

*high school juniors
& parents*

10-STEP GUIDE

to NAVIGATING



COLLEGE APPLICATIONS



04

FROM YOUR COACH

College is happening, and it's happening *fast*. Your junior year is critical for LORs, grades, standardized tests, college visits, planning, and more. This guide shows high school juniors & parents where to get started.

CONTENTS

05. RULES TO EASE STRESS

Parents and students can ease stress by deloying these simple ground rules.

06. THINGS TO CONSIDER

Big fish small pond? Or small fish big pond? Considerations to keep in mind when shopping for colleges.

07. TIMELINE OVERVIEW

Big picture, this is what the process looks like from 30,000 feet.

08. JUNIOR YEAR TIMELINE

Where to begin and what to do in winter and spring of junior year, and the summer before senior year.

09. SHOW DON'T TELL

Don't tell admissions officers about your "passion" – SHOW them what that passion led you to DO. (Hint: Get out there and do something!)

10. DEMONSTRATED INTEREST

What it is, and what it looks like in the college application process.

11. LIST OF COLLEGES

There is no such thing as a "safety" school; focus on building a list of likely and target schools.

12. CAMPUS VISITS

How to get the most out of your campus visit.

13. STEPS 1 & 2: LIST & VISITS, PAYING FOR COLLEGE

Detailed information on building a list, planning visits, and paying for college.

14. UNDERSTANDING SAI

The Student Aid Index (SAI) is used to determine how much federal aid a student might receive.

15. STEPS 3-4: STRATEGY & TESTS

Consider Early Action options and ACT vs. SAT standardized tests.

16. ASSESSMENT: MAXWELL DISC STUDENT/CAREER

Helps students identify academic interests that can lead to future careers.

17. STEPS 5-8: APPS, RESUME, PLANNER, LORs

There's a considerable amount of paperwork that students must complete in the college application process.

18. ORGANIZE ALL ESSAY PROMPTS & WORD COUNT RESTRICTIONS

Every school on your list will have essay prompts with word count restrictions, in addition to the Common App essay. Compile a complete and comprehensive list.

19. STEPS 9-10: ESSAYS, FAFSA, CSS PROFILE

Students, focus on essays and parents focus on FAFSA/CSS Profile.

20. TESTIMONIALS

Here's what parents and students have

10

ACT	SAT
36	1570-1600
35	1530-1560
34	1490-1520
33	1450-1480
32	1420-1440
31	1390-1410
30	1360-1380
29	1330-1350
28	1300-1320
27	1260-1290
26	1230-1250
25	1200-1220
24	1160-1190
23	1130-1150
22	1100-1120
21	1060-1090
20	1030-1050
19	990-1020
18	960-980
17	920-950
16	880-910
15	830-870
14	780-820
13	730-770
12	690-720
11	650-680
10	620-640
9	590-610

SAT vs. ACT

Similarities and differences, scoring, dates, and registration information explained. Verify recent concordance tables online, should look similar to the one at right.



—Christine Gacharná

College is happening, and it's happening FAST. Your junior year is the last full year of grades that college admissions officers will see with your applications, and it's likely that teachers from your junior year will be writing your letters of recommendation. This year marks one of the busiest and most important times of your school career. (No pressure.) The transition from high school to college is unlike any other jump you've made thus far. It requires research, realistic self-assessment, strategic planning, and work from you to launch the next stage of your life's journey.

Consider this a part-time job. I can draw a direct line from the students who put considerable effort into this process to the students who emerge on the other side as the most successful in achieving their post-high school goals.

As your Individual Educational Consultant, counselor, and writing coach, my goal is to make this an insightful and explorative time for you. I will meet you where you are. Each student begins the college application process in a different family with different circumstances, from a different state, at a different pace, and with different goals and objectives. This overview will introduce you (and your parents) to information, resources, and tips to help you stay prepared and on track.

The Importance of Student Self-Advocacy. You're bound to have questions, and some of these questions may be specific to you, your academic interests, or your college choices. Strive to be your own best advocate. To demonstrate self-advocacy, students need to take ownership of their high school classes and the college application process, communicating directly with teachers, administrators, counselors, and college admissions officers. Colleges love to hear from your high school teachers and counselors in LORs about your independence and readiness for leaving home. Self-advocacy is a skill that will serve you well in life.

Building a college list is fun! There is nothing more intoxicating for students than to examine the exciting possibilities that are wide open in their future! **Building a college list can also be challenging.** Students tend to think of this list as the list from

which they will choose where they're going to college — without considering the “sorting hat” (rejection!) part that happens in the middle. Students also tend to gather information from random sources that don't have the most accurate information (other teens, College Confidential, or Reddit) and believe it. Parents sometimes bring stereotypes, assumptions, and/or outdated information to the table or rely on rankings that don't help students consider which colleges are best for them as individuals.

Both parents and students can get hung up on prestige. A highly selective college or university that admits 5 percent of total applicants should not be considered a target school and students should not apply to 20 of these schools in an attempt to increase their chances of being admitted.

An acceptance letter does not indicate a student's worthiness or validate good parenting. It's simply an offer to engage in business commerce, to enroll in exchange for tuition payment. Parents and counselors should guide and encourage students to apply to schools that focus on their unique interests or future goals while considering family resources.

There is no one-size-fits-all college sweatshirt. The variables in the college application process are as unique as each student and family situation. State of residency, ability to pay, and the student's academic & extracurricular performance must be objectively considered.

A transcript is the validation of academic achievements yet it must be weighed against the school profile (what was offered to the student.) We absolutely recommend a student waive their right to view letters of recommendation; but students should be mindful that these letters will speak to their curiosity, teachability, humility of a student, and readiness to leave home and be successfully independent.

A student may never learn of the reasons why they were or were not accepted to a particular institution. Even if you know a few bits and pieces of data about a student who was or was not admitted to a particular college, that doesn't tell you everything the admission officers knew and considered when they made their decision. Most institutions won't disclose the detailed algorithms of admissions decisions.

“Falling in love with a sweatshirt before receiving an acceptance letter puts the cart before the horse.”

PARENTS & STUDENTS CAN EASE STRESS BY DEPLOYING THESE SIMPLE GROUND RULES:

- **Schedule recurring half-hour conversations** once a month for juniors and once a week for seniors to discuss college. This facilitates regular check-ins without overwhelming students and fosters a healthy, trusting relationship between parents and students during what can be a very stressful time.
- **Take detailed notes of pros and cons** when touring schools. These provide valuable input for students weighing options after receiving multiple offers.
- **Keep an open mind.** Falling in love with a sweatshirt before receiving an acceptance letter puts the cart before the horse and can lead to unnecessary heartbreak and disappointment for both parents and students.
- **Manage expectations.** Fewer expectations result in fewer disappointments and more excitement for the student as the process unfolds.
- **Devised a strategy and a plan that is unique to the student's academic interests and family budget.** The college application process, start-to-finish, is a part-time job. A family's ability to realistically and objectively assess the student's performance on a national scale, set realistic goals, and assess expectations is key to minimizing heartbreak and/or disappointment at the end of the process.
- **Maintain high standards.** All offers of admission are conditional and could be rescinded. Students who let their GPA slip, fail to model behavior that reflects a school's core values, violate academic integrity, fail to meet deadlines, or fail to honor early decision commitments are the most common reasons offers are rescinded.
- **Visit schools.** There is no better way to glean information about the character and vibe of a campus than to make a campus visit and talk to actual students. Remember, there's no such thing as a “safety school.”
- **Don't procrastinate.** The goal is to be mostly finished with college applications and essays by Labor Day of senior year, allowing students to focus on AP courses, sports, clubs, extracurriculars, Homecoming, and all of the fun of their senior year.

START NOW

Continue to place more emphasis on depth than breadth in your academic curriculum.

Think about your preferences for college and list things you may want to study and do in college. Get involved. Explore school clubs, extra-curriculars, and/or community service. Build a clear link between academic interests and extracurricular pursuits. If leadership positions do not come organically, create your own.

Take the PSAT/NMSQT in October of your junior year.

If you haven't already, determine when you will take the ACT and/or SAT. Register for the spring, summer, and/or fall of your senior year seating. To prepare, access free, personalized practice tools at www.collegeboard.org, KhanAcademy.org or Academy.Act.Org.

Get & stay Organized.

Organize college brochures, view books, or program information in one place. Write important dates in your planner. Continue filling out the tracker information for schools on your list. If your school uses Naviance or SCOIR, update your account. Complete the profile section with personal details, personal bio, activities, and achievements section. Start looking at and visiting colleges (complete online tours if an in-person visit isn't possible) and follow the colleges you are interested in online.

Visit colleges on weekends, attend local college fairs, and meet with college admissions representatives who come to your school. Use CollegeVine, YouVisit, or YouTube.



SMALL FISH, BIG POND? OR BIG FISH SMALL POND?

THINGS TO CONSIDER

ACADEMICS & ENVIRONMENT

Are you a qualified applicant? Does the school offer the course of study and degree that you wish to pursue? If you change your mind, are there attractive alternatives? Is the support you need for success available?

SIZE

Looking for a large campus? Or a smaller, more intimate community? Class size, student:faculty ratio, activities, & social climate = college experience considerations.

TRANSFER OPTIONS

Local public community colleges are generally less expensive than four-year schools and offer two main paths: career training programs and transfer programs.

DISTANCE FROM HOME

Close to home? Far away? Consider travel options, travel expenses, and opportunities to return for holidays and/or parent visits.

LOCATION & WEATHER

Looking for proximity to the Rockies? Or a beach? Want to experience life in the SEC? Hike in the Southwest? Live in D.C.? Rural, suburban, & urban campuses all have different advantages. Consider the weather (you'll be there between September-May), and hobbies.

CAMPUS CULTURE

How well do you fit in? Do you feel comfortable? Campuses have their own personalities & priorities. Does this campus have clubs and organizations that you enjoy? Athletics? Greek life? Performing arts? Think about how your life will be stimulating and fulfilling outside of class.

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE?

Either way costs money (unlike high school.) Both options come in all shapes, sizes, and states. There are pros and cons to each option; which are the factors that appeal to you most?

EXTRACURRICULARS

Looking to play club sports? Join a Greek organization? Get involved in student government? Volunteer? Look for schools that offer these activities outside of class.

FAMILY OBLIGATIONS

Each family situation is unique! Look for schools that fit your Student Aid Index (SAI) (formerly EFC) and will enable you to maintain commitments.

TUITION

It's important to have conversations about finances as a family, because college costs affect the whole family. Aside from buying a house one day, college is one of the largest investments a student will make in their lifetime. College is worth the expense if student debt is limited and the degree yields a higher salary than no-degree. College is not worth the expense if a student ultimately doesn't graduate. Look for schools that fit your Student Aid Index (SAI.)

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Will you immerse yourself in your religious beliefs? None at all? Or somewhere in between? Examine the school's online mission statement. Often, a school's religious affiliation will be spelled out more clearly there.



BIG PICTURE

GET AN ORGANIZED PLAN

We recommend students set up a new & separate Google gmail account not tied to social media use to file email messages, applications, & record calendar dates and deadlines. Use high school emails with caution as students may lose access to those accounts after graduation.

1

MAKE A WORKING LIST OF POTENTIAL SCHOOLS; TOUR

Tour colleges near home, regardless of intention to apply. Identify pros & cons to each school on the list. The list should include a plan (possible), a back-up plan (likely), and a long-shot/dream (reach.) If it's not possible to visit each school on the list, take a virtual tour.

2

HAVE A CONVERSATION AS A FAMILY ABOUT PAYING FOR COLLEGE

College is an investment in a student's future and each family's financial situation is different. Get familiar with the [Federal Student Aid Estimator \(SAI\)](#) to understand your particular eligibility for aid. [Use this SAI Estimator](#) to calculate what your family can reasonably afford to pay. Consider these numbers when revising the list above.

3

IDENTIFY A MAJOR COURSE OF STUDY

College is more than just Game Day. It's one of the biggest investments a student will make, so it's worth being extra thoughtful about a major course of study. A DISC assessment will provide extra help with this.

4

IDENTIFY APPLICATION, ACT/SAT, & REGISTRATION DEADLINES

Oct. 15 & Nov. 1 are big ED/EA application deadlines. ACT, SAT, & SAT Subject Tests have registration deadlines in addition to test dates. Many colleges require test completion before the school's application deadline.

5

FILL OUT STUDENT ACTIVITY SHEET

Where you spend your time is an indicator of academic interests which may become your major course of study in college. This will help us discern essay topics and will help your teachers write more effective recommendations.

6

IDENTIFY TEACHERS & SECURE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Choose teachers from core subjects your junior year to write letters of recommendation since those teachers had a full year to get to know you and your work. Use our swipe file to ask for these letters.

7

IDENTIFY ALL ESSAY PROMPTS FROM WORKING LIST OF SCHOOLS

It's common for students to list 10-20 schools initially & for that list to shrink as the process unfolds. Essay prompts are not always available until after August 1. Creating a complete list of all the prompts and word count restrictions gives students a good sense of the amount of work involved in college applications.

8

WRITE COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAYS

This is your best opportunity to separate yourself from those who look like you academically! Attend our summer workshops to learn how to turn your readers into your advocates. Aim to finish by Labor Day.

9

FILL OUT FAFSA & CSS PROFILE (ASK PARENTS FOR HELP)

FAFSA opens October 1 of each year. We recommend all students complete this form their senior year, which includes a parents' reported income from tax returns.

10

SUBMIT APPLICATIONS, WAIT FOR OFFERS TO PRESENT

Acceptance letters may come in long before offers of financial aid or merit-based scholarships. Don't rush to commit before weighing all offers! Consider re-visiting campus on "accepted student day" when invited.

11

KEEP YOUR GRADES UP, WATCH YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

I know; we call it "English Major Math." :) High school grades are an indicator of student success in college academics. Acceptance letters are conditional & offers may be rescinded due to final grades or student conduct.



JUNIOR TO SENIOR YEAR

winter of junior year

Meet with your high school college counselor

to review transcript/graduation requirements, discuss standardized testing results, and plan for spring. Share college preferences and identify two teachers who you would like to ask for a letter of recommendation. Some schools require these letters to be completed before the end of the academic year, so plan early in the new calendar year. Some schools require you waive your rights to these letters; clarify this requirement now.

Register to take the ACTs and SATs in late Spring (if you want to re-take it).

If you need help deciding which test to take, please review the ACT vs. SAT section of this guide for more information. To prepare for these tests, you may access free, personalized practice tools at [KhanAcademy.org](https://www.khanacademy.org) or [Academy.Act.Org](https://www.act.org).

College is a pay-to-play game. There are four main types of aid: grants, scholarships, loans, and work study programs. Review College Board's "Getting Financial Aid."

Get an estimate on how much you will likely be expected to contribute based on your family's income and assets. Every college is required to have a "Net Price Calculator" on their website.

SCOIR and College Board have a Cost Calculator. College Board has a Scholarship Search.

Don't overlook local and state sources that include scholarships to help offset the costs of private colleges.

Financial Aid is need-based aid determined by family finances; these may be federal, state, or college-based awards.

Scholarships are merit-based aid determined by academics, sports, or other talents; may be college or independent organization-based.

Make an intentional & purposeful summer plan.

Look for great summer opportunities — internships, volunteer work, jobs, classes, or special projects. Take note of when applications for summer programs are due. Some may be earlier than you expect. Create a plan for your summer that leaves room for you to explore areas of interest and that will strengthen your applications.

spring of junior year

Ask Your Teachers for a Letter of Recommendation.

Set up a meeting with your teacher in May and ask them if they would be willing to write you a positive letter of recommendation.

Develop Your List of Colleges.

The college search is about exploring who you are and what you want and then finding colleges that will meet your goals. There are many colleges at

which you'll be happy and get a great education — don't shop for name brands but rather for a good fit. Keep in mind three phrases: (1) Likely, (2) Target/Possible, and (3) Unlikely/Highly Selective.

Be open to various & numerous possibilities.

Colleges admit only a portion of students who apply. Some colleges are highly selective while others are more inclusive. There is no one-size-fits-all college. Finding the best college for you means culling a diversified list of schools based on your academic interests and other personal and family preferences.

Complete and submit any student and/or parent brag sheets or questionnaires to counselors by May 1.

This information is super important to the professionals trying to help you and your family through this process.

Take the SATs and/or ACTs. Pat attention to Sat Subject Tests, especially if you intend to apply to schools/programs that require these scores.

Tests are typically offered in March, May, and June. If you are unhappy with your scores, I recommend taking a summer course; you may test again in the fall. Many students take the test a second time as seniors. IECs do not recommend taking either exam more than three times — that is valuable time students could spend focused on academic interests/extracurriculars, and colleges do not favor serial test takers.

summer before senior year

Finalize your college list and visit colleges.

Start out with virtual tours before spending the time, energy, and money to visit in person. For in-person visits, try to limit it to one-per-day but definitely no more than two. On campus tours, take detailed notes of pros and cons. Most students benefit more from tours of individual departments (based on academic interests) rather than general campus tours. Some colleges track a student's "demonstrated interest" as part of an application file, so it's best to register for formal tours whenever possible, rather than just showing up on your own. Talk to as many people as possible: college admissions staff, professors, students, and career counselors. Ask questions. Take notes. "Demonstrate interest" by visiting campus on an official tour, opening marketing emails, clicking on links, and following schools on social media.

Study for standardized tests.

Many colleges require submitted standardized test scores be completed before the application deadline; therefore, first semester senior year is the last opportunity for students looking to take advantage of early applications (which we recommend.) Consider a practice test, review book, online tools, or course to help you study.

SHOW ME, DON'T TELL ME

DON'T TELL ME ABOUT YOUR "PASSION;" SHOW ME WHAT YOUR INTERESTS LED YOU TO *DO*

Spend your junior and senior years exploring academic interests and focusing on leadership positions in the activities you've already been involved in as a high school student and deeply enjoy.

Colleges and universities want to see three-dimensional students standing in front of them, real applicants who have faced real experiences, challenges, successes, and/or problems in the real world. How you spend your time tells a college a lot about what kind of person you are.

Most college admissions pages will clarify that while grades are important, they would prefer a student participate in extracurriculars such as athletics, student government, clubs, or volunteer organizations. Yes — jobs count! While it's important for students to be involved in these activities, quality trumps quantity. **Rather than join a bunch of clubs your senior year, look to take on a leadership role in a longterm activity.**

"Demonstrated interest" begins the summer before a student's senior year. Students should initiate a service project, career shadow a professional, and/or enroll in a summer program (especially in science or technology) as it pertains to your declared major on your application. Yes, many schools require you to declare your major as part of the application process. "Demonstrated interest" means actively engaged with the college and university the student is applying to. Did you visit? Take a personal tour? Interact with the admissions office?

Review online college application options.

Some colleges use the Common App, some use the Coalition App, and some colleges use their own proprietary application portal. Colleges don't care if you choose the Common App or the Coalition App, so I recommend choosing the one that covers the most schools on your list. Complete as much of initial applications as possible, such as the profile information and self-reporting of grades.

Explore academic interests.

Colleges want to see that you are academically inclined, but also want to see you have hobbies and interests outside of the classroom. This is a great time to dive into an extracurricular project or get involved with research!

Prepare for college application essays. Create a document to list all essay prompts from all colleges.

Most college applications won't open and essay prompts will not be released until August 1 before your senior year, but you can still start thinking about possible topics for your college essays by reviewing the prior year's prompts. Depending on the number of schools you apply to, you may have more than a dozen to two dozen essays (of varying lengths) that you may need to complete. Some of these essays can overlap and possibly be repurposed but most will need tailoring to each specific school. Map out a summer plan so you can space out the work.

Work on College Essays.

The Common App and Coalition App usually announce the next year's essay prompts in late

winter. Don't begin by drafting an application essay — instead, begin by brain-dumping ideas.

A standout college application essay is one of the ways students differentiate themselves from other highly qualified applicants, so give yourself ample time to produce the best essay you can. These essays get very, very messy before they become polished representations of your application; in my experience working with students who are successful in their pursuits, students can expect to spend many, many hours on essays *for each college*. For this reason, we recommend a student's list be carefully culled.

Prepare mentally for senior year.

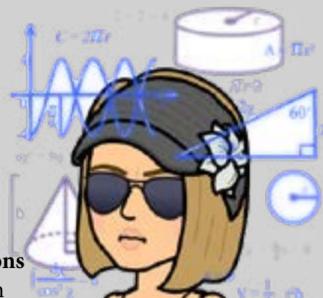
Students: please remember to sleep, relax, recharge, and breathe. You've worked so hard to get to where you are. We want you to show up to senior year ready to learn and grow, and the best way to do that is to practice self-care throughout the summer. Stay humble. Stay curious.

Parents, transition from driver to coach. At this stage, it is crucial that students demonstrate self-advocacy (independence, readiness to leave home) in front of teachers and counselors who may be writing LORs. Resist the temptation to reach out on their behalf. In my experience, seniors who are given the freedom — and support — to make their own decisions (and mistakes) fare far better than seniors who are ultimately forced to live the results of decisions made by parents. Seniors who own their college application process (including the natural consequences of missed deadlines) experience incredible lifelong confidence boosts in even the smallest of wins.

"The waiting has been tough." —Parent of a senior in early February



SAT VS. ACT



2 hours 14 min | Three sections

Reading: 52 questions, 65 min
Writing & Language: 44 questions, 35 min
Math = no calculator: 20 questions, 25 min
Math = calculator: 38 questions, 55 min
Total Scoring Range: 400-1600

Each section is scored 200-800.
Both sections are combined for a total overall score.
Total Scoring Range: 400-1600

Offered 6 times/year

Register at least six weeks before test www.collegeboard.com

2 hours 55 min | Four sections

English: 75 questions, 45 min
Math = calculator: 60 questions, 60 min
Reading: 40 questions, 35 min
Science: 40 questions, 35 min
Total Scoring Range: 1-36

Each section uses a scale of 1-36.
Total score is the average of four section scores.

Total Scoring Range: 1-36

Offered 7 times/year

Register at least four weeks before test www.ACT.org

Both are nationally recognized standardized tests and common admission requirements for U.S. schools. Each measures students' proficiency in various critical skill areas that are necessary for college success, like problem solving and reading comprehension. Neither penalize for incorrect answers.

should I take the SAT or the ACT?

Since the content and style of the SAT and ACT are similar, factors like how a student handles time pressure and what types of questions are most challenging can help determine which test is a better fit. The best way to decide is to take a timed full-length practice test under testing conditions of each type. Don't take either test more than three times.

DEMONSTRATED INTEREST

CHECK YOUR EMAIL.

FOLLOW-UP CAMPUS VISITS WITH A HANDWRITTEN THANK-YOU NOTE TO THE PEOPLE WHO MET WITH YOU.

Engage with the campus where you want to attend. Set up an account. Visit. Request literature. If the campus visits your hometown or high school, be in the front row.

Demonstrated interest begins the summer before a student's senior year. Students should initiate a service project, career shadow a professional, and/or enroll in a summer program (especially in science or technology) as it pertains to your declared major on your application. (Yes, many schools require you to declare your major as part of the application process.)

"Demonstrated interest" also means actively engaged with the college and university the student is applying to.

Did you visit the campus? Take a personal tour? Interact with the admissions office? If the campus sends a representative to your high school, make sure to meet that person!

If you met someone during a tour, follow-up with a thank-you note. If you're signed up to receive information from the school, make sure you open Every. Single. Email.

Colleges track these metrics!

BUILDING THE LIST

IDENTIFY LIKELY, TARGET, & UNLIKELY/HIGHLY-SELECTIVE SCHOOLS

Schools on this list may change as the student learns more through research or campus visits (virtual or in-person.) Parents, teachers, and counselors may "suggest" schools that align with the student's academic interests, achievements, and SAI (Student Aid Index.)

Schools on this list should be schools the student would be happy to attend.

LIKELY



There is no such thing as a "safety" school. At "likely" schools, the student exceeds the requirements for admission, and the student can reasonably expect to be extended an offer. The school should admit more than 60-70 percent of applicants and your scores should be above the score range listed for the 25-75 percent of admitted students. Likely schools tend to offer more merit aid.

admission rate
>70 percent

TARGET



At "target" schools, the student has a chance of being offered admission by meeting academic credentials of typical freshman applicants. **There are no guarantees**, but it is not unreasonable to expect to be accepted to several of your target schools.

admission rate
>50 percent

UNLIKELY



Schools that have an admission rate of less than 30 percent are "unlikely" for any student, regardless of GPA or standardized test scores. At "unlikely" schools, a student's academic credentials fall outside those of typical freshman applicants, **&/OR** the number of applicants far exceeds the number of seats available.

Highly-selective schools are a long shot, but still possible for students who have other talents, experiences, or qualities that will allow them to stand out within their admission pool.

admission rate
<30 percent



CAMPUS VISITS

PLAN & PREPARE, NOTE PROS & CONS



Campus visits are a crucial part of the college application process. Consider these **fact-finding missions; just because you visit a school doesn't obligate you to attend!** Sometimes, students work backward from the answer key, identifying what they are looking for in a college by recognizing elements they didn't realize they don't want in a college until they see it in action. Starting with local schools gives students easier access to a diverse list of public, private, small, large, city, and rural possibilities, including community college options (depending on where you live.)

1 Virtual Tours. It is not always possible to visit every campus on your list. Many colleges and universities have website videos, virtual tours, social media channels, and/or materials that provide an overview of programs and facilities. This will help students get a feel for campus offerings. It might even help students cross a school off the list before costly in-person visits.

2 College Fairs. Many colleges sponsor college fairs at large high schools or exhibition halls where prospective students shop for information. Get on a college's mailing lists to learn when they'll be in the area. Even if a student must travel to a nearby city to take advantage of a college fair, it will likely be a shorter distance overall and cover many more schools. Students who attend college fairs "demonstrate interest" with schools that track this information.

3 Plan your visit. Visiting while class is in session is best to get a good sense of the atmosphere. Admission offices have set times for tours and in-person visits; call at least two weeks ahead of time to schedule and register for a formal tour not just for the school but also for your area of academic interest; this will help you to see the department and resources for where you will spend your time. A thorough college visit can take anywhere from 2-4 hours, plus time to get a sense of the surrounding town or area. Try to visit no more than two schools in one day (ideally, one.)

4 Listen & observe. Can you see yourself here? Pick up a campus newspaper, stop to read the items on the bulletin boards, visit the library, walk through the student center and popular outdoor spaces. Be on the look out for bicycles, scooters, or public transportation. Notice how students interact with one another. Do you feel comfortable in these spaces?

5 Talk to people & ask questions. Talk to students, dining hall workers, tour guides, and faculty. Other than classes, where do you spend your time? What do you like best about this college? What do you least like? Why did you choose this college? How do students get around? What has been your favorite class? Write down any other questions specific to you and your situation that you will want to know about this place that could be your home and school for the next 4+ years.

6 Note PROS & CONS. Record impressions and specifics of things you like and don't like or aren't sure about during and immediately after the visit while the details are still fresh in your mind. Take detailed notes on criteria that is important and apply that same process as uniformly as possible at all schools. After many visits, college campuses can start to blur in a student's mind and it becomes difficult for students to separate one from the other without taking note of those tiny details. These notes will be invaluable later if accepted to numerous schools. Having trouble getting started? List three things you really liked about the school under "pros" and three things you didn't like under "cons." Starting with three will help, but push yourself to recall as many as possible.

7 Follow-up. Ask for business cards and keep track of all names of people you talk with, especially in the admission office. Send thank-you notes to any admissions officers, deans, or professors who met with you and/or guided you in this process.

8 Stay mindful. Admissions officers are paying close attention to the way you speak to your parents and others around you. Treat a college visit like a job interview; dress and behave accordingly.

8 Attending "accepted student day" offerings can make all the difference for students who need help deciding between two schools.

STEPS 1-2

BUILD YOUR LIST & RESEARCH/VISIT CAMPUSES

Use the worksheets to help generate action & ideas from each step in the process.

1 The List. Students and parents attempting to decide "where" to go to college before getting offers of admission are putting the cart before the horse, and this can be a recipe for heartbreak. It's our goal to help students and parents navigate this process with open conversation and eyes wide open to find a good social and academic fit for the student while making a sound financial decision for the family at the end of the process. Everything about the college application process works backward from an answer key, and those answers are found in the list of schools that the student has identified will be a good fit academically, socially, and financially. We call it a "working list" as students may add or subtract schools at any time during the process.

A good place to start building this list is with community colleges and schools in your state of residency. Both public and private schools should be considered (it's a myth that private colleges are more expensive.) From that starting point, students may branch out according to schools that offer programs in the major course of study and degree they wish to pursue. As students add schools to this list, research typical GPAs of previously admitted freshmen, the number of undergraduates on campus, and the previous year's acceptance rate. This will help students organize the list by identifying "Probable," "Objective," and "Reach" schools. Use worksheets "The List" and "Things to Consider" for more help in fine-tuning the list.

Start visiting campuses. Students need to get a feel for college life and what to expect. Start with a local campus or a community college — sometimes, the easiest way for a student to define choices is to start with identifying what they don't want. If visiting in-person, make an appointment. Consider touring specific departments, especially for students who have identified academic interests, and visit student spaces such as the library or dining hall. Save facts-and-stats questions for the admissions office and ask student guides about campus life, their favorite spots, etc. If an in-person visit isn't possible, attend college fairs and virtual tours.

Keep a detailed list of pros and cons for each school. Add to this list during and immediately after the visit. Make a note of people met, vibes felt, little things noticed. A campus with 1,600+ undergraduates will have very different atmosphere than a campus with 36,000+ undergraduates. Pay careful attention and record details of all impressions. Can you picture yourself in this mix? Does this feel like a home away from home? We recommend parents and students keep their own, separate pros-&-cons lists and only compare notes after an offer of admission is extended. The parent perspective is helpful for students making a final decision.

2 Paying for college. Reframing the conversation from "financial aid" to "paying for college" helps families weigh the cost of tuition on the front end of the process. Add the average yearly cost of attendance to each school on the list. Yes, some schools have hefty endowments; there's a chance merit-based scholarship offers may be extended to offset sticker shock, but it's always best to have conversations about paying for college at the beginning of the application process to avoid what we call "February Freakouts" and/or heartbreak next spring. Have open conversations as a family about tuition, room and board, and travel costs to avoid unmet or unrealistic expectations.

UNDERSTANDING “SAI”



STUDENT AID INDEX (FORMERLY EFC)

The SAI, or “Student Aid Index,” is an eligibility index number that a financial aid office uses to determine how much federal student aid the student would receive if attending the school. This number results from the information that students provide on the FAFSA®.

Students interested in financial aid for college need to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which includes parents’ reported income from tax returns. The FAFSA then spits out the number known as the **Student Aid Index (SAI)**, formerly known as the Expected Family Contribution, (EFC.)

In the United States, **high school is compulsory** and states are required to provide K-12 education for students. The idea is that the public as a whole benefits from all citizens being provided a basic education. Public education is managed by each individual state and funded by tax dollars — which is why public schools are “free” whereas private K-12 schools cost parents additional money.

That same model does not apply to private vs. public colleges and universities. **College is not compulsory, it’s voluntary. College costs money, and the underlying principle is that students and parents are expected to shoulder the burden of that cost.**

Public colleges and universities receive local, state, and federal money in addition to student tuition, investment income from endowments, private donations, and other sources such as athletic department revenue. Students who live out-of-state where the university is located do not contribute to that state’s tax base, meaning they aren’t paying taxes that help fund the public university. Public colleges and universities charge a higher tuition rate to make up for this disparity compared to in-state students whose households contribute through taxes.

Tuition is the main source of revenue for private colleges, which is why tuition is often higher than public institutions. Private colleges and universities also receive money gifted to the institution by others such as alumni, corporations, philanthropists, and fundraisers. These “endowments” can be used to offset tuition for students, lowering the cost of attendance. Many private schools have endowments and it’s these endowments which may be awarded to a student, making the net cost of attendance lower than that of a state school.

Paying for college is a tremendous consideration; it’s often the second largest investment an individual will make (second only to the purchase of a home) and student debt can follow a graduate for decades. It’s important to have a conversation about paying for college as a family because not all schools offer merit or need-based aid.



STEPS 3-4

PLAN YOUR STRATEGY & SCHEDULE TESTS

Use the worksheets to help generate action & ideas from each step in the process.

3 Early Decision vs. Aarly Action vs. Regular Decision. This is one of the most difficult AND pressing decisions students will need to make early on, and students should talk this over with parents as far as weighing the pros and cons of early decision vs. early action vs. regular decision. Once a decision has been made, get these admission deadlines on the calendar. Early decision and early action are options that benefit academically qualified students who have identified a clear preference for one institution. Typically, academically strong students tend to apply early to increase their acceptance chances. Every student’s situation is different as every family is unique, so students should research and discuss all options with their parents.

Early Decision. Is. Legally. Binding. Early Decision is when students make a commitment to a first-choice institution where, if admitted, the student will definitely enroll and withdraw all other applications. If the student is accepted, the student will be required to attend regardless of cost or other factors. **BIG ADVANTAGE:** higher acceptance rates. **BIG DISADVANTAGE:** the student won’t be able to compare acceptance offers and/or financial aid awards from other institutions and decide based on all the variables. Each student gets one early decision card to play in this process. Students cannot apply to more than one school using the early decision option, and not all schools offer an early decision option. Take note of (a) which schools on the list offer this option, (b) whether or not the student would like to take advantage of this option, and, if so, (c) verify that family funds can float the cost of that option regardless of how the financial aid package shakes out in the spring.

Early Action gives students a non-binding option to apply earlier than regular decision in order to receive a decision earlier in the process, typically by January or February. In some cases, students applying early action will have an acceptance or a denial during the winter break of their senior year. While early action is typically non-binding, always double-check the specific requirements. Some schools use a hybrid of “restricted early action” or some form of a binding agreement. Read these carefully to be sure the student understands the terms of the agreement.

Regular Decision is just that: meeting the deadline for application.

4 SAT, ACT, and SAT Subject Tests. Schedule these tests with deliberation and purpose — don’t just pick random dates. The time to prepare for these exams is during the student’s junior year and the summer before senior year. Most schools require the test date to be on or before the application deadline for that school. We do not recommend taking either test more than three times. Take a practice test under timed conditions.

Many students find that they do better on one test than the other, so if a student doesn’t do well on the ACT, it’s worth taking the SAT for comparison.



THE MAXWELL DISC STUDENT/CAREER REPORT

The Maxwell DISC Student/Career Strength Finder Assessment gives students insight into how to effectively communicate with others, something you may implement immediately in relating to teammates, coaches, friends, and family.

It also provides insight into how to leverage strengths as a student in school (and, later, in college) by revealing the student's strengths, interests, and weaknesses; we use this information to help identify academic interests, build a list of schools to apply to, and brainstorm reflective experiences that translate into memorable essays to help a student jump off the page in an application essay.

There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. All students have to do is find a place to sit, uninterrupted, for 10-15 minutes and answer NOT as the student their parents wish they were or the student teachers expect them to be but as their true and authentic selves. The more true students stay to their authentic self in the assessment, the better use we can make of the results in putting them to work.

The results of this customized report are based on each student's answers to the assessment and will help students better understand themselves in ways that will provide them with a foundation for living an intentional life as they embark on a college education, living on their own for the first time, choosing a major course of study, and building a career as a young adult.

Most students are surprised to learn about themselves:

- 1 Communication** — understanding the style you prefer in communicating and how to better communicate with the styles of others.
- 2 Values** — this section will provide you with insight into some of your professional values, which help shape your decisions and drive actions. We use this information to weave your values into your application essays.
- 3 Learning and Thinking Styles** — better understanding your preferred approach to learning and your cognitive thinking styles will help you to set up study spaces to maximize effectiveness, capitalize on strengths, continue learning, and remain teachable in life.
- 4 Strengths and The Careers They Best Serve** — the career settings that are best compatible to your own personal strengths.

Christine Gacharná is a Maxwell DISC certified behavioral analysis consultant and trainer. The assessment and report are based off the DISC Methodology of human behavior and theory, researched and developed by William Moulton Marston in the 1920s as part of his book *The Emotions of Normal People*. When his research was complete, the DISC Theory was formed into a validated and reliable assessment for personal and professional development.

STEPS 5-8

GET YOUR PAPERWORK IN ORDER

Use the worksheets to help generate action & ideas from each step in the process.

5 Common App vs. Coalition App. Schools don't prefer [Common App](#) over [Coalition App](#), so it's best to choose the one that applies to the majority of schools on the student's list for convenience. Some schools use their own proprietary portal, so if that's the case, students will need to create an account there, too, and get the essay prompts and application information from that portal. Create these accounts as soon as possible.

Pro Tip: ESSAY CURE recommends that students not use their high school email address for college applications for two reasons: (a) they may lose access to this account after graduation, and (b) they may find it easier to organize the entire process by separating it into a different account. ESSAY CURE recommends that students generate a secure password and use the same secure password for all applications, simply to streamline and destress the process.

6 Student Activity Sheet. Use this sheet to help students identify what highlights to focus on in their college applications. Once students have this sheet finalized and polished, they will be able to copy and paste the information directly into the college application portal, ensuring accuracy and completeness. Students may also use this sheet to send to teachers to help get ensure accurate, complete, and colorful Letters of Recommendation (LORs), and it becomes the working outline for a professional student resume once the application process is finished.

7 High School Counselors. Does the student's high school use Naviance, SCOIR, or a similar program to help the school track applications, transcripts, and letters of recommendation? Ask. If so, make sure to use this tool! This will help identify application deadlines, letters of recommendation (LORs) requirements, supplemental essays, and other important considerations and to-dos regarding each particular school. Help your high school counselor help you.

8 Letter Of Recommendation (LOR) requests. LORs are ideally written by a core subject teacher who knows the student well. Teachers from a student's junior year are ideal since they'll have a full year of experience with the student. Send a personal email request to a teacher asking for a LOR before submitting a formal request through the school. If needed, use the swipe file available in this guide for a template to help the student draft these email requests and responses. Once the teacher accepts the request to write a LOR, the student should follow the directions in the swipe file to respond, including the information from the completed Student Activity Sheet.

As a courtesy to instructors, students should not request LORs via this program until after the student has sent a personal email to a teacher or counselor requesting the recommendation and the student has received confirmation that this person agrees to write one.

ESSAY PROMPTS

CREATE A WORKING LIST

While the Common App prompts are often released around June or July, many individual colleges don't release prompts until after August 1. Create a Google Doc where you can paste in the prompts to the schools where you'll be applying (and easily strike-through them, should you change your mind.) **Be sure to include the name of the school with the prompt and the word count restrictions.** Print it out and hang it in places where you will refer to it daily. Spend time digesting these prompts.

UVA Supplementals (Choose TWO, 250 words max)

What's your favorite word and why?

Describe one of your quirks and why it is part of who you are.

If you created a Flash Seminar, what idea would you explore and why?

What would you paint on Beta Bridge and why is this your message?

Describe a time when, instead of complaining, you took action for the greater good.



STEPS 9-10

STUDENTS: WORKING BACKWARD FROM THE LIST, (1) BUILD A CORRESPONDING LIST OF ALL ESSAY REQUIREMENTS (2) INCLUDING WORD COUNT & (3) BEGIN FREEWITING ASSIGNMENTS

PARENTS: FOCUS ON (1) FAFSA AND (2) CSS PROFILE

Use the worksheets to help generate action & ideas from each step in the process.

9 Research all of the essay prompts for the schools on your list. Now that students have a list of schools they intend to apply to, they can begin taking a deeper dive into each school and develop a primary list of all the prompts and corresponding word counts for each school that the student will be required to complete. Students should begin thinking about essay & personal statement topics. It's possible for some essays to serve more than one prompt, but ESSAY CURE encourages students to be careful with repurposing essays.

Complete at least two freewriting assignments on a topic. It's important that students relax their standards of perfection and, instead, approach this assignment as a brain dump. This isn't an exercise in polished grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation; it's an exercise in freewriting. Freewriting is the act of transferring thoughts and ideas onto the page. The more students practice this process, the easier the college application essays will be.

10 Parents: get Oct. 1 on the calendar. Fill out the FAFSA & CSS Profile. Any U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen seeking need-based aid must submit the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#). ESSAY CURE recommends that all students fill out the FAFSA. Verify students and parents are accessing the government site, it should be FREE. Companies that charge a fee to fill this out are not the official site. The FAFSA is the student's form, not the parents, so while many parents help their students complete this form, and while the parent will be required to co-sign for a student under 18 years of age, the questions that refer to "you" or "yours" address the student, not the parent.

The "Expected Family Contribution" is now known as the Student Aid Index and is a measure of a family's financial strength that is used to help determine financial aid awards. After submitting the FAFSA, the student will receive an email from the Department of Education with a link to their Student Aid Report. A six- or seven-digit number will be buried in this report, usually beginning with several zeroes. This is almost always a shockingly large dollar amount, especially for parents who are going through this process for the first time.

[The CSS Profile](#) is owned and operated by the College Board and is a more complex and personally invasive form. The CSS Profile is used by schools with generous endowments. [The list of Participating Institutions is here.](#)

...

For most students, writing the essay is THE most daunting part of the college application process.

"RIGHT My College Application Essay" bridges the gap between High School English Lit and academic writing at the undergraduate level, starting with the college application essay.



PARENT/ STUDENT TESTIMONIALS

DON'T JUST TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT!

Read what ESSAY CURE students and parents have to say about their experience:

"I wanted to let you know that last night I was admitted into the University of Washington!!! I want to thank you for everything you did to help me reach my goal. I ended up getting into every school I applied to! Thanks again," —Tim R.

"Thank you for all the help with Tim's essays. He was so proud of the end result and we couldn't have gotten there without you. I so appreciate it." —Teresa R.

"I highly recommend using Christine's expertise to help your child write his/her college essays. Christine provided assistance to my daughter when she was writing her personal essay for her application to the University of Oregon. Christine made personal connections with Darian to make her feel safe and know that her work and ideas mattered. Christine provided strategies that Darian could use in all types of writing. Most importantly, she gave Darian specific feedback on all aspects of the essay. Through the revision and editing process, Darian was able to improve her essay and still keep her voice present throughout it all." —Jodi B.

"So, I was one of those students who put all of her eggs into one basket. I knew I wanted to go to the UO, & it was the only school I applied to. I didn't realize it at the time, but my entire college application essay was built on a "phrasal verb." I had no idea what that even meant but by the end of the process, I was confident that at least I was using a phrasal verb correctly. :) I also made one of the biggest mistakes most students make. I'm super grateful that I got that corrected before I hit 'submit.' Go Ducks! :) —Darian B.

"ESSAY CURE strengthens a critical part of the college application — the essay! Her fun, easy-to-follow approach helps students relax, stay focused and create an essay that will express their strengths and uniqueness. Parents can breathe a sigh of relief knowing Christine has their backs! Thank you so much!" —Marnie B.

"Christine is very supportive and she genuinely wants you to be satisfied with your essay. She is super proactive when it comes to editing/composing and gives advice that I still remember today when writing. The biggest thing I gained was how to approach an essay and the attitude when tackling a prompt, which is something I struggled with before. Christine answered questions really thoroughly, even giving examples that made writing easier. I would recommend ESSAY CURE to anyone applying to college or looking to improve their writing skills. She really wanted me to feel confident about writing and her advice always seemed to be focused on quality writing. In the end, I got into my top choice, U.S. Air Force Academy!" —Nathan P.

"Christine's experience with college admission essays is highly extensive. She helped me write a very strong essay from scratch that helped me receive admission to the University of Washington, as well as multiple other Universities. My writing skills overall improved throughout the process and I feel much more confident in my ability to write papers for college classes in the future. I highly recommend her book to any high school student applying to college." —Camden R.

"My essay is now so much better than when we first started. At first, I really didn't know what to incorporate into my essay; some things I went too far into detail on and some things I needed to elaborate more on. Showing me the places in my essay where I needed to "show" more than "tell" definitely helped me the most. Also, adding comments on my punctuation helped so much as I struggle a bit when it comes to that!" —Helen S.

"I'm super happy to inform you that I ended up getting accepted! I honestly have never had the sort of support that I received from you, and it was amazing. I'm beyond thankful for the opportunity and for all your help. Thank you so much!" —Angelina H.

"This was super helpful! I sent my essay to Mrs. Gacharna and the feedback was extremely constructive and helpful. And I got an A! Thank you, ESSAY CURE!!!!" —Kyle H.

"Thank you, Christine! I've been admitted to all the colleges I've heard back from so far: Georgia Tech, Cornell, Clemson with \$20K/year in merit, UVA, Wesleyan College with \$15K/year in merit, and WashU. ESSAY CURE helped make the college process much less stressful." —Elizabeth B.

"I was accepted into Virginia Tech and I will be attending this upcoming fall!! I am super excited and it was my first choice. Thank you SO MUCH for all of your help." —Rachel S.

"I think it was a valuable experience for all of us, and I hope that Libby has recognized the amount of effort needed to write a good essay or paper. We spent quite a bit of time discussing how to effectively communicate important ideas and maintain author's voice with limited word count requirements. Very hard to do well. Thank you for all your help, advice, ideas and guidance — we could not have done this without you!!" —Alyssa E.

"My writing skills improved throughout the process in almost all areas. I couldn't have done any of this without you! Thank you!" —Camden S.

"Thank you for helping me write my college essays. I have just been accepted into UVA and am very grateful for all that you have done to make me a better writer." —Jonathan M.

"Hello, Christine. I just wanted to thank you for your work with Marin, particularly yesterday. As you well know, this personal statement & essay is pretty intimidating to these kids, and it's easy to see why. You really helped illuminate a lot of things to her and I feel like she has a new sense of peace, focus & confidence about it all. She did a deep dive into NU's page and is pretty motivated about their dual-track that results in a BS in Engineering and a BA in Communications. It just seems like such a great fit for a young lady with a clear aptitude for STEM, but also possessing tremendous soft skills (she already has more environmental/emotional awareness than 90% of the adults I've ever met; she hears what's not being said and can take the temperature of a room/situation very well). It was also fantastic specific advice when it came to the potential benefit of being a young lady applying for an engineering department at a school like that. She was pretty energized last night (though probably not nearly as much as I was!) and I just wanted you to know that your time and skillful help were greatly appreciated on this end. Cheers," —Jay C.

"I just got some really good news this afternoon that I was accepted into the CalTech fly in program! I just wanted to thank you again for helping me out with those essays, I'm sure they boosted my application a lot. Thank you!" —Jimmy M.

"I got into UVA!!! I am so thankful for all of the help you gave me in writing my Common App essay and preparing me to write my other supplements. Also, just all of the college help you gave me in general was so useful. I am very sure that my essay was one of the reasons I was able to get in. I am so relieved to have gotten through this process with the success I wanted and I am so thankful that you helped me through it. Thank you so much!" —Emily W.

"I was surprised by how much I could change my essay and make it better in my end result. When I thought that my essays were finished and solid, there was always something I could change and make better. I would recommend this course to my peers. Thank you for your support! God bless :)" —Samantha M.

"I just heard back from UVA, and I got accepted early decision! Thank you so much for all the help you gave me, it definitely helped. As I did early decision, I'm done applying to colleges. Thanks again for all your help." —Nolan H.

"Hi Christine!!! I got into UVA!! I am so excited to be attending there next fall and this couldn't have been achieved without your help! Thank you so much for everything and my family will definitely be contacting you when younger brother starts the application process! Go hoos!" —Paige C.

"Christine did an outstanding job working with our son. She was insightful and quickly helped him shape a great essay for several universities. Christine was thorough and responsive throughout the entire application process. I am confident that her help was instrumental in his successful acceptance at the University of Virginia. ESSAY CURE has my highest recommendation!" —Damion H.

"Christine helped our son become a better writer by providing the tools and techniques to write effective papers or essays. Her program is highly organized and the content and her instructional style kept my son engaged throughout the process. In particular, Christine was always available to meet with my son to support the planning and development of his college essays and we were pleased that he was accepted to almost all of his college choices. We had such a great experience that we plan to have our daughter work with Christine to help with her college essay process." —Will C.

"Christine with ESSAY CURE is truly amazing! I would highly recommend ESSAY CURE to any family with a student heading off to college. Christine is available, punctual and flexible. She really helps her students to think on their own so their unique individuality is represented in their essay. My daughter took the class and without hesitation we will be signing up again when her brother is ready. She is now off to Virginia Tech. We couldn't be more proud! This class is a must, you will not be disappointed! Thank you, Christine!" —Molly W.

"Christine went above and beyond to help our son Joey without much notice. Her wisdom and experience with the college application process was much appreciated. However, it was her ability to review and provide feedback on his college essay and answers to specific questions on the applications was invaluable. Christine is an excellent writer and editor of others thoughts and words. I highly recommend her services to everyone out there who has kids that are getting ready to apply to colleges." —Molly A.

"I also just wanted to say thank you so much for all the time and effort you put in to helping me reach the point I'm at right now. I wouldn't have been able to do it without you." —Tyler W.

"FIRST ACCEPTANCE! Hi there!! Just wanted to give you an update and let you know I got accepted into VCU's Pre-Medical Lab Science Major." —Sofia H.

"Christine at ESSAY CURE was amazing support and guidance. Christine worked closely with our daughter to find her voice in the writing. As we know, each college doesn't have the same essay requirements and Christine was able to take the framework and help with the different nuances as they applied to various schools. The results were amazing. She got into every college she applied to, ultimately choosing Clemson. We are counting down to moving day. - we are thankful!" —Heather M,

"GUESS WHO JUST GOT INTO NOTRE DAME! Thank you thank you thank you for everything, I couldn't have done it without you" —Carolyn H.