember that these programs will paint the school in the best light. Since you want to learn everything you can before making a final decision, it's a good idea to look beyond the nice receptions and speeches. Some students skip these events, preferring to see the college on a more typical day. Others have been clear about their first choice school from the start and know where they want to be.

But even if you visited the college before you applied, it's worth making another trip. Now that you've been admitted, you'll probably see things differently. It's no longer a fantasy. You need to walk across the campus and eat lunch in the dining hall and see if you can picture yourself at this school next year.

Whether you go to a special event or visit the school on your own, be sure to spend some time in the student union or library talking with students about the college. It's better to find out now exactly how hard it is to get into popular classes, or that eve-

ryone goes home on weekends, or that you'll have no social life if you don't join a fraternity. This is also the time to sit in on a couple of classes and talk to students in your major.

If you've grown up in Los Angeles and are considering a college in Chicago, you might have the admissions office arrange for you to meet with a student from California, so you can find out what it's like to adjust to long cold winters. Talk to friends who have gone off to college on the East Coast and ask how they manage being far from home. Preferences can change during senior year, and students who start their college applications thinking they want to go across the country sometimes realize they want to be able to come home for a weekend. If any students from your high school are currently attending the colleges you're considering, get in touch and ask if they'd make the same choice today. Getting as much information as possible will help you make an informed decision.

Comparing financial aid offers is another major factor in making your final decision. If attending your third choice college means you'll graduate with little or no debt, that college might move up to first choice. Financial considerations could be especially important if you're planning to go on to law, medical or graduate school or will be embarking on a lower-paying career right after graduation.

It may seem like a huge decision, but if you applied to colleges that are good matches, there are no wrong decisions. You should have a great experience at any of the schools that have admitted you.

Options in Post-Secondary Education

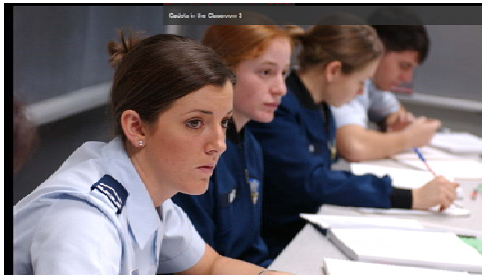
Juniors just beginning the college search process would do well to remember that there are a great many options when planning for post-high school education. While we use the term “college” pretty generically, you really should explore all available options. You’re the one who will determine which option provides the best fit for you.

North Americans tend to use the terms “university” and “college” interchangeably, but they are actually not quite the same thing. A *university* is comprised of two or more *colleges* and schools. For example, the *University of Pennsylvania* includes a *College of Arts & Sciences*, the *Wharton School of Business*, a *School of Nursing*, and a *School of Engineering*. A university generally grants both bachelors and more advanced degrees, while a college is likely to offer mainly undergraduate degrees. Universities also tend to be larger, often employ graduate students as teaching assistants, and tend to focus on research. Colleges usually provide a more intimate learning environment, students are generally taught by professors, and the focus is usually on undergraduate education. These designations, however, are only generalizations, and may not apply equally to all of the schools you are considering. Perhaps it is best just to remember that neither a college nor a university is superior to the other by designation alone.

Students looking for a broad educational experience with the opportunity to sample a variety of academic disciplines would do well to consider the liberal arts college. These colleges may be “stand alone” such as Amherst or Swarthmore, or exist as part of a university. At liberal arts colleges, students generally select one-third of their classes from a core curriculum, another third from their major, and choose from a variety of electives for the last third. This allows many students to double major or to minor in a second field of interest. The liberal arts experience provides a good

foundation for a changing world. Students are encouraged to think of learning as a life-long process, and are given the tools that provide flexibility as career requirements change.

Problem-solving high school students who are strong in math and science may find themselves drawn to a more technical education. Schools of Engineering may be just what these students are looking for. If you think you want engineering but are not entirely sure, you’d do better to choose a College of Engineering that is part of a broader-based university. That will allow you to easily switch majors if you discover engineering is not really a good fit for you.



Art Institutes and Conservatories offer a Bachelor of Fine Arts or a Bachelor of Music degree for students bent on a career in the visual or performing arts. Students at institutes and conservatories take two-thirds of their classes in the arts, and only one-third chosen from core courses and electives.

Future businessmen and entrepreneurs can choose to attend a school that focuses on the world of business, such as Bentley or Babson, or may enjoy the broader experience provided by a school of business that is part of a university. Many future business people never attend an undergraduate business school, but instead choose another related or even unrelated major, and then study business at the MBA level after graduation from college.

Military colleges, schools of hospitality management, fashion institutes, schools of accounting and of architecture, computer and technology schools, cooking schools, and community colleges offering a variety of certificate programs are additional options for post-secondary education. Proprietary colleges (such as the University of Phoenix) and online universities (such as University College of the University of Maryland) provide additional options for working adults. Lots of choices out there—take your time as you seek out the best path for you.

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Focus on Finances: Appealing Financial Aid Packages



In this time of budget cuts and financial concerns, relatively few students have the luxury of making a final college decision without regard to the costs involved. The colleges that have

offered you admission will also do their best to see that you will be able to afford to attend that school, but for most students, it is the family that must assume the bulk of the costs involved in college education.

If you applied for financial aid, you should receive a Financial Aid Statement (FAS) or Award Letter within a short time after you receive notification of acceptance. This letter will describe the financial aid package that the university is providing for your first year of study. Included will be information about the total cost of attendance (tuition and fees, books, personal expenses, room and board), as well as information about student and family resources compiled from data supplied on the FAFSA, and the sources of aid being offered by the university. This aid may include both grants and self-help in the form of loans.

Spring Break—Time to Hit the Road!

It's become nearly a rite of passage for young Americans. Spring break arrives and families hit the college trail! This can be a great time for campus visits since high school and college breaks usually do not coincide. Seniors can visit colleges still high on their list to help in making final decisions about where to attend. For juniors, spring break provides a time to see a college while it is in session. Because colleges tend to get lots of visitors during spring break, be sure you make your plans early.

If a senior is using this visit to make a final decision, it is important to do more than just take the campus tour. Call ahead to the admissions office and request an overnight stay in a residence hall and ask to sit in on one or more classes. If you've identified a major, a talk with one of the professors in that department might also be helpful. Spend lots of time talking with current students about their likes and dislikes, and assess how well this college fits you. Be sure to visit the placement office and learn how the college supports students transitioning to the world of work.

When your award letters arrive, study them carefully to determine your out-of-pocket expenses for each school. If your family determines that it would not be possible to meet these costs, you should contact the financial aid officer directly. Often, the FAFSA and CSS Profile do not compile a full picture of the financial obligations of your family. It is up to you to explain these obligations to the college financial aid office by letter and follow up with a phone call. This letter is known as an **appeal**.

Family obligations and concerns may include unusually high medical expenses, loss of a job, private school expenses for siblings, educational loans in payback stage, additional family dependents such as grandparents. By providing a more complete picture of family expenses, your family may be offered a revised package including more favorable financial terms. A description of the aid package offered by an academically comparable (although your second choice) institution can sometimes result in an increased offer of grant aid. It never hurts to respectfully request a review of your financial aid package.

Juniors who are just beginning their search for the "perfect college" will be concentrating more on the general feel of each institution. Arrange to go on a campus tour, attend an information session, and speak with current students. Visit the dorms, eat a meal at a dining hall, and check out the recreational facilities. Explore educational options such as majors offered, study abroad, internships, and accessibility of faculty. If you're really interested in one of the colleges you visit, check out the summer opportunities there so you can spend more time on campus. Be sure to jot down your feelings about each of the campuses you visit, highlighting programs that intrigued you, notes about physical facilities and course offerings, and your gut instinct about just how good a fit that college would be for you. Include photos you take on that visit and names and contact information for campus officials that you meet. All this will come in handy if that college makes it to your application list!

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Wallowing on the Wait-List

The acceptances have been coming in, but Dream U has left you stranded on the waitlist. What do you do now?

First things first. This is the time to assess your options and make a choice from among the schools that have offered you a place in their freshman class. See page one for a complete description of factors that should be considered while finalizing your decision.

But what about that offer of a spot on the waitlist at your first choice college? Colleges have increasingly been using waitlists as a way to optimize their outcome. With students submitting applications to more colleges than they have in the past, and with the growing use of the Common Application, it has become more and more difficult for many colleges to estimate how many students are likely to accept their offer of admission. Thus, they use the waitlist as a way of ensuring full dorms and classes in the fall.

Most often, the waitlist is not ranked, and

colleges wait to decide who to invite based on the demographics of the students who accepted their initial offer. For example, if the number of women accepting admission is higher than the number of men, admissions officers are far more likely to offer admission to men who remain on the waitlist. Too many potential biology majors —offers of admission will go out to history or English applicants.

The need for financial aid may also play a part as many colleges have been forced by the economy to become more need-aware in admissions. Full payers may well have an advantage over those who will need financial aid to attend.

You should only accept an offer of a spot on the waitlist if you're truly interested in attending. Although you're unable to affect the factors discussed above, you can help move your application from waitlist to accept by contacting your admissions officer at Dream U and letting her know that this is your first choice for college, and that you will attend if admitted. Without contact you'll remain wallowing on the waitlist

Website of the Month: www.ecampustours.com

eCampusTours.com offers virtual college tours with 360° x 360° views of thousands of different schools all at one easy-to-search site. Although not a substitute for an actual campus visit (or even a thorough exploration of the college's own website), this site is helpful for students building their initial college list. Lots of informative articles about the college process are also available at this website.

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