


LEWISTON-PORTER HIGH SCHOOL
Counseling Center



College Information and Planning Guide
2022

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SENIOR PLANNING CALENDAR

SUMMER:

- Talk with parents/guardians about your choices.
- Continue college visits.
- After each college visit, send a thank you to Admissions Representative you met with.
- If you plan to play a Division 1 or 2 sport and have not done so already, register with NCAA at www.NCAA.org.

FALL/WINTER:

- Narrow college list down to top 5-6 choices (this is an average).
- Register online and take the SAT Reasoning Test, SAT Subject Test (if necessary), and/or ACT.
- Complete campus visits and interviews. If possible, visit colleges while classes are in session.
- Complete Brag Sheet and request letters of recommendation.
- Update your resume/activity sheet (if you have one).
- Continue to participate in extracurricular and volunteer activities
- To male students: you must register for selective service on your eighteenth birthday to be eligible for federal and state financial aid.
- Make a calendar showing application deadlines for admission, financial aid, and scholarships.
- Submit online any college applications for early-decision admission by November 1 (or other date specified).
- Apply online through the Common Application, SUNY, Coalition or send EDU.
- Start checking the Counseling Center for Scholarship Applications.
- Ask your Counselor to submit mid-year grades if any of the colleges you applied to request them.
- Follow up to make sure that the colleges have received all application information, including recommendations and test scores.
- Starting October 1st, fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and, if necessary, CSS PROFILE.

SPRING:

- Consider all admissions and financial aid packages you receive. Make the final decision that is best for you. Notify college of your decision by the date they indicate.
- Complete follow-up paperwork for the college of your choice (scheduling, orientation session, housing arrangements, and other necessary forms).

WHAT COLLEGES LOOK FOR IN PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

1. Grades and Courses in High School

Your high school record probably will be one of the most important factors in whether you will be admitted to a particular college or university. Good grades in all your courses throughout high school show that you are willing to work hard and have an interest in a variety of subjects.

A poor grade or two in high school does not mean you will not be admitted to a selected college. If your grades improve, even late in your high school career, colleges will notice.

Additionally, colleges also consider the diversity and difficulty of the courses you have taken (i.e. Regents, Honors and Advanced Placement).

2. Scores on Standardized Tests

The college admissions tests which are used by colleges and universities are the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), the American College Test (ACT) and SAT Subject Tests.

How important are your test scores? That depends on where you apply. Most colleges still require them, but the trend seems to be toward putting less emphasis on the tests.

The College's website will typically list the average test scores of students at their institution. Keep in mind that this is an average, not a minimum. The scores of students admitted to the school are in a range extending below, as well as above, that average.

College admission officers are fully aware that some students don't "test well". For these reasons, virtually all colleges also consider other factors when they select students. They look at grades, class rank, recommendations, essays and a student's special talents and achievements.

3. Out-of-Class Activities

Colleges also look at a student's interests. Colleges notice students involved in theater, musical groups, special interest clubs (i.e. Art, International Studies, etc.) community service, academic clubs (i.e. National Honor Society, etc.) and athletics.

4. Recommendations

Colleges differ when it comes to recommendations. Most require a recommendation from your high school counselor. Some also ask for references from a teacher and/or an adult you know well.

It is important that these people know you well enough to provide valuable insights. They will be asked about your intellectual strengths, your personality and what you do outside of class. Utilizing Lew-Port's "Brag Sheet" will help you document all your activities, honors and achievements. Your Counselor will provide you with one during your Senior Review.

BE ORGANIZED

To make the best use of all the information you gather from colleges, be organized! One good way is to keep a folder for all your college information.

As the materials arrive, note the things you like about a particular college and the things you dislike.

How does the college compare with the factors you considered earlier? Jot down any questions you have as you read, and ask yourself these questions as well:

1. Do I meet the college's minimum admission requirements?
2. Does the college have the major(s) or programs(s) I want?
3. Will the college help me achieve my educational and personal goals?
4. Does it have the activities and/or sports I want?

The idea is not to make a final decision now. Instead, read and think about each college. Then figure out what other information you need to gather.

APPLYING TO COLLEGE

Application form. In order to apply to college, you will need to submit an application online. Several colleges are part of the “common application” which is a unified application in which you can fill out an application one time and submit it to several different colleges and universities all over the country. The website to access the common application as well as a listing of colleges and universities that utilize the common application is commonapp.org. The common application can be used to apply to both SUNY (NYS schools) and private colleges and universities.

Some important things to remember when using the common application.

1. You will need to “invite” your school counselor to submit your secondary school report, which includes your transcript and an evaluation. You may access your counselor’s email address through the Lewiston-Porter website.
2. You will need to invite teachers to submit a “recommendation” on your behalf. Again, you will do this through the common application under “recommenders”, you will invite teachers for each individual school. Please make sure to ask your teachers first if they will submit a recommendation on your behalf and also give them a copy of your brag sheet. Once they agree to do so then you may send them the link.
3. Some schools will have a supplemental application which includes an essay and list of activities, honors and awards. This is usually all covered through the common application so it may be wise to use this for all schools including SUNY colleges and universities.

Application fee. Most colleges charge an application fee. Many colleges will waive this fee for applications from low-income families, such as those who are eligible for free or reduced lunch. If you think you qualify for a fee waiver, ask your counselor about the procedures to follow.

Admissions Test Scores. Your ACT and SAT scores are included on your transcript. However, some colleges request an official score directly from the testing service. It is the student’s responsibility to verify whether or not an official score from the testing center is required for admission and for requesting those scores from the testing center. This can be accomplished in two different ways. When you register for the SAT, indicate on your registration form which college should receive the report of your scores. **All** of the scores from your previous testing will be forwarded to the colleges, along with your new score. If you did not make use of the four score reports or would like to add another college, you may go online to College Board to request test scores. (NOTE: There is a fee).

Letters of Recommendation. Many schools require recommendations from people who can verify your academic abilities and personal qualities. A teacher and counselor recommendation are the most often requested, but other adults you might consider are your principal, assistant principal, coach, club advisor, supervisor of volunteer work, clergy, employer or an alumnus. Choose individuals who know you well. You can help them by providing a copy of your “Brag Sheet. Allow them ample time to complete the recommendations (at least 2 weeks).

APPLYING TO COLLEGE

(Continued)

Essay. Colleges may request an essay in order to learn more about you. Take this opportunity to express your individuality in a way that will set you apart from other applicants. Essays, for the most part, fall into 4 categories: (1) tell us about yourself; (2) tell us about an academic or extracurricular interest; (3) tell us why you want to attend our college; (4) show us the imaginative side of your personality. Tips for writing a good essay are included later in this guide.

Knowledge for College

Step 1: Identify Priorities (What is important to you?)

- A. Curriculum – Does the school offer the courses/major that I want?
- B. Size – Do I want to be on a large campus with many majors and lots to do? Do I prefer a school with smaller classes and fewer students to teacher ratios?
- C. Location – Am I interested in a big-city or small-town setting? Which part of the country would I like to experience? Would I prefer to stay close to home so that I can visit frequently?
- D. Admission Requirements – What does the school require for admission and look for in prospective students? What are my chances of being accepted? Am I a well-rounded student?
- E. Cost – What will it cost? How many students receive scholarships? What type of financial aid will I get?
- F. Quality of Education – How accessible are the professors? Will graduate students or professors teach my courses?
- G. Facilities – Is transportation on and around campus easy to get to? What would I like on or near my campus (restaurants, stores, laundry rooms, libraries, computer labs)?
- H. Athletics – Are intramural, club and varsity sports offered? How are the sports facilities and coaches? Am I planning on playing a division 1, 2, or 3 sport?
- I. Campus Life and Security – How is life outside the classroom? What special interest groups, activities, fraternities/sororities are available? Would I have a roommate or live alone? What is the quality of dorm life? How safe is the campus and surrounding neighborhoods?
- J. Retention and Graduation Rates – Retention rate is the percentage of students that stay for four years. Graduation rate is the percentage of who graduates within four years. High rates indicate that students were satisfied with their school experience.

Step 2: Narrow School Choices (Narrowing the list of potential colleges)

- A. Compare the likes and dislikes of each school on your list.
- B. Group school choices by your chances of being admitted:
(Organize your choices into 3 groups:
Reach Schools – represent an admission challenge either by cost, admission requirements, or both.
Mid Range Schools – those which you are likely to get in but are not quite sure.
Safety Schools – affordable schools, where you are sure to be admitted.)
- C. Make your final list – include schools from each group on your list and rank them by preference.
- D. Get and stay organized – once you narrow down your choices, compile a list of required forms and deadlines.

Knowledge for College

Don't miss out! Attend College Fairs, Open Houses, and Career Center

- Find out which schools will be represented
- Decide which colleges interest you, but don't be afraid to talk to other schools
- Prepare a short list of questions
- Dress appropriately-make a good impression
- Collect brochures and business cards

Public and Private Schools – What's the difference?

- Public Schools – supported by the state's taxpayers. Students pay 30% or less of actual cost of education and state covers the rest. In-state students pay less than out-of-state students.
- Private Schools – provide their own funding and tend to be more expensive than public schools. However, since they are non-tax supported, they tend to be more innovative in developing college financing plans, tuition assistance programs and financial aid award packages.

Step 3: Visit Schools – campus visits give you a close up look; focus on the details and actually get a feel for the college before making a commitment.

Pointers to help make the most of your campus visits:

- Do some prep work – before the visit, decide what you want to learn about the school and put together a list of questions. Use the same list for every school so that you can make fair comparisons.
- Schedule your visit at least 2 weeks in advance – call the admissions office to arrange your visit and inquire about campus tours. Ask to sit in on a class, eat in the cafeteria with students, spend the night in a dorm and use the campus facilities.
- Visit while classes are in session and activities are in full swing.
- Set up interviews with faculty and admissions staff – arrange to meet with professors who teach subjects that interest you. Meet with an admissions rep to verify admission requirements and discuss costs and financial aid.
- Ask lots of questions – ask students what they like best and least about the school, what the campus is like on weekends, specifics about the professors, etc.
- Trust your instincts – pay attention to your first impressions. Keep notes and take pictures to jog your memory as decision time approaches.
- Send thank you notes – it's polite and will keep you noticed.

Knowledge for College

Things that are most important to me in picking a college:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

List some of your college choices:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | |

Safety school _____

Target school _____

Reach school _____

COLLEGE SELECTION CRITERIA: DECIDING WHAT'S IMPORTANT

The following list of questions should facilitate your identifying some basic considerations when thinking about college, and will help you select the right institution.

1. Why are you going to college?
2. What is your primary concern in choosing a college?
3. What are you looking forward to?
4. How do you want to spend those four years? Consider academics, activities, and community.
5. How far from your home will you be comfortable spending those four years?
6. What kind of people do you look forward to encountering in college?
7. Are you more interested in attending college in a city setting, a suburban setting, or a rural setting?
8. How large an institution are you seeking?
9. How important will your college social life be to you?
10. How challenging an academic environment are you seeking?

RESEARCHING A COLLEGE

NAME OF COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

PROBABLE AREA OF CONCENTRATION

From the criteria listed here, number in rank order what the college considers most important:

Academic Average and Class Rank _____ Test Scores _____ Essays _____

Interview _____ Teacher Recommendations _____

What high school average puts you at the midpoint of their freshman class?

What is their range of average for accepted students?

What is the range of Reasoning SAT's _____ Math SAT's _____

What percentage of applicants are accepted?

Is the college out-of-state and public? If so, what percentage of out-of-staters do they take? Do many New Yorkers apply?

Does the college require an essay?

Does the college require letters of recommendation from teachers? If so, how many?

Does the college require an interview? On campus? Who does the interviewing?

Are subject tests required? If so, how many and which ones?

Does Early Decision or Early Action exist? Are there any advantages to either of those at this college?

COLLEGE PLANNING ONLINE RESOURCES

ACT

<http://www.act.org>

Independent, non-profit organization providing educational services to students and their parents, and to high schools and colleges.

Adventures in Education

www.aie.org

A source of college and career planning information.

CareerZone

<http://www.careerzone.ny.gov>

CareerZone is an online career-planning tool that helps job seekers and students research hundreds of occupations in a wide variety of fields. An electronic portfolio, a career-management tool designed to aid job seekers in assessing interests and identifying skills, is included on this site.

College Board

<http://www.collegeboard.org>

Information, services, and products for students and parents, as well as professional educators in both secondary and higher education.

College Data

<http://www.collegedata.com>

Choose, prepare, apply and pay for college with advice and tools. Get college admission help and search for colleges and scholarships.

CollegeNet

<http://www.collegenet.com>

Online college applications and financial aid searches.

College Source Online

<http://www.collegesource.org>

The Career Guidance Foundation provides over 10,000 college catalogs online in original page format.

College View

<http://www.collegeview.com>

Online college search service with profiles of accredited colleges and universities.

Kaplan Educational Center

<http://www.kaptest.com>

Kaplan Test Prep & Admissions offers private tutoring, classroom courses, and online test preparation options as well as valuable guidance on applying to college and financial aid information.

Khan Academy/Free Online SAT Prep

<http://www.khanacademy.org>

Mapping Your Future

<http://www.mappingyourfuture.org>

Tips on career planning, selecting a college, funding tuition.

COLLEGE PLANNING ONLINE RESOURCES (Continued)

My College Options

<http://www.mycollegeoptions.com>

My College Options is a free research-a-college service matching students with the right colleges, universities, or other career and educational opportunities. These institutions offer undergraduate degrees, programs and activities that fit the student's profile.

NCAA Clearinghouse

www.NCAA.org

All high school athletes wishing to compete in college must register with the Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse maintains and processes all of the initial-eligibility certifications.

Naviance

<https://connections.naviance.com/family-connection>

See your Counselor for your Username and Password.

New York's Private Colleges & Universities

<http://www.nycolleges.org>

Commission on independent colleges and universities in New York State: admissions and financial aid information.

Peterson's Guide to College Planning

<http://www.petersons.com>

Overview of college planning, test preparation, financial aid, and career planning.

Princeton Review

<http://www.princetonreview.com>

Explore colleges and careers, improve your SAT, ACT, AP scores and skills, and find scholarships.

Selective Service Online Registration

www.sss.gov

Male students can register with the Selective Service or obtain information.

Sylvan Learning, Inc.

<http://www.educate.com>

Sylvan Learning Center offers private tutoring and test preparation programs to help students score higher and improve their chances of getting into the college of their choice.

The State University of New York

<http://www.suny.edu>

U.S. News and World Report Colleges and Careers Center

<http://www.usnews.com/rankings>

Prepare yourself for college with a wide selection of tools and articles, including US News & World Report's America's Best Colleges interactive guide.

Virtual Campus Tours

<http://www.ecampustours.com>

Use the tools on eCampusTours to view all kinds of college planning information about choosing a college, student financial aid, campus life, career exploration, student loans, scholarships and more.

HINTS FOR A CAMPUS VISIT

A campus visit is highly recommended. Before you visit the campus, consider some of the options listed below. It is also important to develop a list of questions and plan specific activities in order to accomplish your goals.

- Meet with an admission officer.
- Verify admission requirements (tests and high school preparation).
- Discuss your chances for success.
- Determine college costs.
- Ask about financial aid opportunities, as well as deadlines, forms required, etc.
- Meet with faculty in the academic area of interest to you.
- Ask questions about academic requirements/offering.
- Attend a class to get an idea of typical size, teaching style, academic atmosphere.
- Ask about the placement record for graduates in the field you might study.
- Identify career-planning services for undergraduates.
- Tour the campus (be sure to check out the dorms, dining hall, library, etc.).
- Talk to students about the general academic environment and the study commitment necessary for success.
- Find out what student activities (clubs, organizations, sports, etc.) are available.
- Inquire about campus life and social activities.
- Investigate transportation options.

CAMPUS VISIT CHECKLIST

- _____ Letter from campus confirming date, time and location of your interview
- _____ Catalog, viewbook, or brochures of the campus
- _____ List of questions
- _____ Unofficial transcript (obtain from High School Guidance Office)
- _____ SAT, ACT, and Achievement Test Score results
- _____ Campus map
- _____ Parking permit (if necessary)
- _____ Airplane tickets (if necessary)
- _____ Confirmed reservations at local hotel (if you are not staying in a dorm)
- _____ Camera
- _____ Interview clothes
- _____ Portfolio (if appropriate) for Art/Design majors.
- _____ Money or credit card (debit)

THE CAMPUS VISIT

Visiting the campus will probably have the greatest impact on determining which college you choose. The best time to visit is when the college is in session. Schedule summer visits if this is not possible. If any Lewiston-Porter graduates attend the college you are going to visit, your counselor can provide their names for you.

Call the Admissions Office to request an interview and campus tour several weeks in advance of your trip, if possible. Visit classes if the college is in session. End your visit in the student union. Talk with as many people as possible to hear their views of the college.

Questions to ask on a campus visit (or in an informational presentation):

A. Academic Courses

1. How much flexibility will I have in my curriculum?
 - Can I change majors?
 - Can I double majors?
 - Can I cross-register with other colleges?
 - Is there a “core curriculum”?
2. What is the average class size?
3. What is the faculty/student ratio?
4. Can I get an internship in my major field?
5. Can I study abroad? Where?
6. Are there new programs or facilities that will be available in the near future?

B. Faculty

1. What percentage of the faculty teaches freshmen and sophomores? Will I be taught by graduate students?
2. How accessible is the faculty?
 - Do they have office hours?
 - Do they act as faculty advisors?
 - Are they available outside the classroom?

C. Student Life

1. What kinds of students go to school here?
2. What kinds of student organizations are there on campus?
3. Are there fraternities and sororities?
4. What kinds of athletic teams are there? Are there intramural leagues?
5. What extra-curricular activities are there on campus? What are the facilities like?
6. Is there an effective student government?
7. What happens on this campus on the weekends?
8. How politically active are the students?

THE CAMPUS VISIT (Continued)

D. Miscellaneous

1. What is distinctive about your college?
2. Will I have easy access to computers? Where are terminals located?
3. Does your school have a safe campus?
4. What kinds of support services are available?
5. How can I apply for financial aid? Does your school offer scholarships?
What kind of campus jobs can I get if I qualify for work-study?
6. Can I have a car on campus?
7. What are the college's recent graduates doing now?

E. When you talk to students, ask

1. What do you like about this college?.....least?
2. How easy is it to get the classes you want at registration?
3. How many hours a week do you study? Is that typical of students here?
4. Is it possible to study in your dorm room?
5. Is the library a good place to study?.....to do research?
6. Are faculty members interested in students, and accessible outside of class?
7. Do many students go home on weekends?
8. Are campus jobs readily available?
9. Is the food good?
10. If you had it to do again, would you still choose this college?

F. If you attend a class, ask yourself....

1. Are students interested in the materials?
2. Is there time for questions and discussion? Do students participate?
3. Am I intellectually challenged by what is taking place in the class?
4. Is there good rapport between professors and students?
5. Would I feel comfortable as a student in this setting?

G. As you tour the campus, ask yourself.....

1. Are the older buildings in good repair? Are the new buildings as well kept as the older ones?
2. Is lab equipment up-to-date and plentiful?
3. Are rooms in residence halls pleasant?...quiet enough to study in?
4. Are common areas in the residence halls attractive? Are there laundry and kitchen facilities?
5. What is the cafeteria like?
6. Are the grounds well kept?
7. Is the setting and architecture appealing?
8. What is the surrounding town or city like? Would I feel comfortable here?

THE CAMPUS VISIT (Continued)

When your visit is over, write down your impressions of the college while they are still fresh in your mind. It is a good idea to write a **thank you** note to the individual you met, and if questions have arisen since your visit, ask them in your note.

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR YOUR CAMPUS VISITS

1. Visit a dormitory and see a student's room. Does the dorm have lounges, study areas?
2. Find out where the students "hang out" and spend some time there yourself.
3. Check out the size of the campus.
4. Have lunch with a student. How is the food?
5. Read the student newspaper.
6. Talk with faculty as well as students.

CAMPUS VISIT NOTES

Name of college _____

Interview date/time/location _____

Name of Interviewer _____

Important questions answered:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Impression left after interview _____

Time of tour _____ Tour guide's name _____

Impression left after tour _____

Places I would like to see again or missed on the tour _____

Name of faculty or athletic staff met _____

Classes or athletic practices attended _____

Overnight visit scheduled _____ Name of host student _____

Name of dormitory _____

General impression from visit _____

Questions to follow up on _____

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS TEST INFORMATION

College Admissions Tests are standardized tests which are given nationwide, and permit colleges to compare students from different states, schools, and academic backgrounds. They are designed to measure a student's ability to do the college level work and are required by most four-year colleges and universities. The scores are important in a college's evaluation of whether you have the ability to succeed in its programs.

It is rare for a college to base its admissions decisions solely on the results on the College Admissions Tests. Decisions are made based on all the information available to a college including the high school record, class rank, recommendations, special aptitudes, interviews, and test scores. Colleges vary in the amount of importance they assign to each of these factors in their selection process; however, the high school record is usually weighted most heavily.

ACT (American College Testing)

The ACT Assessment is published by the American College Testing Program and is accepted for entrance or placement purposes by many colleges. The ACT Assessment includes four test areas – English, Mathematics, Reading and Science Reasoning – which measure what you learned in high school, and your ability to perform tasks frequently required in college coursework. The items require that the student demonstrate problem solving and reasoning ability. A score for each subject is reported, along with a composite score. In addition, it includes an Interest Inventory to help students choose a college major or career area. Also, there is a new writing test which is optional for students.

SAT Reasoning Test

The SAT Reasoning Test is a three hour multiple choice test which measures evidence based reading, writing and math. There is also an optional 50 minute written essay. Scores on the test range from 200 to 800 for evidence based reading and writing; 200 to 800 for math and 200 to 800 for the essay. The Essay section is optional and the results are reported separately.

SAT Subject Tests

SAT Subject tests are one-hour, multiple choice tests given in specific subject areas, and they measure your accumulated knowledge in those subjects. These tests were previously called Achievement Tests and were abbreviated as ACH. Some, not all, colleges require these tests for admissions and/or placement purposes. Usually, the most competitive schools in terms of admissions standards require such tests. The college catalog gives specific test requirements. It is best to take a SAT Subject test as close to the end of study in a subject matter area as possible. Score choice is available so you can see your score before sending it to a college.

NOTE: *You cannot take both the SAT Reasoning Test and the SAT Subject Tests on the same date. Registration forms for the ACT, SAT Reasoning Test and SAT Subject Tests are available in the Guidance Office, and must be mailed by the student approximately five weeks before the test date. Almost all four year colleges in the country accept ACT and SAT scores equally. We recommend students take both tests at least once.*

SAT Testing Dates for 2022-23 at Lewiston-Porter High School

2022-2023 Anticipated SAT Saturday Test Dates

October 1, 2022

November 5, 2022

March 11, 2023

May 6, 2023

ACT Testing Dates for 2022-23 at Lewiston-Porter High School

2022-2023 Anticipated ACT Saturday Test Dates

October 22, 2022

June 10, 2023

WHAT MAKES A GOOD COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAY

Clarity and Style: Above all else, your essay must be written in a clear and concise manner. No matter how exhilarating your subject, if your essay is incoherent, it will not make a good impression. **A few tips:** Don't try to impress anyone by stretching your vocabulary. Stick with what you know and with what you find comfortable. Similarly, don't worry about blinding the reader with extravagant style. Try to keep your sentences short and simple. However, don't be afraid to include a bit of levity or other indications of your creative side if you think it is appropriate for your subject. It's always a good idea to write at least two drafts of your essay and to have a teacher, parent, or friend proofread it.

Subject: Some schools designate what subject(s) your essay should cover. However, most require at least one essay that has no specific guidelines. For the majority of students, the open-ended essay question is the most difficult. So, how do you choose a subject? Here are a few broad suggestions: an important event in your life (something that affected how you think or feel about a particular subject); an organization to which you belong; an accomplishment about which you are particularly proud; your hobbies or interests; a political or social issue that concerns you; future plans. As long as you write about a subject you know and feel strongly about (either positively or negatively), you are on fertile ground. It's a good idea to discuss your subject with a friend, parent, teacher, or guidance counselor before you begin writing. They can often help you "hash out" the possibilities and assist in clarifying your sense of purpose. What you write about is generally not nearly as important as how you write about it.

Length: If the college to which you are applying has a specific word limit for the essay, try not to exceed it. If you cannot adequately address your topic within the word limit, you should try to pare it down or pick another subject entirely. Conversely, if you do not have enough to say about your subject to come relatively close to the word limit (say 75 percent of the maximum), you might want to reconsider. It is by no means necessary, however, to produce precisely the maximum or suggested number of words.

Repeat Use: Some colleges do not mind if you submit the same essay to other colleges. If different colleges place different word limits on the essay, you may be able to include or exclude certain points as the case demands. If you will need to vary the length of your essay, be careful to determine which points must be included and which are more extraneous. Discussing this with others can help.

Planning: Begin thinking about your essay well ahead of the deadline. Students who write their essays at the last minute do not produce their best work. If you begin to consider possible subjects a couple of months prior to your first deadline, you should be in solid shape.

Writing First Draft: How you approach your first draft depends on whether you are usually an explorer or a preplanner when you write. Explorers discover ideas as they go, searching for meanings first and worrying about logic, order, and form in later drafts. Preplanners, on the other hand, want to know what they will say before they begin. As a result, they have a tougher

WHAT MAKES A GOOD COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAY (Continued)

time starting, often pacing around for a week or more, saying, “I don’t know what to write about.” Only when they think they know do preplanners begin, usually with an outline followed by a draft they expect to be good.

You might find it beneficial to combine these two strategies: relax about first drafts, like the explorer, but give some thought to your essay before writing, like the preplanner. To do this, try the following steps:

First: Allow yourself “thinking” time between the jottings described in the previous section and the first draft. Ideas will perk inside without your knowing it, and you will find that when you start writing, your thoughts will have some shape or form already.

Second: Try a freeform outline; it allows you to explore possible ideas without the need to be organized or logical prematurely. Unlike the formal outline, freeform listings include everything you might want to say about a topic. You don’t decide which ideas are good or not, or what order they should be in, until afterwards.

Third: Talk out possible topics with friends or parents. Short conversations can help you discover what you most want to express and why. Don’t go into great detail (save your energy for writing), and you’ll find that you have more words to work with after these exchanges.

Fourth: Set aside a block of time (at least an hour) to see what happens on a blank page. Staring into space until an inspiration comes will produce more essays, more easily, than running around panicked about what you will write when you sit down.

Sharpening Your Focus

Once you’ve completed a draft, you need to decide which sections are working and which are not, and to make changes accordingly. If you just recopy your draft neatly, fixing spelling and punctuation but not reworking ideas, chances are that you will have a shapeless presentation of events, rather than a focused essay with theme.

To decide what to emphasize, read over your draft and ask yourself, “What’s the main thing I want to say?” Summarize it in a sentence, and then add, combine and rearrange ideas with this in mind. One student, for example, wrote a first draft about three key factors in her life: a six-month stay in France, a strong desire to be an actress, and a supportive family life. However, in reading it over, she realized it rambled dreadfully. So, after showing it to a friend and her English teacher, she focused the second draft on her trip to France, but showed how the visit enhanced her desire to be an actress, and explained how her family life had prepared her to deal with adjusting to a foreign culture.

To sharpen your focus, you may have to cut or condense sections that are important to you. One writer, who began by writing how piano affected her life from age 7 to 17, gave equal time, in

WHAT MAKES A GOOD COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAY (Continued)

draft one, to her mother's nagging and the effect of practicing on other parts of her life - lacrosse, studying, and so on. While rereading this draft, she realized that her best sections showed how piano had helped her mature, and that the tensions with her mother, although part of the process, would be best condensed into a single, strong paragraph.

Putting On a Reader's Hat

Sometimes you finish a draft and know immediately what needs changing and how to do it. But often, these insights require more time and distance from your work. You must shift hats from writer to reader before you know how best to revise. There are several ways to do this: (1) Let your draft sit for a few days (or, at least, a few hours) without looking it over. (2) Read it aloud. Your ear will pick up problems (dull sections, awkward phrasing, etc.) and you will stumble on words. Mark these spots and you will have most of your problem areas. (3) Ask yourself these questions: Where am I bored? Where am I confused? Where have I gone off the subject? What details have I left out that are still in my head? Does my introduction hint at what is coming, and make me want to read on? (4) Finally, trust your intuition, particularly if it makes you feel uncomfortable.

As one professional writer stated, "If you feel it's wrong, it's wrong." Your intuition as a reader doesn't always know how to change a problem, but it points you down the right track.

ONLINE FINANCIAL AID RESOURCES

FAFSA on the Web

<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>

US Department of Education Free Application for Federal Student Aid Website.

FastWeb

<http://www.fastweb.com>

The site is billed as the Internet's largest FREE scholarship search!

Federal Student Aid Web Site

<http://studentaid.ed.gov>

U.S. Department of Education resources for students, access to online FAFSA

New York State Financial Aid Administrators Association

<http://www.nysfaaa.org>

The official website of the New York Student Financial Aid Administrators Association offers students and families a Financial Aid Resource Center.

New York State Higher Education Services Corporation

<http://www.hesc.com>

HESC is the state agency that helps people pay for college. HESC administers the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), guarantees federal student and parent loans, provides guidance for college planning, and provides a highly-rated 529 college savings plan.

PROFILE Form

<http://profileonline.collegeboard.com/index.jsp>

The financial aid application service of the College Board. Many of the member colleges, universities, graduate and professional schools, and scholarship programs use the information collected on PROFILE to help them award nonfederal student aid funds.

Sallie Mae

<http://www.salliemae.com>

Scholarship service with Internet access to a comprehensive database of financial aid resources.

The Smart Student Guide to Financial Aid

<http://www.finaid.com>

A financial aid information site with links to many college aid resources

2008 Colleges, College Scholarships and Financial Aid page

<http://www.college-scholarships.com>

This site is designed to offer college bound students, parents and counselors easy access to information on free college scholarship and financial aid searches, SAT and ACT test preparation tips, and more, colleges and universities throughout the United States, and career schools, vocational schools, technical schools, career colleges, vocational colleges and technical colleges throughout the U.S.

IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. Start your college search early.
2. Know yourself and what you want from college.
3. Work with your counselor and spend time in the career center.
4. See for yourself by visiting several schools for tours and interviews.
5. Be systematic and narrow your choices step by step.
6. Be prepared to compromise; no single college will be perfect in every respect.
7. Take the time to find the right college. It will put you on the right road to a successful future!

GLOSSARY

SAT Subject - One-hour tests offered in subjects such as English, foreign languages, science, history, and mathematics. These tests measure a student's knowledge of particular subject areas.

ACT - Standardized admissions test consisting of four parts - English usage, mathematics usage, social studies reading, and natural sciences reading. Scores are reported in a range of 1 to 36.

Advanced Placement - Credit for college-level high school courses usually granted on the basis of tests. The well-known Advanced Placement exams of the College Board are given in more than a dozen subject areas every spring. They are scored from 1 to 5. Students who score from 3 to 5 on the tests may receive advanced placement and credit at college for the work they have done.

Award Letter - The document issued by the financial aid office to the student that indicates the type, amount, and disbursement dates of the funds awarded from the various financial aid programs, and the conditions which govern the award.

Early Action - Currently available in a limited number of schools. Students apply early, are notified of acceptance early, but are not obligated to matriculate.

Early Admission - A program in which a college accepts high school students to begin work before they graduate from high school. Admissions standards are more stringent for early admission candidates.

Early Decision - A plan in which students apply in November or December and learn of the decision on their application during December or January. This plan is suggested for students who are above average academically. Early decision plans can be single choice (candidates can apply to college) or first choice (candidates can apply to more than one college, but accepted students are usually required to withdraw their applications to other colleges and agree to matriculate to the college that accepts them).

Early Notification - Early notification programs are similar in purpose and process to the early action option. Under the early notification program, applicants must file their papers early, and consequently receive an admission decision early. In contrast to the rule in early decision programs, an applicant is not obligated to attend if admitted.

ETS - Educational Testing Service, an organization that designs and administers tests, like the SAT, for other groups, such as the College Board.

Family Contribution - The amount an outside agency estimates that you and your family should be able to contribute to the cost of your college education, as determined by such factors as your parents' income, assets, and debts; your earnings and savings; and the number of children in your family currently in college.

GLOSSARY **(Continued)**

Federal Stafford Loan - Federal Stafford Loans are federally guaranteed student loans. Freshmen are eligible to borrow a maximum of \$2,625 per year. Students who do not qualify for the subsidized Federal Stafford Loan may be eligible for an unsubsidized Federal Stafford Loan.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) - The application used to apply for federal financial aid.

Grade Point Average - A system of measuring student's achievement used by many colleges and universities. A student's GPA is computed by multiplying the numerical grade received in each course by the number of credits offered for each course, then dividing by the total number of credit hours studied. Most institutions use the following grade conversion scale: A= 4, B= 3, C= 2, D= 1, and E and F= 0.

Matriculation - Enrollment at a college or university to begin work toward an academic degree.

National Merit Scholarship - Scholarship given to students who are selected on the basis of PSAT/NMSQT scores and other criteria to be Merit Scholars.

Needs Analysis - The process used to evaluate an applicant's financial situation to determine how much student aid he or she needs to help meet post-secondary educational expenses.

Open Admissions - A policy adopted by a number of institutions - mostly public - that allows virtually all applicants to be accepted, without regard to such traditional qualifying criteria as test scores, class rank, grades, etc.

Pell Grants - Need-based aid intended to be the starting point of assistance for lower-income families. The largest federal program of awards, Pell Grants are given through colleges to all students who qualify.

Perkins Loans - The federally funded loan administered by colleges to the students who have a demonstrated need.

PLUS/SLS - The parents' and independent students' loan components, respectively, of the GSL program.

Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT/NMSQT) - A shorter version of the SAT given during the sophomore or junior year of high school. It serves a dual purpose: (1) to give students a sample of what the Scholastic Aptitude Test will be like, and to help them project their SAT scores, and (2) to serve as a basis for determining National Merit Scholarship winners.

Rank in Class - A methodology to compare one student's academic performance with the performance of all other students at the same grade level.

GLOSSARY **(Continued)**

Reserve Officers' Training Corp (ROTC) - A scholarship and training program offered by the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force on many college campuses. ROTC students must fulfill a service obligation after graduating from college.

Rolling Admissions - A program adopted by many colleges through which admissions applications are evaluated upon receipt and applicants are immediately notified of the decision.

SAR (Student Aid Report) – A report summarizing financial and other information reported on the FAFSA, sent to a student by the federal government. The student's financial need or eligibility is indicated by the Expected Family Contribution (EFC), which is printed on the document.

SEOG (Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant) – This federal grant is awarded low-income students based on availability of funds at the college, and does not require repayment.

Stafford Loans – Federally insured, low-interest rate student loans for which borrowing limits vary depending on a student's year in college.

Subsidized Stafford Loans – Loans awarded to students who demonstrate financial need (i.e., need-based loans). The federal government pays the interest on these loans while students are in school and during grace and deferment periods.

Unsubsidized Stafford Loans – Loans available to students regardless of financial need (i.e., non-need-based loans). Borrowers pay interest on these loans while in school, or may defer payment and allow interest to accrue.