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# College Advisor

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## November 2010

### 6th – SAT Reasoning and Subject Exams

Seniors – File Early Decision/Early Action applications

Work on remaining college applications

Register for a PIN at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) if you'll be applying for financial aid

### 30<sup>th</sup> – Applications due for University of California colleges

## December 2010

Underclassmen— Review PSAT report with advisor and map out a plan for test preparation

Schedule SAT/ACT testing dates

Seniors—File any additional college applications before deadline dates.

### 4th—SAT Reasoning and Subject Exams

(register by 11/5 - late registration 11/19)

### 11th - ACT and ACT With Writing

(register by 11/5 - late registration 11/19)

## Don't Annoy The Admissions Officer

Students applying to college often worry about whether they have enough AP and honors courses, a sufficiently impressive grade point average and competitive test scores. They obsess over every word on application essays and agonize about which teacher to ask for a recommendation letter. But despite these efforts to present the perfect application, students can end up sabotaging their applications by exercising poor judgment.

Perhaps it's because the stakes seem so high and they are so desperate to get into a favorite school, but the stress of the college admission process seems to lead some students to do things that are really not in their best interest.

Sending eight recommendations when a college asks for two will annoy admissions officers who already have too much to read. In addition, you are communicating that you can't follow directions, can't count, or have so little confidence in your application that you have to try to pump it up with as many letters as possible.

The same thing can happen with application essays. If a college asks for 500 words and you write 1500 words, do not expect the admissions officer who has been reading applications for nine hours that day and who opens your file to find an endless essay to feel kindly toward you.

There's more than one way to ruin an application essay. You can bore the reader by writing about your experience on the sports team, where you learned the value of teamwork and dedication to a shared goal. You can offend the reader by writing

about your belief that all this multicultural stuff on college campuses is a load of politically correct nonsense.

Calling or e-mailing your admissions officer every week to let her know how much you want to attend the college is also not the way to demonstrate interest in the school. Desperation is no more appealing in a prospective student than it is in a potential date.

In many ways, applying to college is like applying for a job. In order to be taken seriously, you need to communicate in a professional manner. That means no texting an admissions officer as if she's your BFF. An e-mail address that seems funny to a student could be offensive to an adult. Perhaps, more importantly, an e-mail address with your name in it is easier for admissions staff to match to you, and anything that makes their lives easier when they are deluged with application files is a good thing.

Of course, students aren't the only ones who can sink a college application. Parents are also quite capable of alienating admissions officers. When a parent pretends to be the student on the phone, it does not go over well. Then there are the parents who insist on going into the interview and speaking for the student. YIKES!

Annoying an admissions officer might not be reason for a denial, but if you're applying to selective colleges, you don't want to stand out for negative reasons. A student's judgment and maturity can factor into admission decisions, so think about the message your actions are communicating.

## Accelerated Degree Programs

High school students who have a clear professional goal can fast track their education by entering an accelerated degree program. Accelerated programs enable motivated students to complete undergraduate and graduate degrees in less than the usual amount of time. Strong students who are sure they want to attend medical school can apply to a seven year program, where they begin medical school after three years of undergraduate work. Students who want to go into law may want to apply to a six year program, where they spend three years as an undergraduate and then begin law school.

The advantages of accelerated programs are clear. You save a year of college tuition. Knowing that you have a place in medical or law school when you begin college can significantly lower the stress level that comes with being a pre-med or pre-law student. It takes years of training to become a lawyer, and even more for doctors, so if you know that you want to enter one of these professions, getting started sooner can be very appealing.

There are also some tradeoffs to consider. You won't have as much time in college to pursue other academic and extracurricular interests in depth, and it can be more difficult to fit in a study abroad term. If you choose a college just because it offers an accelerated program, you may overlook other schools that could be a better fit. You might also change your mind about attending the medical or law school at that university.

If you are interested in an accelerated program, it's important to start preparing well

before senior year. Get some experience in the field by volunteering at a hospital or courthouse while you're in high school. Arrange to shadow a physician or attorney. You will find out if this is the right career path for you, and you'll be able to make a more compelling case for admission in your applications and interviews.

Make sure you are taking all the required

courses in high school. In order to be a competitive candidate for an accelerated medical program, you should take calculus and physics, and score well on SAT/ACT and Subject Tests. Application deadlines for accelerated programs may be early, so start researching those programs now.

Even if you don't begin an accelerated program right after high school, you may be

able to begin graduate work early. The accelerated BA/Master's degree program at Clark University enables students to start graduate work during senior year and complete a master's degree in their fifth year. You don't pay tuition for the fifth year, so you are getting the deeper knowledge of your field and enhanced job prospects that come with a master's degree, for the cost of a bachelor's degree. Some schools offer a five year MBA/BA program. Students usually apply once they have completed a couple years of undergraduate work. The University of Southern California offers a number of "progressive degree" programs, allowing students to complete both bachelor's and master's degrees in five or even four years.

These are just a few of the opportunities available to students who know where they're headed and who are in a hurry to get there.



*The University of Southern California offers Progressive Degree programs in a number of academic areas*

*"Accelerated degree programs enable motivated students to complete undergraduate and graduate degrees in less than the usual amount of time."*

## Focus on Finances: Understanding Financial Aid Jargon



When you're searching and applying for college financial aid, it helps to understand the jargon. The FAFSA form (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) employs a bewildering array of ac-

ronyms. You'll want to file a FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1st of senior year. Complete your application online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). To make the process easier, we offer a handy translation guide.

COA stands for Cost of Attendance. This number includes such costs as tuition, room and board, fees, books, a minimal budget for incidental spending, and two round trips yearly between the college and the student's home.

EFC is the Expected Family Contribution—the amount student and family are expected to be able to pay towards the first year of college expenses. The EFC is derived from an analysis of all of the data entered on the FAFSA form.

### Test-Optional Colleges

High grades but disappointing test scores? Some students who do really well on a day to day basis in the classroom, find themselves stymied by high-stakes standardized tests. In some cases, test anxiety gets in the way and students are unable to demonstrate their true abilities. If this sounds like you, you might want to consider adding some "test optional" institutions to your final list. Hundreds of colleges, including some of the most selective in the nation, admit a sizable portion of their class based upon grades, activities, essays, and recommendations.

In many states, public institutions may waive the test requirement for in-state residents who have met a minimum GPA standard. For example, California students may be admitted to many of the Cal State universities on the strength of their GPA alone. For very popular colleges, such as San Diego State University, test scores may be needed to help students meet the more stringent requirements of these more selective institutions. Other state universities including Arizona State, Indiana State, Michigan Tech, Minnesota State, Ohio State, Oklahoma State, and Texas Tech also offer admission to students without test scores. Check with your own state system if you are inter-

ESTABLISHED NEED—the difference between the COA and the EFC. This is the amount that the college financial aid package will attempt to meet.

PIN— Personal Identification Number. Both parent and student will need a PIN to complete the FAFSA online. Get yours at [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov) and then log on to [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) to complete the FAFSA. You also must have a SSN (social security number) to apply for federal and state aid.

SAR—the Student Aid Report. Your SAR will list all data you submitted, your EFC, and a list of colleges and programs to which you've released your report. You should receive your SAR about two weeks after filing your FAFSA online.

CSS PROFILE—the College Board form required by many private colleges in addition to the FAFSA. The PROFILE gathers more in-depth financial information. If required, complete the College Scholarship Service PROFILE form at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) in fall of senior year.

ested in gaining admission without regard to test scores.

Private colleges often have many fewer applicants than the larger public institutions and can spend more time considering everything an applicant has to offer rather than concentrating only on grades, GPA, and test scores. Some of these test optional colleges include highly selective institutions such as Bowdoin (ME), College of the Holy Cross (MA), Drew University (NJ), Franklin & Marshall (PA), Hamilton (NY), Hampshire (MA), Pitzer (CA), Middlebury (VT), Muhlenberg (PA), and Union (NY). In many cases, students may be asked to submit a graded school paper in lieu of test results.

Specialized institutions may also waive test requirements. Thus, test scores are optional at schools such as Julliard, Johnson & Wales, Ringling School of Art & Design, Manhattan School of Music, DeVry University, and the Culinary Institute of America. You can check out the entire list of test optional colleges at [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org). Contact each college that interests you to learn about their specific criteria for admissions.

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## Acing the Interview

Rarely required but frequently offered as a way of getting to know their applicants, college interviews should be viewed as your chance to shine. Whether on-campus or in your hometown, the interview is unlikely to be the deciding factor in the admission decision. However, making a really good impression could tip the scale in your favor.

To make this "good impression" you need to first do your homework. Before your interview, check out the college's website and review any printed material. Make note of any questions, and be prepared to ask them during your interview. You certainly should be clear on what it is about College X that interests you – major, special programs, location, student body, or opportunities for internships. On the day of your interview, arrive on time (or a few minutes early) and dress appropriately – you can't go wrong with business-like or preppy attire. Shake hands firmly and make eye contact. And now, get ready to have a conversation with this interested adult.

The best interviews are conversations – a give and take exchange of ideas, aspirations, and interests. This means you'll want to answer questions with more than a single word – expand on your answers and allow your interviewer to get to see more than the superficial you. Be prepared to talk about yourself in an articulate and engaging manner. You may be asked about your goals, your major area of interest, activities you love, experiences that have been most significant to you, a book that influenced your thinking. Run through a practice session beforehand, so you have a chance to try out your responses and get some feedback.

Just by visiting the campus or by arranging an interview, you are demonstrating your sincere interest in that college, so your willingness to interview will count in your favor.

At the conclusion of the interview, thank your interviewer for his/her time and interest. Be sure you get a business card or name and address so you can write a thank you note when you get home. That way, you'll make that good impression last!

## Book of the Month: *Creative Colleges* by Elaina Loveland

Students interested in the visual and performing arts have special challenges when searching for and applying to colleges. This guide addresses your needs if you're interested in acting, art, dance, music, or writing. You'll learn about the type of program that can provide the best fit. There's information about preparing for auditions and creating artistic portfolios. More than 200 art, drama, dance, music, and creative writing programs in arts conservatories, liberal arts colleges, and universities are profiled in this book. It's a great specialized resource guide.

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