

# TIPS ON THE COLLEGE SEARCH PROCESS

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Dear Seniors and Parents:

As the school year is gearing up, the time seems ripe to remind seniors that they should now begin planning for life after high school. For most of the seniors, college or some kind of education program lies ahead; for others, work, travel, the military, or perhaps a "Gap Year" is planned. This letter will focus on the process of college selection, application and admission.

Now is the time for students to develop a slate of colleges to which they may wish to apply.

Several commercially produced college handbooks offer valuable information. They include the current editions of:

- [Comparative Guide to American Colleges](#)
- [The College Finder](#)
- [The Fiske Guide to Colleges](#)
- [The College Handbook](#)
- [Insider's Guide to the Colleges](#)

These and other handbooks are available for purchase at most bookstores. Our CCIC also has a limited number of copies which may be borrowed.

Visit the College/Career Information Center (CCIC) and become acquainted with our College/Career Coordinator. The College/Career Coordinator is there to help students find the materials they need to make wise, informed decisions. Many students find the computerized college search, Family Connection/Naviance, an especially helpful resource. If a student needs his/her registration code, please have him/her contact the College/Career Information Coordinator to obtain it.

## **Questions to ask:**

1. **"What location do I prefer?"** City, rural, New England, Mid-Atlantic, Mid-West, South, West, Foreign? Does it matter? Remember to consider travel costs and distance from home.
2. **"Where can I be sure of having programs that interest me?"** There are many resources, including handbooks, college bulletins, and computer programs for discovering college majors and specialties. Many, perhaps most, students are not decided on a major and plan to begin with a general liberal arts program.
3. **"What size college do I desire?"** Small, medium, large? Does it matter?
4. **"Would I feel comfortable at a certain college that I am thinking about?"** For some students the amount of personal and academic freedom or the amount

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of structure may be a consideration. Some students feel that it is important there be at least some significant number of other students who share their religious or other important values. Some seek a school with students from varied cultures and traditions.

5. **“What should I do if I have learning difficulties?”** Some colleges provide programs for students who have a variety of learning difficulties. Programs vary significantly in type, scope and quality. A great deal of helpful material is available in the CCIC and online. Parents and students should contact their counselor if this is a concern.
6. **“How about college costs?”** The cost of college should be a part of the discussion at the beginning of the search process. College tuition costs continue to escalate at a much faster rate than the rest of the American economy. More and more families are when interested in the possibility of financial aid. College websites have a “Net Price Calculator” to help estimate the cost of tuition. Use it. There is a meeting held in the Fall which discusses portions of this topic.

**FAFSA:** The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) must be submitted if one hopes to become eligible for any form of federally subsidized financial aid. The 2019-2020 FAFSA will be available October 1, 2019. Federal aid is need-based and almost all colleges dispense these funds. Some, but not all, colleges also require CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE and/or a form of their own to determine eligibility for need-based aid derived from the colleges’ own funds.

Note: (1) FAFSA must be applied for every year; (2) the FAFSA formula for aid eligibility does not take into account the market value of the primary family residence. This may result in making financial aid more accessible to some middle class families.

**OTHER AID:** Some non-need-based aid, usually referred to as scholarships, is offered by many colleges and a wide variety of public and private organizations. The monetary value of and eligibility for such awards vary widely and deadlines are important. A great deal of scholarship information is available online at [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org) and [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com). Look at the financial Some information is also available in the CCIC.

Some colleges are willing to discuss particular financial situations with families of students who have been admitted.

Student athletes who plan to apply to NCAA Division I colleges must complete the NCAA Clearinghouse forms. These are available online at [www.naaclearinghouse.net](http://www.naaclearinghouse.net) and should be submitted early in senior year.

7. **“What are my chances for admission to a particular college?”** To answer this, additional hard questions must be asked and answered:

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“What does my academic record look like?” This is the most important issue!

“What are my SAT (and SAT Subject Test scores if applicable) or ACT scores?”

“How prominent have I been in school and/or community activities?”

“How can I best present myself in the essay question of my college applications?”

.....These are the areas that colleges evaluate very closely. You must evaluate them closely, too.....

There is often uncertainty as to whether or not a student may qualify for admission to a certain college. Uncertainty is compounded by the reality that admission prospects can change considerably with changing demographic and economic realities. The Family Connection website ([connection.naviance.com/whitman](http://connection.naviance.com/whitman)) can assist a student in determining which schools may be appropriate. It is acceptable to risk an application to a college, if the student's credentials are close to its requirements. But if the student concludes that he/she really does not have a reasonable chance at admittance to a certain college, then the student should plan to apply elsewhere.

8. **“Have I taken the tests required by this college?”** SAT or ACT taken? SAT Subject Tests where necessary? - Test applications and materials are available online at [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org) or [www.act.org](http://www.act.org). It is the student's responsibility to register for the SAT or SAT Subject Tests or ACT tests on time. **The WALT WHITMAN HIGH SCHOOL CEEB NO. IS 210271.** Required admissions testing should be completed no later than October, 2019 if the student plans to submit Early Action or Early Decision applications, and preferably by August, 2019. It is the student's responsibility to make certain that scores are sent by the testing corporation to his/her colleges. Some colleges are accepting the self-reporting of test scores, with “official” scores being required upon committing to the school. There are “test-optional” colleges where test scores are not required at all.
9. **“How many colleges should I apply to?”** There can be no definitive answer to this question, only a few guidelines. In general, counselors urge Whitman students to cover a reasonable range of possibilities in their applications: (1) REACHES: dearly desired, long shot hopes; (2) TARGETS: solid, fifty-fifty bets; (3) LIKELIES: comfortable, choices. Applying to 3-4 schools in each category is advisable. In addition, students should only apply to colleges they want to attend. If the student narrows down his/her choices in the fall, the final decision in the spring will be easier for all concerned.
10. **“Should I make an early application?”** Many colleges have early application programs and many students are interested in participating in these programs.

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Most of these deadlines are around November 1st, though they may be as early as October or as late as December. There are, in general, two types of such programs: EARLY ACTION (EA) AND EARLY DECISION (ED). There are some important differences.

**EARLY ACTION:** There are two types: (1) restrictive early action which allows students to apply to only one REA school and any state school; and (2) non-restrictive early action which has no restrictions. In either case, application deadlines are usually between November 1-15th. A college will inform an applicant of its decision before the end of December. If a student is accepted, he/she is usually allowed until the spring before he/she needs to commit.

**EARLY DECISION:** A student needs to be fully committed to attending a given college if he/she chooses to apply ED I (or EDII). In this case, a binding agreement is signed by the student, parent and counselor before transcripts are sent to the school. EA or regular decision applications may, depending on the ED school, be submitted before the student receives a decision from the ED school. If the student is accepted, he/she must withdraw all other applications that have been submitted. ED II applications may only be filed after a denial from the ED I school is received.

In addition to these programs, many public colleges have Preferred Deadlines which they encourage applicants to meet. Such deadlines sometimes involve the likelihood of obtaining on-campus housing. University of Maryland-College Park has a Priority Deadline of November 1<sup>st</sup>.

These earlier application deadlines may also impact consideration for merit scholarships. Read websites carefully and ask questions of college representatives to make sure you are applying by the deadline that best serves the student.