

COLORADO ROCKY MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

# College Planning HANDBOOK

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this handbook is to answer the most frequently asked questions about the college admissions process. It is impossible to cover all aspects of the process in a brief publication. Additional questions and concerns should be addressed to the college counselors.

This handbook is distributed to members of the junior class as part of the college guidance program. Although other supplementary materials will be used, the process described herein is basic to all of the school's counseling with students and families. It is important that students and parents carefully read the handbook. During the second semester of the junior year, the college counselors will meet with students and parents to formally initiate the college search. Through scheduled class time, students will complete the personal inventory, become familiar with registration for standardized testing, and become aware of a process to use to discriminately identify schools appropriate for their interests and capabilities. This handbook should serve as a handy reference throughout the college planning and application process.

Entrance to colleges of choice is dependent upon the successful completion of a number of variables. No two students are viewed the same, nor will they have the same credentials. College admission is a human process subject to a number of considerations. The following paragraphs are taken from the book *Getting In!* by Steven Cohen and Paulo de Riveria:

As you learn about the college admission process, you will see that there is nothing sacrosanct about admissions policies. Who gets into selective colleges depends largely on who applies in a given year. Admission criteria, particularly at private schools, are rarely set in concrete, and often change from year to year to reflect the quality of the applicant pool and the nature of the school's needs.

And again:

Finally, despite fantasies to the contrary, admissions officers are human. They have biases, preferences, bad days, weak moments, flashes of insight, and more than occasional feelings of compassion. They recognize—and you should as well—that the admissions process is imperfect. People make mistakes. Still, in general, the admissions process works. And you can make it work for you.

CRMS faculty, advisors, and college counselors will work with students to help them make the admissions process work for them. The college applicant must complete a very careful self-analysis, must recognize both strengths and weaknesses, and must thoughtfully and seriously approach the task that lies ahead. Careful and responsible planning is a must if the student is to gain college satisfaction.

# RESPONSIBILITIES

As a college-preparatory school, CRMS has a responsibility to provide effective guidance and counseling in the college admissions process. The staff is eager to support you in your desire to find a good match at a college of your choice. While we cannot get you into a specific college (this is your responsibility), we can help you meet the demands of a very strenuous and time-consuming task. You will need to invest an ample amount of thought, planning, time, and hard work in seeing the task to completion, but the rewards are certainly worth it. The process works effectively when students, parents, and school understand their respective roles and cooperate in the venture.

## Student Responsibilities

**To research the scene:** Become familiar with a broad scope of colleges nationwide and acquire skills in using available resources (catalogues, guides, computer programs, the Internet, admissions personnel) to discover and learn about colleges that interest you.

**To personalize the search:** Think seriously about your ambitions, accomplishments, strengths and weaknesses; define your needs as they relate to further education; and seek colleges and universities that meet your interests and capabilities.

**To communicate frequently with your counselor:** Keep appointments; raise questions and concerns; share information about yourself with your counselor so that the counselor can help you in your search and represent you accurately in the school recommendation; notify the counselor of all college-related planning and of all notices of action taken on your applications; update your information regularly in the school's database.

**To expedite the application responsibly:** Complete every application with care and thoroughness; secure teacher recommendations; provide test scores to colleges; file applications promptly; register for SATs and ACTs by completing the forms, enclosing the fees, and meeting the deadlines.

## Parent Responsibilities

**To spend meaningful time with your child:** Talk honestly about issues such as financial limitations and geographic considerations that will impact student choice; set up visits to college campuses; listen attentively to your child's reactions and share your own.

**To communicate with counselors:** Attend scheduled meetings about college planning; visit, call, or E-mail counselors with questions and concerns; read CRMS college mailings.

**To stay in touch with your student's progress:** Follow your son's or daughter's progress in the college search and application process through the Web site of the CRMS college counseling program, <http://tcci.naviance.com\crms>. Use your password to access their account. If you have concerns about any schools on the list, contact your counselor immediately.

**To offer positive parental support:** Be sensitive to your child's individual needs; realize that as a senior your child needs loving attention while he or she is simultaneously excited about the mystique of college, overwhelmed by difficulties and decision-making, and anxious about acceptance and rejection; encourage successful completion of the senior year.

## **School/Counselor Responsibilities**

**To work carefully with the student and the family in developing realistic alternatives for post-secondary education:** Inform students during the junior year of the college admission process and select preliminary college choices for consideration over the summer preceding the senior year; use data about the student (course work, grades, standardized test scores, extracurricular activities) and information provided by the colleges to assist the student in recognizing which schools are reaches, which are possibilities, and which are likely to admit.

**To assist in identifying appropriate choices that will educate the whole person:** Together consider colleges and other programs where the student will have academic, social, and emotional success; personal fulfillment; and the opportunity to pursue a course of study consistent with interests.

**To guide and support the student through the application process:** Inform students of visits to campus from college representatives; remind students of important test registration deadlines and provide necessary registration materials; assist students with the procurement and completion of application materials.

**To send CRMS support materials:** Be sure that the necessary counselor recommendation, official school transcript, and midyear reports are provided to the institution to which the student applies; support the student's candidacy at the colleges to which application is made, primarily through a thorough, positive, yet credible and honest recommendation, but also through other contacts and communication when deemed helpful.

## **STUDENTS' RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PROCESS**

as published by the National Association for College Admission Counseling

### **When You Apply to Colleges and Universities, You Have Rights**

#### **Before you apply:**

- You have the right to receive full information from colleges and universities about their admission, financial aid, scholarship, and housing policies. If you consider applying under an early decision plan, you have a right to complete information from the college about its process and policy.

#### **When you are offered admission:**

- You have the right to wait to respond to an offer of admission and/or financial aid until May 1.
- Colleges that request commitments to offers of admission, financial aid, and/or housing prior to May 1 must clearly offer you the opportunity to request (in writing) an extension until May 1. They must grant you this extension, and your request may not jeopardize your status for housing and/or financial aid. (This right does not apply to candidates admitted under an early decision program.)

#### **If you are placed on a wait list or alternative list:**

- The letter that notifies you of that placement should provide a history that describes the number

of students on the wait list, the number offered admission, and the availability of financial aid and housing.

- Students should contact the colleges by phone to emphasize their continued interest in the school.
- Colleges may require neither a deposit nor a written commitment as a condition of remaining on the wait list.
- Colleges are expected to notify you regarding the resolution of your wait list status by August 1 at the latest.

## **When You Apply to Colleges/Universities, You Have Responsibilities**

### **Before you apply:**

- You have a responsibility to research and understand the policies and procedures of each college or university regarding application fees, financial aid, scholarships, and housing. You should also be sure that you understand the policies of each college regarding deposits that you may be required to make before you enroll.

### **As you apply:**

- You must complete all material that is required for application, and submit your application on or before the published deadlines. You should be the sole author of your applications.
- You should seek out the assistance of your high school counselor early and throughout the application period. Follow the process recommended by your high school for filing college applications.
- It is your responsibility to arrange, if appropriate, for visits to and/or interviews at colleges of your choice.

### **As you receive your admissions decisions:**

- You must notify each college or university that accepts you whether you are accepting or rejecting its offer. You should make these notifications as soon as you have made a final decision as to the college you wish to attend, but no later than May 1.
- You may confirm your intention to enroll and, if required, submit a deposit to only one college or university. The exception to this arises if you are put on a wait list by a college or university and are later admitted to that institution. You may accept the offer and send a deposit. However, you must immediately notify the college or university at which you had previously indicated your intention to enroll.

If you think your rights have been denied, you should contact the college or university immediately to request additional information or the extension of the reply date. In addition, you should ask your counselor to notify the president of the state or regional affiliate of the National Association of College Admission Counseling. If you need further assistance, send a copy of any correspondence you have had with the college or university and a copy of your letter of admission to: Executive Director, NACAC, 1631 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-2812.

The information presented here is consistent with changes to the NACAC Statement of Principles of Good Practice, revised in September 1994.

# AN OVERVIEW OF THE FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE PLANNING PROCESS

## **Grade 9**

- The student begins to build academic credentials through success in course work. The six credits received and the student's grades in these courses determine the grade point average (GPA), and represent one-third of the academic credentials the student will submit to college admissions offices at the time of application.
- The ideal transcript will have four years of each of the five major subject areas: English, history, math, science, foreign language.
- Develop your passions. Get involved in the community.

## **Grade 10**

- In October, every sophomore takes the PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test), a forerunner of the SAT I taken during later years. Analysis of test results helps the student address areas of strength and weakness.
- The student may attend CRMS information sessions with visiting college representatives.
- Families are encouraged to visit college campuses during vacations. Begin to discover the variety of options available (e.g., small, large, public, private, urban, rural).
- Complete the year successfully. Two-thirds of the academic credentials are completed.
- The student should register for appropriate SAT II: Subject Test at end of year.
- The student and advisor should plan carefully a course of study for the junior and senior years consistent with the student's interests and abilities, while ensuring that school requirements will be met.
- The student should consider leadership roles that will demonstrate their passions to colleges.
- The student should seek summer activities that will strengthen a personal resume (e.g., volunteer work, summer job, academic programs, travel).

## **Grade 11**

- In October, every junior takes the PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test).
- Attend CRMS information sessions with visiting college representatives.
- During the school year take the SAT I: Reasoning Test and the ACT. Take appropriate SAT II: Subject Tests at the end of the school year.
- Consider taking an SAT prep course offered for juniors on campus.
- Attend scheduled weekly college planning seminar during the second semester. Identify a list of colleges for consideration. (Complete preliminary resume and essay.)
- Students should pursue appropriate summer programs and activities (e.g., SAT prep course, college study, special workshops, camp/camp counseling, employment).
- Visit colleges to clarify likes and dislikes and to evaluate campus offerings.
- Consider taking the SAT prep course.

## **Grade 12**

- During the fall take the SAT I. If deemed appropriate, also take the ACT and SAT II: Subject Tests.
- Consider taking an SAT prep course.

- Attend scheduled college planning sessions during the first semester.
- Meet with college representatives visiting the CRMS campus.
- Schedule visitations to several college campuses.
- Meet deadlines with completed applications to approximately six to nine colleges.
- If applying for financial aid, complete all forms (CSS-College Profile, school forms, FAFSA or Free Application` for Federal Student Aid), and submit by published deadlines.
- Accept the offer of admission and submit deposit to one college by May 1.
- Complete the year successfully. Colleges require end-of-year transcripts for matriculation.

# COLLEGE ADMISSIONS TESTS

There are two agencies that provide testing data to most colleges and universities. The College Board offers the following tests annually: PSAT, SAT I: Reasoning Test, SAT II: Subject Test, TOEFL, and the AP. The American College Testing Program offers the ACT. Most colleges accept both and a number of colleges will accept the ACT scores in place of the SAT II: Subject Tests.

## Kinds of Tests

**Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT):** The first test of direct usefulness in college planning is the PSAT that CRMS students complete in both the 10th and 11th grades. The test is a multiple-choice test that measures developed verbal and mathematical reasoning abilities important for academic performance in college. It does not measure other abilities, motivation, creativity, or additional characteristics that may contribute to success. The two-and-one-half-hour test consists of a verbal section, a mathematical section, and a writing section. On the PSAT, scores are reported for each section on a scale of 20 (lowest) to 80 (highest).

One of the main reasons for taking the PSAT is to provide practice for the SAT. Both tests have similar questions and directions. A second purpose is to estimate SAT scores. The PSAT scores are not used by colleges for admissions purposes. The other purpose for the test is to determine which juniors will become eligible to be National Merit Semifinalists. In September of the senior year, semifinalists—those students who scores place them in the top half of one percent within the state—will be announced. Students from this group who meet additional requirements become finalists and compete for about 4,000 merit scholarships.

**SAT I: Reasoning Test:** The new version of the SAT features a 60-minute writing section and 70-minute critical reading and math sections, for a total testing time of three hours and 45 minutes.

The big changes are as follows (from the booklet *What Students Will Ask About the New SAT*, published by The College Board):

- **Writing:** Students will be asked to write an essay that requires them to take a position on an issue and use examples to support their position. Questions similar to the multiple-choice questions on the SAT II: Writing Subject Test will be included to see how well students use standard written English.
- **Math:** The new math section will include topics from third-year college-preparatory math (what most people know as Algebra II), such as exponential growth, absolute value, and functional notation, and will place greater emphasis on other topics such as linear functions, manipulations with exponents, and properties of tangent lines.
- **Critical Reading:** The critical reading section, currently known as the verbal section, will include shorter reading passages along with the existing long reading passages. Analogies will be eliminated, but sentence-completion questions will remain.

Separate scores are reported for the critical reading, writing, and math sections on a scale from 200 (lowest) to 800 (highest). In addition, verbal sub scores (sentence completion, and critical reading) and math sub scores (arithmetic/algebraic reasoning and geometric reasoning) are reported.

**SAT II: Subject Tests:** The SAT II: Subject Tests are one-hour, multiple-choice tests in specific subjects. Unlike the SAT I, these tests “measure your knowledge or skills in a particular subject and your ability to apply that knowledge.”

CRMS students should take the appropriate mathematics test (Level I or Level II). Selective colleges request that three subject tests be reported, so the student may elect to complete this requirement by selecting one of the other subject tests (foreign language, history, or science offerings).

A student should take subject tests in those subject areas that are being completed and in which he or she has found success. For example, a good biology student should take the test in June immediately following completion of the course. Similarly, a student successfully completing the study of foreign language after three or four years should register for the foreign language test in June of that year. International students should consider the ELPT (English Language Proficiency Test) as an option.

**Advanced Placement (AP) Examinations:** These tests, given in May, measure the achievement of the student in a college-level course that is taught in high school. Generally there is a specific curriculum that is followed. Success on these lengthy (approximately three hours) examinations may allow a student to receive credit or advanced placement at the college elected to attend. Scores are reported during the summer and are placed on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Students should confer with the classroom teacher about the appropriateness of registration for an examination. Because the English curriculum at CRMS is literature-based, certain juniors and/or seniors may register for the AP English Literature and Language Examination, though no specific course is offered.

**Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL):** This test is designed to assess the English-language capabilities of students for whom English is a second language, and is required by many colleges. Two formats are available for the test: a written test and a computer test. International students should take this test over the summer prior to the senior year.

**The American College Test (ACT):** The ACT Assessment contains four tests: English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning. These tests measure skills and abilities highly related to high school course work and success in college. A separate score is reported for each of the four tests. A composite average of the four tests is also given on a scale of 1 (low) to 36 (high).

## Testing Dates

The PSAT is required of all CRMS sophomores and juniors and is given only in October.

The SAT I is required of all CRMS juniors and seniors. It is urged that students take the test in the spring of the junior year and October of the senior year. Other test dates are available if the student desires.

The SAT II is taken in May or June of the junior year and November or December of the senior year.

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\*Parents of boarding students should provide students or the college counseling office with credit card information (Visa, MasterCard, number and expiration date) for use in test registration.

The AP is given in May for those students who have completed the required course work.

The ACT is given at various times throughout the year, though it is urged that juniors register for the April administration of the test and seniors for one of the fall test dates (October or December).

All registration materials for these tests are available at the school. These are distributed to students at the appropriate times. It is the student's responsibility to complete the registration forms, to enclose the appropriate registration fee\*, and to meet the registration deadline. Each testing agency provides a "how to" guide for each test. Included in these is a sample of the test itself. Students are urged to complete this in preparation for the testing. It is important that students hold on to the registration booklets, as these include important school codes and other information that will be needed in the application process. Test results should also be filed for future reference.

***The Colorado Rocky Mountain School code is 060215.***

## **Frequently Asked Questions about Test Scores**

### **How do I get my test scores sent to various colleges and universities?**

When the student registers for the examinations, he or she is asked to list the colleges to which he or she wants the scores sent. After the tests have been scored, the results will automatically be sent to those schools. Four scores are sent at no additional cost to the student. If no colleges are indicated on the registration form, or if additional colleges are to receive the scores, the student will need to complete the "Additional Report Request Form" provided with the results or available in the counseling office and send it to the appropriate agency. Colleges usually require an official report and it is the student's responsibility to contact the service for these.

### **If I take the SAT I more than once, which scores will the college use?**

In most cases, admissions officers will use the highest scores whenever earned. In some cases, colleges will average scores. The College Board reports all scores when test results have been requested, so the college will be aware of all SAT test results.

Contact [collegeboard.com](http://collegeboard.com) to add colleges needing SAT scores.

### **If I take the ACT more than once, which scores will the college use?**

The ACT will send only one set of scores and the student will determine which scores to send.

### **Can I cancel my scores?**

The student may cancel the test results immediately after the testing session if he or she feels the scores will not be representative of the student's best performance. This is done by completing a cancellation form available at the testing center or by telephone within hours of taking the test.

Instructions are given in the test registration materials. Once scores are reported, they are permanent.

### **Which SAT I is more important, my verbal or mathematics?**

Most college admissions officers feel that the verbal score is more important because almost every discipline pursued in college requires abilities in this area. On the other hand, if the student has indicated strong interest in math or science as an area for future study, then the math score assumes a role of greater importance.

### **Does an SAT review or preparation course really help me achieve higher scores?**

There is a great deal of controversy about the effects of a preparation course. On the one hand, the test makers and administrators have maintained that short-term coaching and student cramming do little or nothing to increase scores. On the other hand, there may be some benefits of preparation courses for those students willing to put in the time and with the right attitude. Review courses frequently include several administrations of past tests, with advice about following directions, strategies for approaching certain types of questions, and intelligent guessing. Drills on vocabulary and mathematics may help the student review subject matter as well as possibly boost a score. Test anxiety can be reduced through familiarity and practice.

College admissions personnel agree that the high school transcript provides them the best indication of what a student is capable of doing in college because it demonstrates accomplishments over a four-year period, as opposed to a three-hour period of standardized testing.

A student asking the above question should consider seriously whether he or she has time for such a course and should remember that test scores are not used as the sole basis for college admission. If the student then decides to enroll in a preparation course, the optimal time for such study is during the summer between the junior and senior years.

### **If I am planning to apply for early decision or early action, how does this affect my test-taking calendar?**

The student who is fairly certain of applying for early action or early decision is advised to take three SAT II Subject Tests by the end of the junior year and the second SAT I in October of the senior year. This makes it possible for scores to be received by colleges early enough for the student to be considered in the early action/early decision process.

# TYPES OF SCHOOLS FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

**College:** An institution that offers education instruction beyond high school level in a two- or four-year program.

**University:** An institution that grants undergraduate and graduate degrees and includes two or more degree-granting schools or colleges. It is composed of “schools” or “colleges.”

**Community College:** A two-year institution that offers vocational and academic programs. Most vocational programs are completed after two years, while academic course work may be transferred to four-year institutions. Usually these are non-residential in nature.

**Liberal Arts College:** A four-year institution that emphasizes a broad program of undergraduate education as a requirement for graduation. The student will usually identify a major field of study for the junior and senior years.

**Technological College:** An independent professional school that provides programs in specialized fields — engineering, for example. Sometimes these are called institutes of technology or polytechnic institutes.

**Technical School:** A two-year institution that offers terminal occupational programs — secretarial, data processing, pilot’s training, for example.

**Nursing School:** Two types of nursing schools exist. Hospital schools of nursing offer R.N. degrees upon successful completion of training. At nursing schools affiliated with four-year colleges, the graduate receives both a B.S. degree and an R.N. degree.

**Military Academy:** A four-year institution offering degrees in a variety of areas, from engineering to humanities, while preparing officers for military service. The application process to these institutions is unique from other application procedures and usually begins during the student’s junior year.

# **STEPS IN THE COLLEGE SEARCH**

There are more than 3,500 colleges and universities in the United States—and, like the students who attend them, they are all different. They are private and public; large and small; located in cities and small towns; offering liberal arts and sciences; and focusing in specialized and technical areas. In some ways, the college selection process is not unlike a marriage. Just as there are many potential marriage partners, there are also many colleges that will meet a student's needs. Careful research fosters a good match. As with courtship, it is important that both partners—students and college—present themselves as they really are. Ultimately, college life will be like marriage—that is, what the student makes of it.

The student beginning the college search experiences a variety of feelings. On the one hand there is the excitement of the unknown, the mystique of college; on the other hand there is hard work involved in the process, in addition to the uncertainties, anxieties, and frustrations that accompany thoughtful decision-making. The college search and application process can be painful, but at the same time it can be very rewarding, especially if the student approaches the task seriously and responsibly. The process, if executed conscientiously and effectively, should prove to be an informative, worthwhile, truly educational experience. **Following the ten steps below will assist the student in the college search.**

## **Step 1: Conduct a self-assessment**

To choose a college, the student has to know his or her own self-interests and abilities, dreams and goals, reasons for attending college. The place to begin the college search is with and within the applicant. Each junior completes the personal inventory. The first questions involve self-assessment — strengths and weaknesses, talents, interests, activities, and ambitions as they relate to school and higher education. By seeking answers to these questions, the student will be in a better position to define criteria for exploring college options.

## **Step 2: Determine factors that are personally important**

Another section of the personal inventory asks the student to think about the kind of academic and social environment that might best serve him or her at college. Initially, some of these questions may be difficult to answer, but as the process continues, it is important that answers are found, as these will help the student sort out which colleges and universities have suitable programs, facilities, and atmosphere. For example, there is the question of size. While one college may have only 2,000 students, another may have 30,000 (the size of a small city), and the student should weigh the advantages and disadvantages of size in personal terms, according to the importance to himself or herself of individual attention, access to professors and desired courses, variety of curricular fields, class size, teaching methods such as use of graduate assistants and lectures, and extensiveness of facilities and equipment. Thus one question may have many ramifications.

## **Step 3: Identify appropriate schools**

Using the information developed in the first two steps, the student then makes realistic selections of a broad group of colleges (fifteen to twenty) to compose a tentative list. A variety of sources should be consulted to learn about colleges and their programs that seem appropriate: college directories, college catalogues, computerized college research programs, visits with college representatives, visits with college students, and conversations with parents, faculty, alumni, and others. While the abundance of information may appear overwhelming, if the student has completed steps

one and two effectively, the identification of appropriate schools can be realized rather easily. (Students should be aware that there are several colleges that will meet their needs. Assuming there is only one will only create further anxiety.) The student is also urged to fully investigate a college, despite what he or she may have heard, for too frequently stereotypes are misleading and may prevent further exploration of an appropriate institution.

#### **Step 4: Assess admission probabilities**

There are several pieces of information that the student may use to clarify the admissions picture for each school in which there is interest. College admissions offices are concerned with several elements of the student's high school credentials: courses taken, grades in those courses, standardized test scores, and extracurricular activities. The student should compare his or her academic credentials with the standards presented by colleges of interest. College handbooks and directories provide information that will be helpful during this step. Their data will include class rank, grade point averages, and average standardized test scores for admitted freshmen. An equally important piece of data is the acceptance rate of a given college; a few schools have very low rates of acceptance. The student now begins to sort colleges into categories: reaches (the student's credentials and the college profile are significantly different); possibles (close alignment of credentials and the college profile); and likelies (alignment of credentials and the college profile place the student in a highly favorable position).

#### **Step 5: Seek further information from colleges**

The student should write directly to each college in which there is interest, requesting a catalogue and other information relating to specific interest areas. Students may also visit college Web sites on the Internet where they may take virtual tours, view the course catalogue, or seek departmental information. Much of this information may be downloaded. The student should create an orderly filing system for information received that may be reviewed easily. This step involves gathering and organizing material.

#### **Step 6: Compare and investigate the colleges**

There are many factors to consider when one examines college possibilities. Those important for the student should become more familiar as the process continues. Certainly several of the following are appropriate at this state for comparison purposes: academic quality (faculty credentials and accomplishments, number of students pursuing graduate study); type and quality of student body; curriculum structure and course offerings (degree requirements, number, range, depth, and quality of offerings in a given field of interest, special programs); student activities; campus facilities; teaching faculty (graduate students?); size of classes; costs.

#### **Step 7: Make campus visits**

During the summer between the junior and senior year, each student should visit college campuses to gain a better understanding of them and to discover any special considerations not earlier contemplated. When possible, the student should arrange an interview with admission personnel. During the fall the student should visit one or two of the colleges that are emerging from the narrowing list.

#### **Step 8: See college representatives**

Each student should take advantage of the presence of college admissions personnel on the Colorado Rocky Mountain School campus. These sessions with college representatives can be impor-

tant, for the student may discover answers to questions thus far unanswered, or may further validate initial impressions. The potential applicant may even make an impression on the representatives that could affect chances for admission, since most representatives are part of the decision-making body.

### **Step 9: Narrow the list**

By mid-October, the student is directed to determine the final application list and to consult with the college counselor about this list. This should include no more than six to nine colleges, and in some cases a student will apply to only one. Each of these choices should meet the student's needs. The final application list should include colleges in the different categories of admissions probabilities — reaches, possibles, and likelies.

### **Step 10: Complete the application**

The student must observe the stated deadlines and make certain that all of the applications materials are complete. The student provides teachers with recommendation forms and the counseling office with the secondary school report forms. More detailed information about completing the application appears later in this handbook.

# **FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A COLLEGE**

Compiled from various sources by the National College Fairs staff

## **Admissions Requirements**

- What high school courses are required?
- What scores are acceptable?
- Is a certain grade point average or class rank required?
- Will my activities and school involvement be considered?
- Is there an essay on the application? Is it read?
- Is there an early decision or early action plan?
- On what basis are applicants accepted?
- Are personal interviews or letters of recommendation required?
- Do certain majors have special requirements?
- What percent of applicants are accepted?
- Can admission denials be appealed?
- What is the application filing date?

## **College Characteristics**

- Where is the college located (city, suburb, small town, or rural setting)?
- What is the surrounding community like?
- Is the college public, private, or church-affiliated?
- What is the current student enrollment?
- What special or unique programs are offered?
- Does the college have general education or course distribution requirements? What are they?
- Does the college have special programs for transfer students?
- What is the academic calendar (semesters or quarters)?

## **Academics**

- What is the average class size? Largest? Smallest?
- Do classes actively involve students in discussion and in learning?
- How many students in last year's freshman class returned for their sophomore year?
- What support and developmental programs are available for first-year students (exposure to experienced teachers, relatively small size for introductory classes, etc.)?
- What was the grade point average for the freshman class last year?
- What is the college's procedure for student orientation, class placement, and scheduling?
  - Are classes guaranteed?
- How is a faculty advisor assigned to a student? How frequent is student-advisor contact?
- What services does the school offer for the student who is undecided about a major?
- How many students complete a degree?
- What are the most popular majors?
- Are students taught by full-time faculty members, graduate assistants, or a combination of both?
- What types of additional services are provided by the school to the student (e.g., tutoring, career and personal counseling, developmental reading and study-skills workshops, job placement)?
- Is there an honors program? What are the qualifications for entry?
- Is the quality of student satisfaction with the college experience measured by student-opinion surveys and interviews with graduates?

## **Financial Aid**

- What percent of the students receive financial aid based on financial need?
- What percent of the students receive scholarships based on academic ability?
- What would be a typical financial aid package for a freshman?
- What percent of those who apply for financial aid receive it?
- Will financial aid be adjusted if any need increases?
- What are the financial aid application procedures and deadlines?
- When are financial aid applicants notified of their awards?
- How long do they have to respond?
- Is there a tuition payment plan?
- Are campus jobs available? Are there off-campus jobs as well?

## **Social Life**

- What is the average age of the student body?
- What is the male-to-female ratio?
- What percent of the students reside on-campus?
- Are dorms single-sex or coed?
- Is it a “suitcase college” where all the students leave on the weekends?
- What are the procedures for selecting a roommate?

## **Student Population**

- From where do the majority of students come?
- Do most of the students commute or live on-campus?
- What types of student activities are there?
- Are sororities and fraternities on-campus?
- What athletic programs are available?
- Is the surrounding community supportive of the college?
- Does the college have a campus visitation program?
- Is housing available/guaranteed for freshmen?
- Is it available all four years?

# **RESOURCES FOR THE COLLEGE SEARCH**

To assist the student in the college search process there is a wide variety of resource material available, including computer programs that accept individualized criteria to generate a list of possible colleges, videotapes, CDs, and printed material. The college counseling office at CRMS contains a large collection of college catalogues that the student may consult. The videotape and CD collection increases in size every year and these, too, are available in the office. Comprehensive college reference books are also available for student use. These are the resources that a student should use to begin the search.

Advancements in technology have made college information much more accessible to students. Almost every college offers a home page with a variety of information available, from a virtual tour of the campus to the course catalogue. An increasing number of schools offer on-line applications as well as E-mail access to the office of admission and to academic departments.

There is an abundance of printed material about the college search. A complete bibliography would take many pages. No one resource has emerged as the authoritative text, so families and students are advised to read widely. Most of these books are available in public libraries as well as in local bookstores. The following is a list of some of the literature to aid in the college search process.

## **Comprehensive, generally objective college reference books published annually**

*Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, Barron's Educational Series, Hauppauge, NY  
*The College Catalog*, Kaplan Newsweek, Simon & Schuster, New York, NY  
*The College Handbook*, College Board, New York, NY  
*Comparative Guide to American Colleges*, Harper and Row, New York, NY

## **Selective, generally subjective college guidebooks**

*The Fiske Guide to Colleges*, Sourcebooks, Naperville, IL  
*Guide to the Best Colleges in the U.S.*, Simon & Schuster, New York, NY  
*The Insider's Guide to Colleges*, St. Martin's Press, New York, NY  
*The Princeton Review: The Best 311 Colleges*, Random House, New York, NY  
*The Public Ivys*, Viking Penguin, New York, NY  
*100 Colleges Where Average Students Can Excel*, Arco MacMillan, New York, NY

## **Supplementary college reference books**

*College Admissions Index of Majors and Sports*, Riverside Publishing, Itasca, IL  
*The College Finder: Choosing the School that's Right for You*, Ballantine Books, New York, NY  
*Index of Majors and Graduate Degrees*, College Board Publications, New York, NY

## **SAT preparation review books**

*Cracking the System, the SAT*, Princeton Review, Villard Books, New York, NY  
*5 SATs*, College Board, New York, NY  
*Standing Up to the SAT*, FairTest, Arco Publishing, New York, NY  
(Similar preparation books exist for the subject tests and the ACT.)

## **Books on how colleges make admission decisions, how students can predict their chances for admission**

*Behind the Scenes: An Inside Look at the Selective College Admission Process*, Edward B. Wall, Octameron Associates, Alexandria, VA

*Playing the Private College Admissions Game*, Richard Moll, Penguin Books, New York, NY

*Who Gets In? A Guide to College Selection*, Day Tyson, Graphic Publishing, Wichita, KS

## **College admission strategy books**

*The College Admissions Mystique*, Noonday Press, New York, NY

*College Match: A Blueprint for Choosing the Best School for You!*, Octameron Associates, Alexandria, VA

*The Fiske Guide to Getting into the Right College*, Sourcebooks, Naperville, IL

*Getting In!*, Paulo de Oliveria and Steve Cohen, Workman Publishing, New York, NY

*Looking Beyond the Ivy League: Finding the College that's Right for You*, Penguin Books, New York, NY

## **College books for parents**

*50 College Admission Directors Speak to Parents*, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Bethesda, MD

*College Admissions: A Crash Course for Panicked Parents*, Arco MacMillan, New York, NY

*Letting Go: A Parent's Guide to Today's College Experience*, Adler and Adler Publishers, Bethesda, MD

*Smart Parents Guide to College*, Ernest L. Boyer and Paul Boyer, Peterson's, Princeton, NJ

## **College books for foreign students**

*Applying to Colleges and Universities in the United States: A Handbook for International Students*, Peterson's Guides, Princeton, NJ

## **College books for students with specific backgrounds and concerns**

*The Black Student's Guide to Colleges*, Beckham House Publishers, Providence, RI

*Guide to American Art Schools*, Penguin Books, New York, NY

*The Hillel Guide to Jewish Life on Campus*, The Princeton Review, New York, NY

## **College books for students with learning differences**

*Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorders*, Peterson's, Princeton, NJ

*Lovejoy's College Guide for the Learning Disabled*, Monarch Press, New York, NY

## **Miscellaneous, very strongly recommended resources**

*Colleges that Change Lives: 40 Schools You Should Know About Even if You're Not a Straight-A Student*, Loren Pope, Viking Penguin, New York, NY

*Countdown to College: Every Student's Guide to Getting the Most out of High School*, Schneider and Kalb, College Board, New York, NY

*Looking Beyond the Ivy League: Finding the College that's Right for You*, Loren Pope, Viking Penguin, New York, NY

*Taking Time Off: Inspiring Stories of Students Who Enjoyed Successful Breaks from College and How You Can Plan Your Own*, Hall and Lieber, Noonday Press, New York, NY

## Web resources

### College Search

[www.collegequest.com](http://www.collegequest.com)

[www.myroad.com](http://www.myroad.com)

[www.usnews.com](http://www.usnews.com) (*U.S. News and World Report* rankings)

### Testing Information

[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

[www.kaplan.com](http://www.kaplan.com)

[www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)

[www.review.com](http://www.review.com) (Princeton Review)

[www.nacacnet.org](http://www.nacacnet.org)

[www.aauap.org](http://www.aauap.org) (Programs for Learning Differences)

[www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org) (National Collegiate Athletic Association)

[www.hillel.org](http://www.hillel.org) (Jewish campus life)

[www.wiche.edu](http://www.wiche.edu) (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education; WUE)

### Common Application

[www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org)

### Financial Aid

[www.fastaid.com](http://www.fastaid.com)

[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)

[www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)

[www.scholarships.com](http://www.scholarships.com)

[www.nelliemae.org](http://www.nelliemae.org)

[www.salliemae.com](http://www.salliemae.com)

[www.collegefund.org](http://www.collegefund.org) (American Indian College Fund)

[www.hsf.net](http://www.hsf.net) (National Hispanic College Fund)

## COLLEGE CAMPUS VISITS

The campus visit is one of the most valuable ways of learning about a college. In making a decision about where to apply, and eventually what college to attend, the student needs as much information as is possible. By reading about the college in catalogues, meeting with college representatives, and talking with other students, a student can learn a great deal. However, these sources cannot usually substitute for the information and impressions acquired during a well-planned college visit.

In the early stages of the college search, the student is encouraged to visit several colleges located close to home that represent categories of choice. Each student should try to visit large and small schools, city and rural campuses, public and private institutions, competitive and non-competitive programs. Visit several campuses and arrange for an interview and tour when possible. Even if these schools may not be eventually selected, valuable information and experience can be gained.

When a working list of schools has been established, the student is encouraged to visit some of these campuses. A trip that will allow the student to see several campuses over a period of several days is well advised. The colleges being visited should reflect the range of admissions probabilities earlier noted. To visit schools of similar make-up will not yield a great deal of information. In fact, by so doing some students become unwilling to explore other alternatives and eventually may experience some disappointment.

When families make plans for a trip, it is important that arrangements are made with the college offices well in advance. Call the colleges for an appointment and a campus tour. If there is an interview (individual or group), try to arrange this for after the tour, as the tour may provoke questions. If the student is interested in a particular subject or has any other specific interest (athletics, computers, theater), try to arrange for a visit with a person in that area.

The importance of the interview varies from institution to institution. In fact, for a variety of reasons, many colleges no longer offer individual interviews. Most admission personnel minimize the role of the interview as part of the admissions process. If you do have an interview, you will be asked about your background, interests, hobbies, goals, and reasons for applying to college. Regard the interview as a conversation in which you ask questions, too; you will be more likely to relax and enjoy the experience.

Following are some suggestions for the campus visit, what to look for and what to ask. It is important for the student to be prepared for the visit.

### Areas to Visit

- Visit the labs, classrooms, and seminar rooms, and talk to students and faculty. If you are majoring in the sciences or arts, see how well equipped the facilities are.
- Visit the library and check on the resources and accommodations available. Believe it or not, a college student spends an extraordinary amount of time in the library!
- Visit the student services area to check on the scope of services, such as career planning and placement.
- Visit the residences and if possible spend the night in a dorm. Explore the possible residential arrangements — single sex, coed, etc.
- Visit the athletic facilities for the opportunities they present.
- Visit the dining halls and discover what types of food plans are available.

- Visit the student center. Obtain copies of student publications and a schedule of student activities. Discover the nature of the clubs and organizations that are on campus. Read the bulletin boards to discover what is really happening on campus.
- Visit briefly the community in which the college is located to ascertain if it provides for needs that may not be available on campus.

## **Interviews**

- Be prompt.
- Be appropriately attired and groomed. The first impression is a strong one!
- Be informed about the college and have prepared any questions you have about the program.
- Be responsive, honest, and sincere. Project your personality, your strengths, and your interests.
- Become informed while informing. Both the interviewer and interviewee should leave having learned something. Take notes, as interviews have a way of blending together.
- Be confident. The college interviewer is as anxious to learn about you as you are to learn about the institution.
- When appropriate (individual interview), write a note of thanks to the individual who did the interview.

## **Academic Questions that Might Be Appropriate**

- What are the entrance requirements to the academic programs that interest you?
- What percentage of qualified applicants was accepted into that program the previous year?
- What is the enrollment in the academic program of interest? How big are the classes and who teaches them?
- What is the dropout rate in the program? That is, what percentage of the students entering the program fails to graduate?
- What academic counseling is available prior to registration?
- How and when are academic advisors assigned to each student? How many students does one advisor have?
- What opportunities are there for out-of-class contact with the faculty?
- Is there a student course evaluation published and available to you? If not, how does the university assess teaching effectiveness?
- What graduate schools are students entering? What is the percentage of those accepted to those who applied?
- What special programs are available for students both on-campus and off?

## **When You Talk to Students, Ask:**

- How many hours a week do you spend studying? Is that typical of students here?
- Is it possible to study in your dorm room?
- What's the library like as a place to study? To do research?
- Are campus jobs really available?
- Are faculty members interested in students and accessible outside of class?
- Do many students go home for the weekends?
- Is the food good?
- What do you like most about the college? Least?
- How easy is it to get the classes you want at registration?
- If you had it to do again, would you still choose this college?

### **If You Attend Class, Ask Yourself:**

- Are students interested in the material?
- Is there time for questions and discussion? Do the students participate?
- Are students prepared for class?
- Am I intellectually challenged by what is taking place in class?
- Is there a good rapport between the students and the faculty?
- Would I feel comfortable as a student in this setting?

### **When Your Visit Is Over, Ask Yourself:**

- What is distinctive about this college?
- Does this college have academic programs that fit your interests?
- Were the people that you met friendly and did they answer your questions fully and candidly?
- Did you like the social atmosphere?
- What do you think about the quality of instruction?
- What do you feel about the academic demands and atmosphere?
- Would you like to spend more time there?
- Did you sense that the college was interested in having you as a student?

Try to write down your impressions of the college while they are still fresh in your mind, so that you may compare these impressions with those from other schools you have visited.

## THE APPLICATION: MAKING IT COUNT

After the student researches and then decides on the colleges to which application will be made, one important task remains: completing every application with care and thoroughness. It is crucial that the applicant pays sufficient attention to the quality of the materials submitted and devotes sufficient time to the preparation of the application. The application is an OPPORTUNITY. It is the best means the student has of showing the admissions office who he or she is. A well-prepared application should enhance the student's chance for admission.

All colleges seek certain materials from the student and the school, but the quality will vary from one institution to another. At many large public universities, the student may only have to complete a short application and submit a transcript. Very competitive colleges, on the other hand, will ask a great deal more: several essays, teacher recommendations, and perhaps alumni interviews. While the following description of and suggestions for the application pertain most directly to competitive colleges, they are useful for all schools.

### The Student's Part of the Application

**Personal factual information:** In the first part of the application, the student is asked a series of background questions about his education and his family. This information gives admissions officers some understanding of the school and home environment and the nature and extent of the student's academic and non-academic opportunities.

Next, the student is often asked to specify the general areas of study that will be pursued in college: liberal arts, business, engineering, etc. There is always an undecided option, and for most students this may be the appropriate response. Some colleges will handle applications differently if the student identifies a particularly competitive interest area.

Colleges are also interested in the student's non-academic interests and activities in and out of school. Colleges often try to build a freshman class that includes a variety of talents and backgrounds. A full, detailed description of activities should be included. Because space on the application may be insufficient, students are urged to create a resume of activities to include with the application. A sample resume is included in the appendix. As every admissions officer will acknowledge, it is not the number of activities, but the quality of participation that counts.

**Personal essays:** Up to this point the application will require only short responses and data. Many applications will require one essay and, in some cases, several. The essay is a very important part of the application, and to be effective the student will need to do the hard, time-consuming work to maximize this portion of the application.

There are two purposes for the college essay. First, it provides the admissions office with an indication of the student's writing ability. Can the student put together a sentence, a paragraph, an entire statement? Because writing is so crucial to academic success, colleges are extremely interested in evidence of this ability. A second reason for the personal essay is that it provides the opportunity for the college to get beyond student grades, test scores, and resumes to learn about the student as a person. Although the essay questions from one college to another will differ, there is an underlying similarity to most of them. In short, most are asking the student to answer the statement: "Tell me something about you that I cannot learn elsewhere in the application." This is the opportunity to tell the college about yourself and to present yourself as an individual who would bring freshness

of vision and viewpoint to the college that would enhance the quality of its academic and social life.

### **Types of essay questions**

There are basically two types of essay topics: those that require a specific response and those that are open-ended, allowing the student to select and structure his or her own response.

Examples of the specific question essay include: “React to something you have read”; “What brief message would you beam to a suspected civilization in outer space to describe the nature of humans on our planet?”; “Write a short essay about a significant experience in your life, an issue you consider important, or a special interest.”

Examples of the open-ended essay include: “Please write an essay that will help us understand you better as a person and prospective university student”; “Brag about yourself”; “Write a description of your goals, what you hope to achieve in college, what influences have helped shape your life.”

A few colleges will ask applicants to submit a writing sample. Usually, the request is for a piece of writing the student has done for a class that has been graded by a teacher. If a college suggests that you submit a writing sample in addition to the required essay, do so.

### **Writing the college essay**

When preparing the college essay, consider the following:

- Consider the audience. A college admissions officer may read 30 to 50 essays in one sitting, so make it interesting and unique.
- Answer the question.
- Tell a story that only you can tell. The essay must be your own expression of who you are and what is important to you. Talk about yourself. Do not recite a laundry list of your accomplishments. An essay about walking the dog, if written well, may be as suitable a topic as marching for civil rights.
- Be yourself. Do not try to write what you think the college wants to hear. What they really want to know is who you are.
- Make certain that the essay is well constructed. Strive for memorable detail to support generalities. Be specific rather than general. Reflect on the meaning of your story. Remember the importance of the first sentence in grabbing the reader’s interest.
- Save your essay on a computer so that you can print other copies when needed.
- Spelling and grammar matter! Do not make a poor impression by turning out a sloppy or inaccurate document.
- After completing the rough draft, get the opinion of someone else—teacher, advisor, parent, counselor—about your essay. Listen closely to constructive criticism before writing the final draft.
- The length of the essay may be specified by the college, but 200-500 words is standard. Observe the recommended guidelines.

**Supplementary support:** If the student has a highly developed talent (artistic, athletic, musical, or scholarly), he or she should consider sending materials to explain and document it. Copies of this information should be directed to the appropriate campus department to enlist the support for the student’s candidacy.

## The School's Part of the Application

**Secondary school report and midyear report:** This form usually contains a space for a counselor recommendation and should be given to the college counselor as soon as it is determined that the student will apply to a specific college.

In addition to completing this form, the counselor will prepare the school recommendation, which will be sent to every college or university to which the student will apply. This report addresses four areas. First, the counselor comments on the student's program and achievement. In this section the counselor shares those abilities, habits, and skills that have contributed to academic success and notes improvements or other trends. Second, the counselor will focus on the student's contribution to the school and community. Third, the counselor prepares a description of the student's character and personality, supported by specific examples, if possible. If there have been unusual or extenuating circumstances that may have affected the student's record, these are explained. Finally, the counselor makes a summary statement and an overall recommendation on the student.

**Transcript:** The school will send a transcript to the university or college. The transcript is the record of the student's academic work. It lists all the courses taken and the grades and credits earned. Test results are included.

**School profile:** With every transcript the school also sends a School Profile. This document includes a brief description of the CRMS programs and history, the academic statistics of the graduating class, testing records for a five-year period, a description of special programs of note, and the school's college placement record for the past five years.

**Teacher recommendations:** Teacher recommendations are another very important part of the school's contribution to the student's application. These are read closely by admissions officers. Teacher comments provide support for other data received and help to form a picture of the student and his or her academic and personal strengths.

Below are some guidelines for selecting teachers:

- Ask teachers who have recently taught you and who you feel really know you well as a student and a person.
- Follow the instructions of the college, as many will ask for a recommendation from an English teacher. An aspiring engineer ought to have a recommendation from a math or science teacher as well.
- Do not confine your choices only to those teachers who rewarded you with an outstanding evaluation in their course. Other teachers can comment on your motivation, your dedication, and your attitude.
- In some cases a college may not require teacher recommendations. It may be a good idea to send one anyway. Check with your counselor.
- If there is a special area (athletics, fine arts, etc.) in which you have excelled, involve the teacher or coach in that area. This information might best be sent directly to the department, rather than the admissions office.

In the fall, seniors will be given printed material entitled "Proper Student Protocol in Obtaining Letters of Support for College Applications," which details the entire process for requesting letters of recommendation.

## Some Tips for Completing the Application

- Make a photocopy of the application. Fill it in first and when ready, transfer it to the original. Neatness is a factor.
- Copy and save all of the support materials that have been created: essays, resume, etc. Have these available for inclusion with completed applications. Maintain a file copy in the event that the application and support materials are not received by the college.
- Take advantage of the Common Application, a single application that can be submitted to a number of colleges. This will save considerable time and effort.
- Follow all instructions carefully.
- With the recommendation for teachers and the school there is generally a portion that the student is to complete. Make certain that this is done. On some applications there will be a space that asks the student to waive legal right to see the references upon matriculation to college. The school suggests that you waive this right. If the student has chosen his recommenders wisely, there is no reason to see what has been written. College offices are somewhat wary when this waiver has not been signed.
- Start early! If the application is not completed in advance of the deadline, it may be a sign of procrastination and affect the positive image the student desires to create.

## TYPES OF COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PLANS

There are several basic admissions plans of which the student should be aware. It is important that the student carefully read the information supplied by the colleges when he or she begins the application process.

**Early action:** Colleges have instituted this plan whereby they notify both acceptance and denials early in the year (usually mid-December). The student may apply to one of these colleges and, if accepted, be under no obligation to attend. Other applications may be filed. If accepted, the student does not have to notify the college of his or her final decision until May 1, the same date that the other schools must be notified.

**Early decision:** Some colleges have adopted plans whereby outstanding, qualified students make application early in the fall (end of October to early December). The colleges will notify applicants approximately one month after the application deadline. If a student is accepted under this plan, the student must withdraw all applications to other colleges. Acceptance under this plan is binding. Obviously, the student must be absolutely sure that he or she wants to attend this college. If the decision is deferred (moved to the regular applicant pool), the student is released and able to apply to other colleges.

**Regular admission:** Most of the applications will fit in this category. Each college will have an established due date for applications and an established reply date. Application deadlines may fall anywhere from November to March. It is important that the student meets the stated application deadline and does so with time to spare. **PLEASE NOTE:** The public colleges and universities of California have a November deadline for application.

**Rolling admission:** Under this program, used by the majority of colleges and universities, notification of status by the college is given within four to six weeks after receipt of all student credentials (though some colleges may have an established date when notification begins). Under this plan a student may be asked to accept an offer within a specified time period and pay a non-refundable deposit to hold the place. A letter should be sent by the student requesting an extension to May 1 to allow other schools to respond.

**Wait list:** A qualified applicant whose credentials are slightly less strong than others may be placed on a college's wait list. This applicant might be offered a place after the May 1 Candidates Reply Date, when colleges know how many students will enroll. In some years a college may not go to its wait list; in other years a college may draw from its wait list to a considerable extent. A student should place a deposit with an accepting school by the May 1 deadline to hold a place for the fall as notification for wait-listed students will come later in the summer, sometimes even in September. The student should carefully follow the instructions that attend the letter informing him or her of the wait list status.

**Deferred admission:** Some colleges have arrangements that allow a student to apply for a deferred admission. When accepted, the student may request that college entrance be postponed in order to pursue some other activity, such as a foreign exchange program. More and more colleges recognize that not every academically capable 18-year-old is emotionally, socially, or financially ready to begin college.

## THE COLLEGE'S REVIEW PROCESS

There is no standard admission process for colleges and universities, though certainly there are common pieces of information sought by all. Every school will examine the student's academic performance as the preeminent consideration. Then, depending upon the institution, there may be numerous other considerations to evaluate and weigh. Some of these factors are controlled by the student; others may be beyond the student's control.

### The Admissions Office

With the first communication to a college, an admission file is established in the student's name (it is important to use the legal name in all communication to ensure that everything is included in this file). This file will contain everything that has been asked for and submitted. When all is complete, the application file begins its way through the admissions process.

Some schools have a set formula for admitting students (a combination of the student's GPA and test scores), and at these schools one admissions officer will accept or reject the candidate. If the student represents a borderline case, others are called into the decision-making process.

At other colleges, the process takes more time, involves more people, and is generally more complicated. Applications may be read by two or more admissions officers before being submitted to a committee. Some admissions offices have created systems to grade or evaluate applications. In most of these cases, especially at the nation's most competitive colleges, decisions are made by a group of people, each bringing a different perspective to the process.

As these people meet to consider the student's application, they are using the materials in the file to determine the student's academic qualifications, the student's personal qualifications, and the student's ability to contribute to the life of the institution.

## **The Academic Evaluation**

**The transcript and high school courses:** The most important document in the admissions folder is the transcript. Admissions officers will examine it closely, not only for the grades earned, but also for the strength of the student's academic program. The quantity and quality are reviewed. In many instances the student's GPA will be recalculated to create uniformity among all applicants.

In reviewing the transcript, the admissions officer will look for trends. Have the grades and difficulty of courses been consistent through high school? If there is variation, is it clear why this is the case? The student's performance during the junior and senior years will be closely evaluated, as these courses most closely relate to college offerings. A strong college expects a balanced and demanding course load. When asked whether it is better to take a more advanced course (and possibly get a lower grade), most colleges recommend taking the more advanced course, as long as the student does not get in over his or her head. It is generally best from a purely educational standpoint, as well as from the college's point of view, to challenge yourself at a demanding level in the toughest courses you can take. If this means your grades are a bit lower, or that you must work harder for them, this only enriches the education you are getting in high school and improves your preparation for the challenges you will face in college.

**Standardized test scores:** Depending upon the school to which the student applies, test scores can be anywhere from almost totally irrelevant to very important. For many state colleges and universities, they may not be important criteria at all. For more competitive institutions, the test scores may have significant importance.

On the whole, the higher the student's test scores, the better the admissions probabilities. If the student's test scores diverge considerably from the median scores of a college under consideration, the test performance will have an impact on the student's application to that school. If the test scores are 150 to 200 points lower or higher than the median, the chances for acceptance are affected accordingly, unless these scores are offset by excellent grades or significant activities.

At the more competitive schools, the SAT II: Subject Tests may play an important role in the admissions consideration. There seems to be a high correlation between performance on the achievement tests and academic success in certain collegiate environments. Sometimes strong subject test scores can offset low SAT I scores.

**Writing ability:** Admission officers pay close attention to the student's portion of the application file. The writing sample (essay) is an important criterion in the admissions process, as it provides an indication of the student's ability to communicate and can be closely related to that expected from the college to which the student has made application. At many schools, the student's essay is read and evaluated by two or three people on the admissions office staff. The score on the SAT Writing section may be an important consideration for some schools.

**Other:** Teacher and counselor recommendations are reviewed closely, for these bring the student's academic achievements to life. Admissions officers can learn a great deal about a student's commit-

ment and approach to schoolwork. Frequently, these recommendations provide an impression of the student's potential for growth during the college years. The teacher's/counselor's enthusiasm for the student is often evident.

**Extracurricular activities/community service:** The depth of your involvement in activities outside the classroom will also be a factor in determining the strength of your application. Have you held office in student government? Acted as a peer tutor? Been a peer listener/counselor? Are you a dorm head? Do you take your love of the wilderness ever farther by working each summer as a camp counselor or trip leader? Have you been instrumental in the production of the yearbook or the school newspaper? Do you have an interest in something such as music performance, writing poetry, gourmet cooking, or working with children? Every college has its athletic teams, orchestra, theatre groups, community service clubs, and other organizations that need student support every year. Consequently the admissions officers will be seeking students to fill these.

While colleges are always interested in good students, they are also looking for freshmen who will contribute to the overall richness and diversity of life at their college. Leaders come in many forms, and colleges seek leaders both in and outside of the classroom. The application information the student provides will play a role in the college's decision.

### **Other Factors (Often Beyond Student Control)**

Almost all colleges and universities have institutional goals and priorities that they try to meet in the admissions process. There are several groups of candidates that might receive special attention in the admission process: athletes, minority students, disadvantaged students, and alumni children. Every college has a "hidden agenda," which means that certain applicants have an advantage in the admissions process. The rationale behind this is to make sure that each freshman class is an interesting group with which to live and work. Candidates who have experienced different cultures or lifestyles, who demonstrate unusual skills, or who are interested in majoring in a department that is reaching out for more students may find an advantage in the hidden agenda.

### **Selectivity**

Another factor beyond the student's control is the selectivity of an institution. Schools that enjoy a large applicant pool frequently turn away many well-qualified students because of limitations to the size of the freshman class. While the majority of the schools in the country accept nearly 80 percent of those who apply, there are a number of schools that accept fewer than 50 percent. When students consider schools, they need to be aware of the percentage of students offered acceptance. The more competition there is for a place in the class, the more difficult it becomes to predict admission outcomes.

## DECISIONS: ACCEPTANCE AND DENIAL, CHOOSING THE COLLEGE TO ATTEND

Depending upon the policy of each college, the students will accordingly receive responses to applications, some early, some as late as mid-April. There will be successes and there will be disappointments. The student needs to remember that if the process has been completed correctly, some schools were in the reach category and therefore chances for acceptance were slight.

Rejection is very difficult, particularly if it comes early in the process and even more so if it comes from the first choice school. This is a time when the student needs a great deal of parental and faculty support. If a student receives a rejection letter, he or she should keep the following in mind:

- The decision is not a judgment of personal or academic worth. In many cases, the reason one student has been selected over another student has more to do with the college's priorities than with the particular student.
- Everyone needs to recognize that there is not one college, or even a certain group of colleges, which has a monopoly on offering an outstanding education; rather, there are a number of colleges that will meet the student's needs. Frequently the quality of the institution that has accepted the student is not that different from the quality of the institution which has rejected the student.
- In the end, what is important is the student's attitude, approach to academia, and desire for advanced education no matter which institution he or she attends. The student makes the college; the college does not make the student.
- Keep in mind that if that college which rejected the student is the college he or she really wants to attend, entry may eventually be gained by transfer after the freshman or sophomore year (transfer admission is not as competitive as freshman entry).

As acceptances are received, the student will need to make some decisions frequently in a rather short span of time. Some will find the process easy; others will find it difficult to select the college. Each student should:

- Review individual criteria and try to determine which college seems to fit best. How does each of the accepting colleges meet your academic and social needs?
- Talk over your choices with other people. Discuss the options with others who will provide different ways of viewing the options.
- Visit or even revisit colleges. If one or more of the colleges have not been seen, it may be important to see them in action.
- Rely on instincts and feelings. Frequently these are the best indicators of choice. Too rational an approach can create difficulty.

Once the student has made the decision, he or she should inform all of the colleges immediately. Not only should the student file the required documents to accept the offer, but also the student should notify every other accepting school that he or she will not attend. In almost all cases the deadline for reply is May 1. The student should report college decisions to the college counselor.

# SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL AID

All colleges and universities expect the student and parents to contribute as much as possible to the cost of college education. But they realize that college costs may strain the family budget and will do their best to bridge the gap between what the family can afford and what the college costs. The lack of adequate family finances should not prevent a student from attending college. If there is the proper motivation and ability, financial assistance is available from a variety of sources. Materials pertinent to financial aid are available through the school's counselors. The best source of information concerning costs, types of assistance available, application procedures, and deadlines is the college financial aid officer, who can be contacted by a letter directed to the Director of Financial Aid at the college of choice.

There are two basic types of aid: grant and self-help. The grant is a direct gift of money provided without an obligation for future repayment. Self-help aid consists of loans and employment. With a loan, the student and/or family must repay it within a specified period after graduation. Employment, usually made available through the college, will also help meet part of the expenses. Most aid is based on need as well as achievement, and acceptance of aid may require certain levels of achievement within the college programs.

There are four primary sources for aid:

**Institutional:** This aid is controlled by the college and comes from its own funds and endowment. The sum available is dictated by a variety of factors, including the fiscal health of the institution. Such institutional programs include scholarships, grants, and loans.

**Private:** Many organizations, foundations, professional and trade associations, corporations, and churches/religious organizations serve as sources for additional financial aid. Some of these funds may be outright scholarships; others may be in the form of loans. The individual will have to research these. An excellent resource for finding private scholarships is [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org).

**State:** Some states have programs to assist students to attend state schools. When a family completes the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), it should indicate interest in these state programs. Families are urged to check with state institutions about the appropriate forms needed.

**Federal:** The federal government is the largest source of funds. Application is made directly to the federal government and/or the college for federal money. There are three main federal programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education. The largest is the Pell Grants, which are primarily intended for low- and moderate-income families. Application for the Pell Grant is made when the FAFSA is completed.

A second program, the Federal Stafford Loan, provides for a low-interest loan of a fixed sum that increases each year the student is enrolled. These loans come from commercial lending institutions. When the student is in school and for six months after completion of his or her education, the federal government pays the interest. Families have to demonstrate need before becoming eligible for the Stafford Loan. After the student has been accepted, application is made to the private lender. Long-term payoffs are part of this loan. The student will be the holder of this note. Moreover, there is a relatively new program called the Unsubsidized Federal Stafford Loan, the terms of

which are the same as the Stafford Loan except that the federal government does not pay the interest on the student's behalf prior to repayment. A student can receive both a subsidized and unsubsidized loan.

Unlike the Pell and Stafford programs, the Parents Loan for Undergraduate Students (PLUS) does not require a family to show need. This program, offered through a bank, is more expensive (higher interest rate). The interest rate is a variable rate with a 9% cap. Payments begin 60 days after receipt of the loan. This loan is made to parents whose responsibility it is to see that it is paid.

There are three other programs that are administered by the colleges with funds from the federal government. Funds for these programs are appropriated annually and allocated to colleges who in turn distribute the funds to eligible students. The Perkins Loan allows students to borrow up to a maximum of \$15,000 over a four-year period. The interest is 5%. Repayment by the student begins nine months following graduation, and the student has 10 years to repay. The College Work Study (CWS) program provides jobs for undergraduates who need financial assistance. Finally, the Supplemental Education Opportunity Act (SEOG) provides a sum each year that does not have to be repaid. The SEOG is for undergraduates with exceptional financial need, with priority given to Pell Grant recipients.

## **Applying for Aid**

If the student thinks that he or she will need financial aid, this should be indicated in writing to the colleges being explored. In most cases the colleges will provide specific information about financial aid at their school.

All students are required to file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). In addition, to be eligible for institutional money, some institutions will require the student to complete a supplemental application such as the CSS College Profile, which is submitted to the College Scholarship Service, and/or the Family Financial Statement (FFS), which is submitted to the offices of the American College Testing Program. It is imperative for each student to confirm whether one or both forms will be required by the institution to be filed for next year. Forms are distributed in late December or early January through the college counselors or this may be done online by using this address: [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov).

These forms ask for detailed information about the family's financial situation in order to perform a needs analysis. To complete these forms, it is necessary to have the federal income tax return available. The information reported is strictly confidential. The family designates which colleges are to receive the information. It is important that these forms are completed and mailed before mid-February in order to meet the college deadlines, since many colleges award aid on a first-come, first-served basis. Most college financial aid offices provide community workshops to assist families in completing the FAFSA and are available to answer questions, regardless of whether the student is applying to that school. Take advantage of this assistance.

Some colleges will supplement these forms with their own. Additionally, some colleges will require the family to make available photocopies of their income tax return for the preceding year.

## **The Financial Aid Package**

Four to six weeks after the FAFSA is submitted, the family will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) in the mail. The SAR lists your Expected Family Contribution (EFC) to college costs, and the data

on which the EFC is based. Review it carefully for accuracy. If it is incorrect, mail it back as soon as possible with the necessary corrections.

In determining the EFC, a common set of principles is used. First, the parents have the primary responsibility to pay for their child's education, although students also bear a responsibility to help pay for their education. Basically the contribution is a set figure, no matter what the cost of the institution. The formula used to calculate the EFC is complex and is determined by law. The results of the analysis are sent to the colleges that were indicated on the application.

The college's financial aid administrator then puts together a financial aid package. The costs of the education are first computed. The administrator reviews the financial need analysis as to the expected family contribution. This is deducted from the costs. The resulting figure represents the need of the student. The administrator then identifies all possible sources of money available from the college and other agencies. Finally he creates a financial aid package that is communicated to the family with the student's acceptance to the college.

Generally the package consists of three parts: an outright grant or scholarship from the institution that will not have to be repaid; a loan or loans at low interest rates; and a campus-based job or work study award. If there are several offers of financial aid, each package should be considered for its own merits. It is then up to the family to determine the action it will take. More than a few students have eventually made their college decisions (the choice of school to attend) on the basis of the awards granted. Given the cost of education, there is good reason for this. If there is a question about the financial aid package, the family is encouraged to call the college financial aid office for clarification.

### **No-Need Scholarships**

Financial scholarships not based on need are sometimes available to academically able or specially gifted students. In recent years, the number of these has increased as colleges have competed for the high achieving student. Careful investigation may yield outstanding opportunities for the student. While a great deal of publicity attends these opportunities, the actual number of awards is relatively small. Generally it happens that these scholarships are more prevalent at less selective schools that are trying to lure capable students to their programs.

### **Other Financial Aid and Scholarship Programs**

First, a word of caution. In this age of entrepreneurial enterprise, parents will receive notices in the mail about scholarship opportunities. Be very wary of these unsolicited notices. A general rule of thumb is that if there is a charge for the service, do not pursue it. If in doubt, seek advice from the college counselor or a local financial aid office.

There are a number of local and national scholarships available in addition to those state and federal programs listed above. Published scholarship directories are available at bookstores and libraries. In addition to the print material, two Web sites offer comprehensive lists of scholarship opportunities:

- [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)—the Internet's most complete financial aid site, with links to others
- [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)—claims a data base of 375,000 scholarships.

A list of scholarships may also be found at the CRMS counseling Web site, <http://tcci.naviance.com/crms>

## APPENDIX

All letters should be neatly typed or handwritten. These are the first impressions the college admissions office has of the applicant.

Today, it is easier to make this request by E-mail.

### Sample Letter I (Request for information)

1493 County Road 106  
Carbondale, Colorado 81623  
April 1, 2008

Director of Admissions  
Colorado College  
14 East Cache la Poudre Street  
Colorado Springs, CO 80903

Dear Sir:

I am currently a junior at Colorado Rocky Mountain School and will graduate in June 2009. I am interested in Colorado College and request that I be sent an application, a catalogue, and any other information appropriate for an entering freshman.

I am particularly interested in (major fields, sports, etc.) and would appreciate any information about this special interest area.

As I am also interested in financial aid and scholarships, I would appreciate receiving information concerning your policies and the attendant forms.\*

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

John Doe

\*Include this if you are intending to seek financial aid or think that you may qualify for a scholarship.

# Sample Resume

Below is a sample resume that may be used as a model (try to keep to one page):

## JOHN DOE

Street address

Town

Phone number

Birth date

Social Security number

E-mail address

### **Academic/Special Honors**

Honor roll, grades 10 and 11

National Merit Scholarship Corporation, Commended Scholar

National French Test, 4th place in division

CRMS Wilderness assistant, grade 12

CRMS Discipline Committee, grade 11

### **Athletic Activities**

CRMS recreational kayaking, grades 9, 10, and 11

CRMS competitive kayaking, grade 11, seventh place in state competition

CRMS soccer, grades 9 and 10 (14 hours/week)

FC Glenwood, select traveling soccer club, seven years

Backpacking and wilderness camping, five years

### **Extracurricular Activities**

Agenda (student government), grade 10

School newspaper, grades 10 and 11; sports editor, grade 11\*

Band member, grades 9, 10, and 11; drummer, eight years

### **Community Service and Work Experience**

Community Outreach, elementary school tutoring at CRMS, grade 10\* (seasonal: 8 hours/week)

Hospital volunteer, summer 2006 (20 hours/week)

Deep fry specialist at Wendy's, summer 2005 (30 hours/week), grade 11 (10 hours/week)

Political volunteer for state congressional candidate (5 hours/week), grade 11

Set crew, grades 9 and 10

### **Special Experiences**

Cornell University summer architecture program, summer, grade 10

Eagle Scout, 2003

International travel — countries visited, summer, grade 9

CRMS Fall Trip Penitente — Seven-day climbing trip, grade 12

CRMS Spring Trip San Juan — Seven-day kayaking trip, grade 12

CRMS Glassblowing Interim — Seven-day workshop, grade 12

### **Hobbies**

Piano, seven years

Model planes, jogging, mountain biking, guitar, church choir