

College Guide

What the Guidance Counselors Do

Many people don't realize just how much the guidance counselor can do to help you with the college selection and admission process. In many ways, the guidance counselor should become your best friend because ultimately, they will be the people who represent you to the colleges. They can:

Suggest colleges for you to consider in the college selection process

Help you find the resources you need such as guidebooks, test registration forms, websites, financial aid forms, and scholarship announcements

Review your applications with you

Review your essay with you, offering suggestions or criticism

Publicize the dates when college admissions officers will visit

Help you work through the occasional confusion and stress that many students feel during the college application process

Meet with your parents to answer their questions or to help you explain the college admission process to them

Assist families in planning which colleges to apply to, and help in being realistic about goals and expectations

Explain financial aid procedures

GETTING STARTED

- ___1. Start talking with your parents about the selection process and request their input.
- ___2. Obtain relevant information regarding your academic profile - e.g., GPA, PSAT, and SAT scores.
- ___3. Start researching colleges on the Internet using college search programs such as <http://www.petersons.com/college-search.aspx>
- ___4. Obtain information from college resource books such as Peterson's Four Year Colleges.
- ___5. Discuss with your counselor ideas you have about colleges.
- ___6. Use your counselor as a resource. They are available for individual appointments.
- ___7. Register for the ACT or SAT. You will take it at school your junior year, but if you choose to take it more than once, you will need to register on your own.
- ___8. Attend a College Fair
- ___9. Write the colleges that interest you, requesting information
- ___10. Visit colleges during spring break and summer. You also are allowed 2 college visit days your junior and senior year.
- ___11. Once you have started researching colleges, make plans to meet with college representatives.

GET ORGANIZED

Get a box, a crate, a drawer, or something that you dedicate entirely to college correspondence, applications, and essays. If you haven't already, you will soon begin to be bombarded with letters and brochures from colleges that want you to consider their school. It's really important to have a system in place for organizing this information.

- 1) Get files or envelopes or notebooks to organize all the paperwork
- 2) Keep all the papers for one school in one file
- 3) Keep all the rough drafts for your college essay in one file
- 4) Get a calendar that has room to write stuff on the dates, and post that in your room or on the refrigerator.
- 5) Write down deadlines and test dates, so you and your parents will know when things are coming up. Include ACT/SAT and the dates that college representatives are coming to Greenfield High School.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Community Colleges are two-year post-secondary institutions that have an open door admission policy, and offer a wide variety of courses often leading to certificate programs or an associate's degree. The Community Colleges recognize that people who enroll can differ greatly in their abilities and objectives and consequently, there are usually programs for just about everyone. Community Colleges offer courses in three categories:

1. *College and University Parallel Curricula* - These courses are designed to parallel in objective and content the first two years of courses normally taken in four-year colleges and universities. If you check out the requirements at the four-year college you will be attending later, there should be no problem in transferring all of the courses you take at the Community College to the four-year institution.
2. *Career Courses* - The Community Colleges also offer vocational programs to train you for immediate employment. If you complete one of these programs, which combine occupational related courses and academic classes, you will be trained to enter careers in fields such as: business, engineering, health, public service, ag-business, or industrial technology. Courses in these programs are often accepted as the first two years of baccalaureate programs in technology fields.
3. *Adult and Continuing Education Courses* - Students in this program choose courses of study related to self-improvement and self-enrichment. Often these courses do not meet specific degree requirements.

Advantages of the Community College are many. First, admission is open to anyone with a high school diploma regardless of grade point average or test scores. Sometimes, people think that just because admission is open, classes are easy. This is not the case. Your course work at the Community College can be just as challenging as anywhere else. Another advantage is cost. Tuition is a fraction of what you will pay at other schools. A third plus is that you can live at home or near home while you study.

TECHNICAL SCHOOL

Another option for students is going to a technical school. Tech schools vary greatly from one to the other, so it's a good idea to spend time with your counselor to talk about the advantages of specific institutions. When considering tech schools, explore many different programs to see which ones might match your interests best. Visit the schools and talk with a representative there to find out exactly what the programs cover and what they require for you to graduate. It's a good idea to look at more than one school and then to compare costs and programs. Also, ask where graduates are placed once they finish the program and how much you can expect to earn during your first year of employment. Finally, check out the credibility of the school you plan to attend. Contact employers, other schools, the Better Business Bureau, and recent graduates to discuss their experience or knowledge regarding the particular technical school you're considering. The quality of programs offered by an accredited institution is guaranteed, so look for schools that have accreditation.

WHAT COLLEGES LOOK FOR

The exact things a college may be seeking can vary from one year to the next, but basically most colleges keep the following in mind when reviewing applications:

1. Your academic records are the most important part of the application. Colleges want to see that you've done well in challenging courses. Admissions officers will look at grades and courses. They prefer to see A's and B's and no D's or F's in any course. They also look to see if you've made improvements from ninth grade to twelfth grade, or if you continued in a sequence of courses such as foreign language. They also take into consideration your first quarter and semester grades, so make every effort to do well and avoid senioritis!
2. Standardized testing is another important part of the application file. ACT/SATs are vital to your admission. Test scores should be a validation of your academic record. They are another way for admissions officers to get to know you, and all information is considered before making a decision. Check the school's website to determine the middle range of ACT/SAT scores for last year's freshman class at every school you're interested in attending.
3. Teacher recommendations will probably be the most telling documents when it comes to describing your performance and achievement in an academic setting on a daily basis. Choose to ask teachers to recommend you if they know you well and see your potential. Give them plenty of time to write your letters.
4. An essay is required by many schools. This is the only opportunity that you have to let the admissions committee see your personality, so write

something from the heart. It is not a test of your written English (though that is certainly important), but it is more a way to find out what kinds of things make you tick. You should write two or three, edit and revise, and then send in the one that says, "This is who I am." Brag about yourself!

5. Extracurricular activities are also important. Look to see how you have contributed to your school or community in terms of service, clubs, or athletics. They look to see what kind of commitment you've shown to an activity for four years of high school. Part of your application should include a list of your activities in the order of their importance to you as well as a brief written statement as to which one has the most meaning for you and why.

Other things to remember are:

Sometimes work experience is important. It can show that you have displayed responsibility and character.

If you have a superior talent in art, music, drama, dance, or athletics, you can expect to receive a special review in admissions.

TESTING

Part of the process of getting admitted to college usually includes taking some standardized testing: ACT or SAT. Try to learn about each one before you take the test.

1. SAT or Scholastic Aptitude Test is 3 hours long and tests evidence-based reading and writing and math. If you take the test with the essay, it is an additional 50 minutes. Each section of the SAT is scored on a 200 to 800 point scale. Your total SAT score is the sum of your section scores. The highest possible SAT score is 1600. If you take the essay, you will receive a separate score. Students may take the SAT as many times as they like, and most colleges will take the highest verbal and the highest math scores into consideration for admission - even if they come from two different test dates.
2. ACT or the American College Test is divided into four areas, testing a student's abilities in English, math, reading, and science reasoning. Writing is optional. The test is 2 hours and 55 minutes long with additional time if you take the writing portion. Scores range from 1 to 36.

THE ESSAY

Few students see the essay for what it really is - an opportunity for you to make your application come alive, to make you stand out from all those other people who are also applying to your college.

Think of the essay as a story. This is the time to recount a powerful experience of significant relationship. A story that elicits an emotion from the reader (lump in throat, laughter, a grin, tears) is the one that works.

For the most part, essays will fall into three categories: the "you" question, the "Why Us" question, and the creative question. The goal of all three types of questions is the same: to gather more personal and revealing insights into you as an individual for the admission officer or committee to consider.

1. Tell us about yourself - the "You" Question

This open-ended question requires that you write about your best subject, you! Think about your personality and accomplishments and what best illustrates your strong points: who you are, what you think and do, and what your goals are. Aim to show how your experiences have shaped you as an individual. If you write about adversity, like a death or illness, accent the positive and emphasize what you've learned from the experience.

2. Tell us why you want to come here - the "Why Us" Question.

Respond to this question by considering why you want a higher education and what you hope to accomplish with a college degree. Tell why you think that particular school is the right place for you. Don't make the mistake of telling an admissions committee what they already know about their institution (for example, I want to go to Big U because it has a good business school. They know they have a good business school). Tell them something about you.

3. The Creative Question

Here you may be asked to respond to works of a particular author, a quote, an important issue, how someone or something has influenced your life, or a humorous incident. Be sure to illustrate with examples how a book, quotation, or idea you discuss reflects what's important to you.

Tips on Essays

Answer the question

Have your English teacher take a look

Write about something you care about

Use vigorous language - strong verbs and precise nouns

Write in your own "voice" and "style." Use comfortable vocabulary

If humor is part of your style, feel free to use it

Be honest

Check and re-check for correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling

Ask others to read your essay and offer their opinions

Don't wait until the last minute

Show it to your counselor, they are happy to help and I will give them a little extra insight into you as well.

FINANCIAL AID

G.H.S has a "Financial Aid Night" every October to explain some things about financial aid. You're not alone when you start to worry about how you or your parents will pay for everything, and money is the number one source of conflict in most discussions about college choices. The secret to success in this area is communication.

1. Talk to your parents about the costs of college and ask them to include you in discussions about financial aid. Be honest with one another about expectations and budgets.
2. Talk to your guidance counselor about financial aid options.
3. Talk to a financial aid officer at the colleges that interest you.

One common mistake that many people make is to rule out a particular school because it seems expensive. Often, schools that advertise costs of \$40,000 or more are also the schools that can give more financial aid, and sometimes those expensive schools end up being more affordable than the lower-priced state universities. Choose your college based on academic resources and likelihood of being admitted NOT on sticker price alone. Once you've been admitted to more than one school, then the cost of attending should become a factor in helping you choose which school to attend.

Important Facts about Financial Aid

1. **FAFSA** - The FAFSA is the first step in getting any money for college no matter how much money you and your parents already have. FAFSA stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid, and just about every school will require you to fill this form out and submit it to the government to determine how much money they think you can afford for college. The FAFSA should be filed after October 1 of your senior year. You will have to get a FSA ID to fill it out. You can obtain this at <https://fsaid.ed.gov>. GHS will have a FAFSA completion night in October of every year.

2. **CCS PROFILE** This is a service offered by the College Board that allows schools to ask questions not covered by the FAFSA. This information is used to help them distribute nonfederal student aid funds, or institutional funds. PROFILE is customized for you based on the information you give when you register and then it is sent to the colleges you request. Submitting your CSS Profile to one college or scholarship program costs \$25. Additional reports are \$16 each. First-year undergraduate college applicants whose parents live in the U.S. may be eligible for a CSS Profile fee waiver. Many private schools use this form. The school will let you know if they require PROFILE when you apply, but you can find a complete list at www.collegeboard.com
3. **Anyone can receive financial aid** Many people think their parents make too much money to qualify for financial aid. While in some cases, this is true, the reality is that almost anyone can receive financial aid, but only if you apply for it.
4. **Expected family contribution** Once you've filed your FAFSA, you will receive a report from the government that includes your Expected Family Contribution (EFC). This is the amount of money that the government has determined you and your parents should be able to pay. It is a complicated formula.
5. **Colleges look at the EFC** Once the college has received your EFC, they will determine how they can help you make up the difference.

TYPES OF FINANCIAL AID

Basically, there are four types of financial aid: scholarships (sometimes called merit aid), grants, loans, and work-study programs.

1. Scholarships are money that you don't have to pay back and usually they are tied to some kind of talent or attribute such as academic performance, athletic ability, musical talent, or affiliation with certain organizations (such as Rotary Club, credit unions, or employer groups).
2. Grants are free money that is usually determined by need. Colleges use the information on your EFC to determine which grants to award. Often the grants are money from the government or the university you attend.
3. Loans are the most common form of student aid, and almost everybody encumbers some kind of student loan during the four + years of college. The key is to work with your parents to be sure the amount of your loan is reasonable. Most loans are at low-interest or fixed rates, and usually you don't have to begin paying them off until six months after you've finished college. This grace period is extended if the student attends graduate school full-time after college. Remember to look at your financial aid package and assess how much debt you are willing to take on over four years and if applicable include graduate school so you can make a realistic decision.
4. Work-study is the fourth kind of financial aid. It usually involves a part-time job while you're in college. You'll be limited as to how many hours you can work, and what you make in work-study usually only covers minimal expenses like food, books, and laundry.

Sources of Financial Aid:

1. The federal government provides Perkins Loans and Stafford Loans at low interest rates, and they also are the people who pay for your work-study.

2. The state of Illinois provides a number of grants for students who want to go to college in Illinois. They can based on ACT/SAT scores and grade point averages.
3. The colleges themselves are the biggest source of money. Many of them have large endowments to attract qualified student to their schools.
4. Private organizations such as community service clubs, religious groups, or your parent's place of employment are another source of aid.
5. Check the on G.H.S. website to find out about recent scholarships available.

Helpful Websites for Financial Aid:

www.studentaid.ed.gov

www.fafsa.ed.gov

www.gibill.va.gov

www.finaid.org

www.salliemae.com

www.fastweb.com

www.collegescholarships.com

www.scholarships.com

www.collegeboard.com

www.highfivescholarships.com

Miscellaneous Tips Regarding Financial Aid

You can't get financial aid unless you apply for it

Be accurate when you fill out the forms. Incomplete or inaccurate information will cause delays in processing your application

You need your Social Security Number

When you contact the financial aid offices at your colleges, be sure to get the name of the person you speak to and write it down. It helps to speak to the same person each time you have a question about financial aid

Make copies of all forms and correspondence, and keep them organized in a safe place

Be sure to sign and date all forms

Ask your parents to file their income tax returns as early as possible. That will give you a head start in the financial aid process

Before applying for the FAFSA, you will need an FSA ID

Guides and Websites

College Guides and Books on College Admissions

COMPREHENSIVE, OBJECTIVE COLLEGE GUIDES

The College Handbook, The College Board

Barron's Profiles of American Colleges, Barron's Educational Series

Four-Year Colleges, Peterson's

NARRATIVE, SUBJECTIVE COLLEGE GUIDES

The Fiske Guide to Colleges, Edward Fiske

The Insider's Guide to the Colleges, Yale Daily News staff (put together by Yale students each year)

Colleges That Change Lives, Loren Pope (helpful profiles of lesser-known, but excellent colleges)

The Best 376 Colleges, Princeton Review

GENERAL COLLEGE COUNSELING BOOKS

I'm Going to College—Not You! Surviving the College Search with Your Child, Jennifer Delahunty (editor)

The Thinking Student's Guide to College: 75 Tips for Getting a Better Education, Andrew Roberts

Admission Matters: What Students and Parents Need to Know About Getting Into College, Springer & Franck

College Admission: From Application to Acceptance, Step by Step, Robin Mamlet & Christine Vandavelde

Less Stress, More Success, Dr. Ken Ginsburg & Merilee Jones

College Admissions Together: It Takes a Family, Steven Goodman & Andrea Leiman

Crazy U: One Dad's Crash Course in Getting His Kid Into College, Andrew Ferguson

The College Solution, Lynn O'Shaughnessy

College Unranked: Ending the College Admissions Frenzy, Lloyd Thacker (editor)

The Fiske Guide to Getting Into the Right College, Edward Fiske (college admissions process overview)

The Launching Years: Strategies for Parenting from Senior Year to College Life, Kastner & Wyatt

Letting Go: A Parents' Guide to Understanding the College Years, Karen Coburn & Madge Lawrence

BOOKS OF LISTS/SPECIALTY GUIDES

Rugg's Recommendations on the Colleges, Frederick E. Rugg (recommends colleges by major)
Cool Colleges for the Hyper-Intelligent, Self-Directed, Late Blooming, and Just Plain Different, Donald Asher
Smart Choices: Honors Programs and Colleges, Peterson's
Index of Majors and Graduate Degrees, The College Board
Colleges With Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities or ADD, Peterson's
Degree Programs in Visual and Performing Arts, Peterson's
The Gap-Year Advantage: Helping Your Child Benefit from Time Off Before or During College, Haigler /Nelson
International Student Handbook, The College Board

FINANCIAL AID GUIDES AND INFORMATION

Getting Financial Aid, The College Board
Scholarship Handbook, The College Board
Scholarships, Grants & Prizes, Peterson's
The Financial Aid Handbook: Getting the Education You Want for the Price You Can Afford, Stack & Vedvik
Don't Miss Out: The Ambitious Student's Guide to Financial Aid, Octameron Associates

College Admissions Related Websites

Naviance (OES web-based college counseling program)

<http://connection.naviance.com/oes>

OES College Counseling Webpage <http://www.oes.edu/us/college/index.html>

COLLEGE SEARCH WEBSITES

www.collegeboard.com www.collegeview.com

www.collegequest.com www.nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/

www.ucan-network.org www.unigo.com

FINANCIAL AID WEBSITES

FAFSA www.fafsa.ed.gov

Scholarship Search www.fastweb.com

www.scholarships.com

Financial aid information, scholarship search, CSS Profile www.collegeboard.com

Financial aid information, scholarship search www.finaid.org

National Assoc. of Student Financial Aid Administrators www.nasfaa.org

National Education Loan Association www.nela.net

FAFSA4caster and information on financial aid www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov

Oregon Student Assistance Commission www.getcollegefunds.org

Western Undergraduate Exchange <http://wue.wiche.edu/>

Colleges offering merit aid www.meritaid.com

TESTING

The College Board (SAT) www.collegeboard.com

American College Testing program (ACT) www.actstudent.org

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) www.toefl.org

Test preparation www.number2.com

Colleges that are test optional www.fairtest.org

Colleges that want SAT Subject Tests

http://www.compassprep.com/admissions_req_subjects.aspx

MISCELLANEOUS WEBSITES

Common Application www.commonapp.org

National Survey of Student Engagement www.nsse.iub.edu

(a view of collegiate quality that focuses on teaching and learning)

Common Data Set (This is the form colleges complete for www.commondataset.org organizations gathering data. Some colleges make the information available on their website.)

Summer Programs www.petersons.com

Women's Colleges www.womenscolleges.org

Canadian Universities www.uwaterloo.ca/canu/index.html

Colleges That Change Lives www.ctcl.com

Colleges Abroad www.aaicu.org

International Student Information www.edupass.org

International Student Scholarship Search www.internationalstudent.com/scholarships

Colleges in the United Kingdom www.ucas.ac.uk

British Council (colleges in the United Kingdom) www.britishcouncil.org

LGBT Friendly Colleges and Universities www.campuspride.org

Historically Black Colleges and Universities www.hbcunetwork.com

Hispanic Colleges and Universities www.hacu.net

Catholic Colleges www.catholiccollegesonline.org

Jesuit Colleges and Universities www.ajcunet.edu

Colleges with Hillel www.hillel.org

Christian Colleges www.christianconnector.com

CAREERS

Explore majors www.mymajors.com

Explore majors and careers (go to "Find a College") www.collegeboard.com

Bureau of Labor Statistics <http://www.bls.gov/audience/students.htm>

ATHLETICS

National Association of College Athletics www.ncaa.org

National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics www.naia.org

NCAA Eligibility Center www.ncaaclearinghouse.net

Links to college team websites www.linkathletics.com

Visiting Campus

One of the best ways to learn about a college is to see it for yourself and talk to as many people who live and work there as possible. A campus visit often gives you that chance. Here are some suggestions:

1. Call the admission office ahead of time. Request a tour, class visit, directions, and local hotel information if needed. This is also the time for special requests; that is, meeting with a coach, faculty member, financial aid officer, arranging an audition or staying overnight in a residence hall. If you have a special need, don't be afraid to ask.
2. Call if you need to cancel or are running late for your appointment.
3. Make a list of questions to ask during your interview/visit.
4. Be prepared to share information about yourself such as GPA, current classes, extracurricular involvement, and unique or special interests. Take an unofficial copy of your transcript with you on your visits.
5. At the end of each visit, jot down notes while the impressions are still clear in your mind. Sometimes it's helpful to take a few pictures of each campus.

Things to do during a campus visit:

Take a tour

Visit one or more classes

Have an interview, if possible

Talk to as many students as possible

Carefully observe students as you walk around and see if you can picture yourself as a member of the student body

Stay overnight in a residence hall

Eat in a dining hall

Visit the neighborhood in which the college is located. Check out transportation facilities.

Read the bulletin boards and the college newspaper

Visit the library

Things to look for during a campus visit:

General neatness of the campus

Student attire

Friendliness

Student conversations

Student groupings

Security

Faculty presence

Library

Laboratories

Computers

Theater

Music and art studios

Athletic facilities

Residence halls

Amenities, including the bookstore, cafeterias, student lounges, student union

Sample Questions to Ask During a College Visit

1. What percentage of first-year students return for the sophomore year?
2. What percentage of first-year students graduate in four years?
3. Are there special academic programs? Study abroad? Exchange programs? Internships? Co-ops?
4. How is the advising system organized and who are the advisors?
5. What types of tutoring programs are available?
6. How soon does a student have to declare a major? What are the most popular majors?
7. Are large classes broken down into seminars? Who leads them? Who determines the grades?
8. What is the geographic, ethnic, religions, and racial makeup of the student body?
9. What is the location of a church/synagogue of your choice?
10. How is admission determined? What is the importance of SAT? ACT? GPA? Class rank? Extracurricular involvement?
11. Is guaranteed housing available? For how long?
12. How are roommates assigned?
13. What percentage of students go home on weekends?
14. What is the role of fraternities and sororities on campus? What percentage of students are involved? When is rush?
15. What percentage of seniors go on to graduate school? Medical school? Law school?
16. Is there a career planning and placement center available to students?
17. Ask for a list of recent graduates in your field who would be willing to talk with you.
18. What percentage of students receive some kind of financial aid?
19. How do students describe the academic environment?
20. What support facilities such as computer labs, science labs, library, art studio space, music practice rooms, athletic facilities, writing centers exist? Who gets to use them?
21. How much pressure do students feel to compete with each other?

22.How accessible is the faculty? To what extent do first-year students interact with faculty outside class?

23.Do students seem to be friendly? What do you observe as you walk around campus?

24.What are the rules governing alcohol, cars, curfew? What is the enforcement policy?

25.What kind of diversity exists on campus?

Sample College Visit Worksheet

COLLEGE NAME:

LOCATION:

Distance from home

SIZE:

Enrollment

Physical size of campus

ENVIRONMENT:

Type of school (2-year vs. 4-year)

School setting (urban vs. rural)

Location & size of the nearest city

Co-ed, male, female

Religious affiliation

ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS:

Deadline

Tests required

Average test scores, GPA, rank

Special requirements

ACADEMICS:

Majors offered

Special requirements

Accreditation

Student-faculty ratio

Typical class size

COLLEGE EXPENSES:

Tuition, room & board

Estimated total budget

Application fee, deposit

FINANCIAL AID:

Deadline

Required forms for receiving aid

Scholarships

HOUSING:

Residence hall requirement

Availability

Types and sizes

Food plan

FACILITIES:

Academic

Recreational

ACTIVITIES:

Clubs, organizations

Greek life

Athletics, intramurals

Other

