



Climbing the steps to success

September 2011

10th and 11th grade students register & prepare for PSAT

Seniors – Finalize college list; work on applications & essays; review transcript for accuracy; request recommendation letters from teachers and counselors; meet with visiting college reps

10th – ACT and ACT plus Writing – offered in selected states only

October 2011

10th and 11th grade students :

Review test materials & take PSAT either 10/12 or 10/15

1st – SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests (register by 9/9—late registration 9/21)

22nd - ACT and ACT plus Writing (register by 9/16-late registration 9/30)

Attend area college fairs and meetings

Meet with college reps visiting high school

Seniors - Continue work on college applications; complete Early Decision/Early Action applications; complete CSS Profile if required

Submit “rolling” admissions applications ASAP

The Changing World of College Admissions

The college admission process wasn't nearly as anxiety-producing thirty years ago. Parents who haven't been through it yet have heard horror stories from friends and relatives, but they don't understand why things are so different now.

Today, more students apply to college. Thirty years ago, half of high school graduates applied to college, but now over two thirds submit applications. Back then, those that did apply usually stayed closer to home, often only applying to public universities in their state. Today's students apply more widely.

They also end up with more debt. The continuing increases in applications at expensive schools, even those that do not promise to meet full financial need, suggest that despite or perhaps because of an uncertain economy, families still see a college degree, especially from a brand name school, as important for their children's future and worth the financial sacrifice.

Parents are often shocked at how much more expensive college is today. College costs have outpaced inflation. The new, well-equipped science centers you see on so many campuses are expensive. Labor costs have gone up in higher education, just as in other industries. But in manufacturing, productivity can also increase with technological advances. It is more difficult to increase efficiency on campus without losing the personal attention that students and parents expect in college.

The application process has become easier in some ways, more difficult in others. Thirty years ago, students had to type and mail each application. Today, applications are done online. *The Common Application* means students no longer have to prepare a separate application for each college. The convenience of the Common Application and the anxiety about getting

into a good school motivate students to apply to more colleges. In 1989, only 16 percent of students applied to six or more colleges. By 2009, 33 percent applied to at least six colleges. Many students now apply to 10 or 15 schools, driven by the fear that they will be rejected by most schools.

The anxiety that students feel is mirrored in colleges, where admissions officers are under more pressure to keep increasing their application numbers. Colleges compete with rival schools to look more selective and desirable, and to get high rankings, which have become a priority for families obsessed with “best” schools. Colleges engage in aggressive marketing techniques, as families see when the dazzling viewbooks start arriving.

Thirty years ago, students were usually competing in a smaller applicant pool, with other students from similar backgrounds. Today, admissions officers have expanded their recruiting efforts, both across the country and internationally. The deluge of applicants with near perfect grades and high test scores makes admission to highly selective colleges more unpredictable. Admissions officers choose one high-achieving student while turning down another as they attempt to craft the ideal freshman class.

What has not changed dramatically is the number of available seats; most colleges have not increased capacity. When you have more students applying for roughly the same number of spaces, fewer students will be admitted.

College admission may be more competitive and anxiety-producing today, but students can choose to make this process less stressful. Focus on the programs and characteristics that are most important to you in a college, and then find schools of varying selectivity that offer what you want.

Focus on Careers: The Legal Profession

“Since there is no recommended “prelaw” major; college students planning on attending law school can major in any area of interest. They should, however, pursue a curriculum that emphasizes such areas as English, government, history, philosophy, economics, foreign language, public speaking, psychology, computer science, and mathematics.”



Through the years, popular TV programs have introduced all of America to the profession of law. Students and their families either are lawyers or know lawyers, or believe they know what lawyers do. This is a profession that has grown rapidly; almost a million lawyers now practice in the United States with the total number multiplying more than four times since the middle of the last century. Although law school applications have decreased in recent years, new law schools continue to open and all of their available places are filled. The profession is expected to continue to grow. But just what is it that lawyers actually do?

A lawyer acts as both advisor and advocate. As advisors, lawyers draft legal agreements, explain the legal consequences of actions to their clients, counsel clients about their rights and obligations, and advise clients on both personal and business matters. In the position of advocate, lawyers represent their clients in court and also help to resolve business and personal disputes through negotiation outside of court. Some lawyers serve as judges and preside in the courtroom. Others specialize in representing corporations while about ten percent work in governmental positions.

To be a successful lawyer, students should have good reasoning skills, a strong vocabulary, the ability to read critically and write clearly, possess a good memory, and be able to listen and communicate well. Because all lawyers are *officers of the court*, lawyers are governed by strict regulations and should possess strong ethical values. If you are interested in becoming a trial lawyer, you'll also need to be able to think on your feet, speak easily in front of an audience, and be able to plan courtroom strategy.

It takes at least seven years of full-time study after high school in order to become a lawyer. This includes four years of col-

lege (a bachelor's degree is required for law school admission) and three years of law school. There is no recommended "prelaw" major; college students can major in any area of interest. They should, however, pursue a curriculum that emphasizes such areas as English, government, philosophy, history, economics, foreign language, public speaking, psychology, computer science, and mathematics. Students interested in specializing may also want to include courses in accounting (for tax law) or engineering and science (for patent law).

Competition for available spots in law school remains heavy. Acceptance depends upon the applicant's undergraduate grades, scores on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), the quality of the student's college, related work experience, and a personal interview. To practice law in the U.S., applicants must graduate from an ABA or State accredited law school and pass a written bar examination. Individual states also have additional requirements for admission to the State Bar.

High school students are encouraged to get a first-hand look at legal careers by interning at local law offices or with their local State Attorney's office. Shadowing a practicing attorney will also give you a good first-hand look at what lawyers do. A number of precollege summer programs also offer hands-on experience for budding lawyers. School-based programs such as Mock Trial and Speech & Debate can also help students develop the communication skills valued in this profession.

For more information about careers in law, try the National Association for Law Placement at www.nalp.org. Related careers include *paralegals* who work as assistants to lawyers, *mediators* who help people resolve disputes without going to court, and *court reporters* who record everything said as part of a formal trial.

Does the High Cost of College Really Pay Off?



Reed College, Portland, OR

Peter Thiel, the co-founder of PayPal and a graduate of Stanford University, is paying 24 entrepreneurial college-age students \$100,000 NOT to attend college for two years. Instead, the students will spend their time and energy developing business ideas while participating in a mentorship

program in Silicon Valley. This program is the outgrowth of his idea that the high cost of college education is not justified in today's world. But is he right? Does the money invested in a college education pay off?

A recent study at the Brookings Institution suggests that not only is college worth the cost, but it's "likely to be the best investment a person makes in his lifetime." The study looked at the young adults who graduated from college during the last three years, a time period marked by high unemployment levels and a scarcity of jobs. The study found that about 90% of these graduates were employed in 2010 compared with only 64% of their peers who looked for work rather than attend college. Further, those with a college degree were earning, on average, al-

most twice the salary of those with only a high school diploma. By the age of fifty, the average college grad was earning \$46,000 more per year than her non-degreed peer.

Although college expenses are high, the return on investment is correspondingly high. The investigators found that possession of a college degree gave a return of over 15% a year on the average cost of a college education for those who earn the average salary for college graduates. Add to this the higher level of job satisfaction, better health, and longer life of the average college graduate, and you have more compelling reasons to opt for that degree. Indeed, the study concluded that "the more education you obtain, the better off your job prospects and future earnings."

Options for Last-Minute Testing

Seniors hoping to present higher test scores along with their college applications still have time to show what they can do. Both the SAT and ACT offer a number of test dates this fall for last minute testing. Although most colleges will accept scores through the December test dates, you should check with each of the colleges on your final list to determine their individual testing deadlines.

You might consider trying a different test this fall if you've only taken either the SAT or ACT. Although it's difficult to generalize, students stronger in math and the sciences tend to perform better on the SAT while those with verbal strengths tend to get higher scores on the ACT. There's really no downside to taking the alternate exam—colleges will accept whichever test you

submit. Be sure to review coursework if you plan to take one of the SAT subject exams this fall.

On a happy note, an increasing number of colleges are quite willing to accept students who do not submit any test scores. Their test optional policy means that the admissions committee will give greater weight to grades, degree of rigor of curriculum, essays, achievements, and recommendations. Some test-optional colleges ask for graded papers to help in their decision-making process. You can see the whole long list of test-optional colleges at www.fairtest.org.

Website Review

Have you ever planned a college tour? If you've tried to arrange visits to several colleges in a particular geographic region, you know already just how frustrating it can be to coordinate times of tours and information sessions with travel time and routes between campuses. A new website, however, has made the job much easier.

At www.GoSeeCampus.com you can organize a college trip, get advice on what to see and things to do when visiting a campus, read university and college trip reviews, and even search for nearby colleges that have the programs that you want.

Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.

Abraham Lincoln

A2Z College Planning

PO Box 13056

Durham, NC 27709

919.450.0171

info@a2zcollegeplanning.com

a2zcollegeplanning.com

Getting Involved

Whether you're just beginning high school or are well along in your secondary school career, it's never too late to get involved in both school and community life. Students often go out for clubs or activities because they think it "will look good" to college admissions officers, but wind up staying involved because the benefits go far beyond the college application process.

Rather than trying to impress someone, only select activities that truly matter to you—it's much more likely that you'll want to stick with a club, sport, or community service project when you enjoy that activity and derive satisfaction from being involved.

Participation requires a time commitment, the ability to balance school and extracurricular activities, and a willingness to share one's talents. Rather than joining numerous clubs or trying to play several sports, select only one or two activities and fully immerse yourself in those. By staying

involved over time, you'll find yourself gradually taking on a leadership role as younger students join the group.

The benefits of getting involved are clear—recent studies have shown that students engaged in activities forge stronger bonds with caring adults and develop closer relationships with peers. Participating students generally take more challenging high school classes and experience greater academic success. For example, students taking part in music programs scored on average about 20 points higher on the SAT than students who were not involved in music.

When it comes to extracurricular activities, think depth of involvement rather than quantity of activities. Strike the best balance for you between academics and extracurricular; the benefits you derive will be much greater than merely impressing an admissions committee.