

College Admissions Process Newburyport High School

Introduction

For most students the college search process begins at the start of second semester junior year. Counselors meet with students both in groups and individually to guide them through the application process and assist them with developing a college list, advising on teacher recommendations, explaining standardized college admission testing, and counseling them through both the decision process and transitional issues. Counselors are an invaluable resource for families helping them to focus on matching needs and interests with colleges where the student will be socially and culturally comfortable as well as academically challenged. This packet is a supplement to counselors' work with students and families and can answer many questions you may have about the college admission process.

What you can expect from your counselor:

Guidance

The counselors' experience and the relationships they have developed over the years with college admission counselors allow them to have a good understanding of what colleges are looking for.

Written evaluation

The counselor will write a comprehensive, honest, and positive letter of recommendation for each student. Research for this letter will be done by collecting as much data as possible from the student, parents, teachers, coaches/extracurricular advisors, as well as by observation.

Transcript materials

Your counselor will send your transcript and other material via Naviance to the colleges you are applying to. Students must make transcript requests in Naviance **at least 3 weeks before each college submission deadline** to allow counselors to send everything on time. The items sent include the following:

- Transcript of all final grades for Grades 9-11
- Counselor letter of recommendation
- Teacher letters of recommendation
- Newburyport High School Profile (*document providing a detailed picture of the school*)
- First term grades after the end of the term, as well as midyear and final grades when available

What is expected from parents:

- Be encouraging and supportive
- Help your son/daughter create an organized schedule of college application tasks
- Offer advice and guidance when appropriate
- Help your son/daughter to understand that there is more than one college that will be a good fit
- Discourage limiting options too early, or trying to find the "right college" too soon; the search should begin with finding a set of about 20-35 possibilities
- Avoid pushing your preferences or biases regarding college choices
- Be open to new options and suggestions (*even "unknown" colleges*)
- Complete the financial aid forms
- **Complete the Parent Questionnaire form**—Your observations, comments and especially anecdotes about your child are extremely valuable to the counselor as he or she writes the letter of recommendation

What is expected from the student:

- Enroll in appropriate courses to meet graduation and college entrance requirements

- Use a variety of resources to identify and research college choices
- Meet with your counselor
- Be familiar with the colleges' requirements and deadlines
- Visit colleges and arrange for interviews (if recommended)
- Take the standardized tests; **submit official scores to each school that requires them** through College Board or ACT
- **Meet deadlines established by counselors and colleges**
- Remember, the counselors provide support for many students. It is important to allow reasonable time for letters of recommendation and any other requests.
- **Give teachers plenty of time to write letters of recommendation**

College Selection

Characteristics of yourself to consider

- What are your interests, abilities, and ambitions?
- What are your particular strengths?
- What are your values and goals?
 - Are you independent, motivated, creative, a leader, self-disciplined?
 - What is your relationship with your peers, with adults?
 - What are your academic interests?
 - In what type of environment do you feel most comfortable?
 - Do you learn best with others or independently?
 - Are you self-motivated or do you need personal direction from your teachers?
 - How would you describe your role at NHS and the larger Newburyport community?
 - How would someone who knows you best describe you?

Characteristics of a college to consider

- What section of the country do you like?
- Would you prefer suburban, urban, or rural environment?
- What size school would you like (e.g. small - up to 5,000 students; medium - 5,000 to 10,000 students; large - over 10,000 students)?
- A college or university with wide offering of curriculum choices? A liberal arts college? A technical college with training in a specific area?
- A college with a religious affiliation?
- A college offering an intercollegiate athletics program and if so division I, II, or III?
- A college with a strong visual arts or theatre program?

Research appropriate college choices

- Develop a list of colleges and research admission criteria using the resources available through Naviance, College Board, and institutional web sites
- Visit college campuses
- In the fall of senior year, attend local college fairs. You should also listen carefully for announcements about college rep visits to NHS

Resources

Your counselor is available to help you weigh the pluses and minuses of different colleges and they can help steer you in the direction of schools that might be good matches for you.

Naviance: Newburyport High School has selected Family Connection from Naviance as a tool to help you in your college search process. Family Connection offers a comprehensive website that helps you make decisions about colleges and careers. Family Connection is linked with Naviance, which we use to track and analyze data about college and career plans, so it provides up-to-date information that's specific to our school. Intro letters and parent access codes are available in spring of Junior year. The web address for Family Connection for NHS is:

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

Family Connection will allow you to:

- **Keep track of the college search and application process:** Build a resume, complete on-line surveys, and manage timelines and deadlines for making decisions about colleges and careers.
- **Research colleges:** Compare GPA, test scores, and other statistics to actual historical data from our school for students who have applied and been admitted in the past.

College Guidebooks:

Letting Go: A Parents' Guide (Coburn, Karen and Treiger, Madge)

Harvard Schmarvard(Mathews, Jay)

Winning the Heart of the College Admissions Dean (Mitchell, Joyce Slayton)

Colleges That Change Lives (Pope, Lauren)

Cass and Birnbaum's Guide to American Colleges

College Board: The College Handbook

College Admissions for the High School Athlete(DeSalvi, Jack &DiGeronimo, Teresa)

The Fiske Guide to Getting into the Right College(Fiske, Edward & Hammond, Bruce)

Peterson's College Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities

Princeton Review: The Gourman Report

Ruggs' Recommendations on the Colleges College Life(Ruggs, Frederick)

Internet:Most colleges and universities have web sites with a specific section for admissions and prospective students. The information you find will vary greatly from college to college, but typically you will find the most current and detailed information available about the school and its application procedures. Some sites include "virtual" tours, and others allow you to apply electronically to the institution.

College Fairs:The National Association for College Admission Counseling sponsors large college fairs around the country which bring together representatives from several hundred colleges. All of these fairs provide a good forum for you to talk briefly with the representatives, pick up literature, and put your name on their mailing lists. The web site for this organization is www.nacacnet.org.

Campus Visits:Before you become too serious about attending any school, it is very important that you spend some time there to get a feel for the environment. All admission offices offer campus tours and information sessions for prospective students. You should try to revisit those schools in which you are most interested, however, at a time when classes are in session. Most college admission offices will help arrange for you to spend a night in a dorm, attend classes, and eat in the dining hall.

Applying

In working with you, we will share how previous Newburyport High School students with similar credentials have fared in the admission process. Our goal is to arrive at a list of schools that fall in three separate categories—reach, match, and possible (i.e. likely you'll get in). These terms are relative, not absolute. If we feel the list is unbalanced or that certain reach schools are unrealistic, we will tell you. While we support each student in applying to the school of his/her choice, we will help him/her to realistically consider admissibility, considering the increasingly competitive college admission process.

Even students with outstanding credentials may not be offered admission to all of the colleges on their lists. At highly selective colleges there are more qualified applicants than there are spots available in the freshman class. These colleges deny far more students than they accept, with several now accepting less than 12% of their applicants. We recommend applying to between six and nine colleges that vary in selectivity. All schools on your list (*even possibles*) should have most of the features that you desire in a college.

Reasonable Reach A school where most of the students who have been admitted have slightly higher test scores and academic records than yours.

Match A school where your grades and standardized test scores are comparable with those of other

students.

Possible (likely) A school where your abilities and achievement record are stronger than the majority of the accepted students. Everyone should apply to two such schools.

Be cautious about letting only one or two factors govern your choices. Do not be overly influenced by one individual as you consider your choices. Your relationship with someone who attends, graduated from, or works for a specific college does not mean that you will be comfortable there. Don't select colleges solely on the basis of prestige, "mystique," or somebody else's vague idea of what makes a good college. Choose colleges that offer qualities, conditions, and characteristics that are right for you. Don't take lightly the selection of a "possible" or likely school choice. Finding a possible school that best meets your needs and interests can be the hardest part of your search. A possible isn't a viable choice if you don't want to go there!

Application Deadlines and Related Terms

It is critical that you know the application deadlines for the schools to which you are applying. To apply late usually elicits the same response as not applying at all. Below are some important terms used in the application and admission process by most colleges and universities. It is important that you understand them and the differences between them.

Application Deadline

In the application information for each college you will find a date by which all application materials are due.

Candidate (or Applicant) Notification Date

This is the date by which you will receive a decision, or the date by which the decisions will be mailed from the school. Notification dates for the more competitive schools are usually in late March and early April. Most colleges will not provide acceptance information by phone. Be patient!

The following Definitions of Admission Options are taken from NACAC's Students' Rights and Responsibilities. Additional Information and definitions can be found at:

<http://www.nacacnet.org/PublicationsResources/Marketplace/student/Pages/RightsandResponsibilities.aspx>

Restrictive Application Plans

Early Decision (ED) Students make a commitment to a first choice institution where, if admitted, they definitely will enroll. The application deadline and decision deadline occur early.

Commitment: Binding

Restrictive Early Action (REA) Students apply to an institution of preference and receive a decision early. They may be restricted from applying ED or EA or REA to other institutions. If offered enrollment, they have until May 1 to confirm. *Commitment: Non-Binding*

Non-Restrictive Application Plans

Early Action (EA) Students apply early and receive a decision well in advance of the institution's regular response date. *Commitment: Non-binding*

Regular Decision Students submit an application by a specified date and receive a decision in a clearly stated period of time. *Commitment: Non-binding*

Rolling Admission Institutions review applications as they are submitted and render admission decisions throughout the admission cycle. *Commitment: Non-binding*

Open Admission Some colleges grant admission to all high school graduates without regard to additional qualifications. For example, Northern Essex Community College. *Commitment: Non-binding*

Candidate's Reply Date You have the right to wait until May 1 to respond to an offer of admission

and/or financial aid. Colleges that request commitments to offers of admission and/or financial assistance prior to May 1 must clearly offer you the opportunity to request (in writing) an extension until May 1. They must grant you this extension and your request may not jeopardize your status for admission and/or financial aid. Candidates admitted under early decision programs are a recognized exception to the May 1 deadline. If you are accepted under an early decision plan, you must promptly withdraw the applications submitted to other colleges and universities and make no additional applications. If you are an early decision candidate and are seeking financial aid, you need not withdraw other applications until you have received notification about financial aid. You may confirm your intention to enroll and, if required, submit a deposit to only one college or university. The exception to this arises if you are put on a wait list by a college or university and are later admitted to that institution. You may accept the offer and send a deposit. However, you must immediately notify a college or university at which you previously indicated your intention to enroll.

NHS will only send your final transcript to ONE college or university.

Admissions Factors

When you are considering what colleges are seeking in their prospective students, realize that the more selective schools receive many more (*sometimes thousands more*) applications from qualified students than they can possibly accept. This means that these colleges are denying admission to "acceptable" students, many with high SAT scores and near-perfect grade point averages. Having acknowledged that there are always special factors coming into play, one can nevertheless consider the following several factors which are considered in the admission process at most colleges:

- High School Performance, GPA
- Rigor of academic program in relation to courses offered
- Scores on standardized tests
- Special talents
- College essay
- Recommendations
- Interview
- Extracurricular activities

The emphasis placed on each factor will vary among colleges. Students should remember that the final selection process is based upon the goals of a specific college community. Some colleges, particularly the very selective schools, are trying to build a balanced entering class that will allow them to have a range of athletic teams, organizations, and student backgrounds. Information about the importance of various criteria can be found on college websites. Some schools have very specific admission requirements set by state public accrediting boards. The following are requirements for admission to Massachusetts' public universities and colleges.

Massachusetts State Colleges & UMass Minimum Admissions Requirements

The admissions standards for the state colleges and UMass emphasize a strong academic high school background so that students enter college ready to learn. These standards represent minimum requirements; meeting them does not guarantee admission, since campus officials consider a wide range of factors in admissions decisions. It is important to note that admissions standards for the state's community colleges differ. Community colleges may admit any high school graduate or GED recipient.

Freshman Applicants

The new admissions standards for freshmen applicants have two main parts:

1. 16 required academic courses; and
2. Minimum required grade point average (GPA) earned in college preparatory courses completed at

the time of application.
Applicants must also submit an SAT or ACT score.

Academic Course Requirement

Sixteen college preparatory courses distributed as follows are required. *(A course is equivalent to one semester/1 credit class at NHS. Courses count toward the distribution only if passed).*

Subject	Courses	
English	4	
Math	3	Algebra I & II and Geometry or Trigonometry, or comparable coursework
Science	3	Including 2 courses with laboratory work
Social Studies	2	Including 1 course in U.S. History
Foreign Language	2	In a single language
Electives	2	From the above subjects or from the Arts & Humanities or Computer Science

Minimum Required Grade Point Average (GPA)

The GPA must be achieved based on all college preparatory courses completed at the time of application and should be weighted for accelerated (Honors or Advanced Placement) courses. Effective Fall 2001 the required minimum weighted high school GPA is 3.0 for the four-year public campuses.

Each state college or UMass campus to which a student applies will re-calculate the GPA for purposes of applying the admissions standards.

Standardized Test Scores

Applicants who meet the GPA requirement do not have to use the sliding scale for admission, but still must submit SAT or ACT test scores for consideration if they are applying to a state college or UMASS within three years of high school graduation.

Sliding Scale

(used when GPA is lower than the minimum required GPA)

If an applicant's GPA falls below the required minimum, a sliding scale will apply. This scale should be used only when an applicant's GPA falls below the required 3.0 minimum for admission to the state colleges or UMass.

Sliding Scale for Freshman Applicants to UMass

Weighted High School GPA	Combined SAT-I V&M Must Equal or Exceed (ACT Equivalent in Italics)
2.51-2.99	950 <i>(20)</i>
2.41-2.50	990 <i>(21)</i>
2.31-2.40	1030 <i>(22)</i>
2.21-2.30	1070 <i>(23)</i>
2.11-2.20	1110 <i>(24)</i>
2.00-2.10	1150 <i>(25)</i>

Sliding Scale for Freshman Applicants to a State College

Weighted High School GPA	Combined SAT-I V&M Must Equal or Exceed (ACT Equivalent in Italics)
2.51-2.99	920 <i>(19)</i>
2.41-2.50	960 <i>(20)</i>
2.31-2.40	1000 <i>(21)</i>
2.21-2.30	1040 <i>(22)</i>

2.11-2.20	1180 (23)
2.00-2.10	1120 (24)

EFFECTIVE FALL 2000, NO APPLICANT WITH A HIGH SCHOOL GPA BELOW 2.00 MAY BE ADMITTED TO A STATE COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY CAMPUS.

Subject	Courses	
English	4	Algebra I & II and Geometry or Trigonometry, or comparable coursework
Math	4	Including 2 courses with laboratory work
Science	4	Including 1 course in U.S. History
Social Studies	4	In a single language
Foreign Language	4	Algebra I & II and Geometry or Trigonometry, or comparable coursework

Standardized Testing

Standardized testing is an important factor in admission decisions at most colleges and especially at highly selective colleges and universities. Colleges pay close attention to the results, as these results usually serve as a reliable predictor of a student's performance on college work.

Almost all colleges focus on a student's highest score on the math section and the verbal section.

Students can register for standardized testing using www.collegeboard.com for the SAT and www.act.org for the ACT. Students also send test scores to colleges via their registrations or the respective website. The Newburyport High School transcript does not include any test scores.

Test scores are only one credential in the college process. Excellence in coursework at NHS is the most important factor that will be recognized by colleges. Students should talk with their counselors, however, to identify those schools that attach particular importance to standardized test scores, if this is a concern.

Each student should become familiar with the instructions and with sample questions; in this regard there are booklets published by College Board or ACT, Inc. that offer hints, sample questions, a partial or full practice test and an answer and scoring key for self-evaluation. Additional materials can be found on both web sites and many private test preparation centers.

MAJOR TESTS USED BY COLLEGES

SAT Reasoning Test A 3 hour, 45 minute test that measures developed writing, critical reading, and mathematical reasoning ability. All students should take the SAT in the spring of junior year. Many students elect to repeat the SAT during the fall of senior year as well. Most competitive colleges and universities require SAT or ACT for admission.

SAT Subject Tests One-hour test measuring achievement in a specific subject area. Up to three tests may be taken on one test date. It is best to take a Subject Test when finishing the corresponding coursework. It is a student's responsibility to read carefully the admission requirements for each college and university under consideration. Most selective schools require two or three SAT Subject Tests. Certain state universities and special programs such as engineering may require specific tests- for example, math, science or both.

ACT The ACT is acknowledged by most colleges and universities in the U.S. as an acceptable substitute for the SAT Reasoning Test *and/or* Subject tests. Some students may choose to take the ACT in addition to the SATs. The ACT assesses a student's aptitude in four areas: English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning. Students who elect to take this test should take it with the essay.

ACT/SAT Comparison

While most colleges have testing requirements, you may have a choice about which test to take. Many colleges accept either the SAT or ACT. Some selective colleges that require 3 SAT Subject Tests will accept the ACT instead. The following lists provide information on the major differences between the tests. To further compare specific content areas, please refer to the web sites or the registration booklets.

Comparable Scores on the SAT and ACT

ACT	SAT	Percentile
36	1600	99
29	1300	90
27	1200	80
25	1180	70
23	1080	60
21	1000	50
20	960	40
18	870	30
15	740	20

NOTE: Comparison is based on math and critical reading portion of SAT; does not include writing.

Fee waivers are available. If you believe you are eligible speak with your counselor.

SAT vs. ACT: How do the Tests Compare?

The following chart is taken from The Princeton Review website and outlines the major differences between the two tests.

	SAT	ACT
When is it administered?	Seven times per year	Six times per year
What is the test structure?	Ten-section exam: 3 Critical Reading, 3 Math, 3 Writing, and 1 Experimental; the Experimental masked to look like a regular section	Four-section exam: English, Math, Reading, Science, and Writing (optional); the Experimental section is added to tests on certain dates only and is clearly experimental
What is the test content?	Math: up to 9th grade basic geometry and Algebra II. Critical Reading: sentence completions, short and long critical reading passages reading comprehension Writing: an essay, and questions testing grammar usage, and word choice.	Math: up to trigonometry Science: charts, experiments Reading: four passages, one each of Prose Fiction, Social Science Humanities, and Natural Science English: stresses grammar Writing: an essay
Is there a Yes/No penalty for wrong answers?	Yes	No
How is the test scored?	200-800 per section, added together for a combined score—a 2400 is the highest possible combined score	1-36 for each subject, averaged for a combined a composite score. A 36 is the highest possible combined score.
Are all scores sent to schools?	No. There is a "Score Choice" option. Students can choose scores by test date to send to each college.	No. There is a "Score Choice" option. Students can choose which schools will receive their scores AND which scores the schools will see.

Best time to register?	At least 6 weeks before the test date	At least 4 weeks before the test date
Need more information?	The College Board: (866) 756-7346 www.collegeboard.com	ACT, Inc.: (319) 337-1000 www.act.org

TOEFL If English is not your first language or if English is not spoken at home, you might consider taking the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) **www.toefl.org**. The test is administered by the Educational Testing Service and is administered by appointment at testing centers. As of July 1998, the TOEFL is computer-administered in the U.S. and most countries, and it has four sections: Listening Comprehension, Structure, Reading Comprehension, and Writing. For students who have been studying in this country for less than five years, the score obtained on the TOEFL will often be substituted by college admission offices for the verbal score on the SAT. Unlike the standard practice for the SAT, however, many schools do have cut-off scores for the TOEFL. Those that do will usually make that information known to you. International students should take the TOEFL at least once before the end of their junior year. Additional information on the TOEFL as well as a registration form can be obtained in the College Counseling Office.

SAT and ACT Registration for Students with Disabilities

All students with disabilities who plan to take the SAT or ACT with testing accommodations are required to submit an additional application form at least 12 weeks before the first test date. Students who have already been approved for accommodations must submit a copy of the Student Eligibility Letter from the College Board with SAT or ACT registration forms. See your Counselor for the deadlines to submit eligibility forms. For more information visit:

<http://www.collegeboard.com/ssd/student>

<http://www.act.org/aap/disab/index.html>

A FINAL WORD ON TESTING

How important are your test scores? That depends on where you are applying. College guidebooks and admission materials often indicate an average score for students. Keep in mind that this is an average, not a minimum. More schools have moved to the reporting of their scores as ranges for the middle 50% of their students. This information is usually more helpful and a lot less intimidating. College admission officers are fully aware that some students do not "test well." Slow reading speed, unfamiliarity with the test format, or simple fear may cause a student to perform poorly on standardized tests. For these reasons, test scores are usually reviewed in the context of all other parts of the student's application.

The Essay

The application essay is probably the most dreaded part of the application for the student and the one that admission counselors most enjoy. It can bring your application to life. Most selective schools require at least one, and sometimes several, essays.

Imagine all of the parts of your application on a table before an admission officer: your application, your transcript, your test scores, your recommendations. Think of your essay as being that part of your application which transforms your file from a collection of bits of information into a real person. If one of the essay questions is, "Provide us with any other additional information which might be helpful in evaluating your application," then do just that. For example, write a paragraph describing your community service experience or a special summer experience.

Above all else, admission offices are looking for a reflection of you in your essays. You should not feel that you have to come up with something unusual or tragic. You should not try to give the reader what you think he or she wants. You should not use language with which you are not usually comfortable.

What should you do when writing your essays? Make sure you understand the question you are

answering and answer it. Do not give one school the answer to an essay for another school unless the questions are exactly the same. Give yourself ample time to write good essays. Write a first draft and then put it away for a couple of days. Take it out and revise it. Put it away again. Polish it and then have someone else read it, for both content and grammatical and spelling errors.

Be careful about getting too much help on your essays. It will show and it will spell doom if the reader gets the impression that the work is not your own. Someone who reads hundreds (*or thousands*) of them will be able to tell. Write your own essays!

Please note that some colleges require a copy of a graded writing assignment. It is important to keep your English papers in case you need to submit one.

Resume

A resume is a brief description of your previous education, work experience, and additional relevant information. It is the first opportunity you have to make an impression on a prospective employer. Many college applications request a resume.

A resume should:

- Highlight your knowledge, skills, and accomplishments.
- Emphasize your strengths.
- Contain correct information. Accuracy is extremely important. Proofread several times and have someone else proofread it for you.
- Use action verbs such as managed, supervised, monitored, led, created, developed, planned, organized, etc...
- Be easy to read. The experience you have will sell you, not the size of the words you use.
- Be concise, no longer than one page.
- Be organized logically.
- Be ordered in importance.
- Be professional. Use a computer to print your resume, making sure the copies are neat and clean.
- Emphasize key points or expressions by using bold type or underline.
- List all relevant experience, including school projects, club and sport activities, volunteer work, positions of leadership, and awards, and accomplishments

Counselor Recommendation

With each transcript sent to a college, we will also send a letter of recommendation on your behalf. Be certain that you have taken enough time to talk with your counselor well before your applications are due so that he or she can write a specific, comprehensive, and informed letter about you. You will have to take the initiative in arranging the meetings. Expect the conversation to be relaxed and expect to be asked questions about yourself and your interests. Please complete the Student Data Sheet before meeting with your counselor as that will help direct the conversation.

Your counselor will complete a Secondary Report Form which includes the recommendation letter. To request a Transcript Packet, including the counselor recommendation, do so through Naviance.

October, November, and December get very busy in the counseling office, with several hundred applications being processed in a month's time. While you must be attentive to the application deadlines of the schools to which you are applying, you must also be aware of the internal deadlines set by the counseling office since those occur earlier than those of the colleges. Determine your earliest application deadline and observe the office deadline of submitting your transcript release form *at least 3 weeks prior to the application deadline*.

Your counselor will automatically send your mid-semester grades through Naviance to each college for which you have submitted a Transcript Release Form. Many schools have an additional Midyear School Report which they ask the office to submit. We do **NOT** need these forms.

Please note that frequently colleges send a letter upon receiving your application stating that certain documents are “missing.” Do not panic. Most times the documents are at the college and have not yet been matched up with the application. Please check with your counselor to verify when the Transcript Packet was submitted and to discern whether the college needs to be contacted.

Teacher Recommendations

Many colleges will ask that you have a teacher write a letter of reference on your behalf. Some ask for more than one teacher recommendation, and some even specify teachers of specific subjects. You should give careful consideration to your selection of the teachers you will ask to write letters for you. The teachers you choose should know you well. Teachers from junior and senior year are usually preferred, as are teachers of “core” academic subjects like math, English, history, & science. Choose a teacher with whom you feel confident writing about you. If you indicate a particular major or field of interest on your application, you should have letters which support that interest. For example, if you are interested in studying engineering, the college will look for a letter from a science or math teacher. If you are interested in a pre-law program, it would make sense to have letters from English and social studies teachers.

Most students will have two teacher letters sent to each of their colleges—if one college requires two letters, it is not too much to ask both teachers to send their letters (via Naviance) to each of your schools, even if some ask for only one or none at all—provided you have followed the steps for requesting letters.

Remember that teachers take this responsibility very seriously, and that they spend a considerable amount of time and effort preparing thoughtful and well-written recommendations for their students. You must give your teachers ample time to accomplish this task. If the teacher agrees to write a letter for you, you should offer to meet with him or her to answer any questions he or she might have for you.

Never ask a teacher to write a recommendation for you when there is not ample time to do so properly. Also, never ask a teacher to write a letter for you via a note left in the teacher’s box or on the teacher’s desk. After all of your letters have been written, thank the teachers who have written for you. When you get responses from the schools in the spring, let the teachers who have written for you know what the decisions are.

Additional Recommendations

Many students ask about whether or not they should get extra letters of recommendation to support their application to a particular school. Such letters might be from alumni of that college or friends of the family in prominent positions. The rule of thumb is this: letters from people who do not know you well as a person, and specifically, as a student, are not helpful. If you think an additional letter or two will highlight an aspect of your life not already covered by your application, you might think of asking a coach, an employer, or an advisor. Do not include more than one or two, however. Such letters should be sent directly to the Admission Office by the people writing them.

Campus Visits

You should plan to visit a range of colleges in the spring of your junior year. This will help you decide what campus size, location, and setting is the best match for you. We suggest you schedule no more than two college visits in a day. Most colleges offer campus tours at regularly scheduled intervals. Check the website or call ahead to ensure that the tour will be offered and ask if you need to pre-register.

Interviews

The interview is probably the time in the application process when the student experiences the most

anxiety. There is a big difference between dropping an essay in the mail and sitting five feet from someone looking you in the face. Interviews can play an important role in the application process at many schools, especially at the smaller and more selective colleges. Any personal contact you have with a representative from the admission office strengthens your application and makes it more "real." Take advantage of your interviews and get one whenever you can. There are several different types of interviews:

Group Interviews Many colleges, in conjunction with their campus tour, offer group interviews for many prospective students at one time. This is designed to be more of an information session and carries little evaluative weight. At the same time, however, it would be easy to make a good or a bad impression depending on the questions you might ask, your appearance, and other factors.

On-campus Personal Interviews If it is possible, getting a personal interview with an admission officer is the most desired type of interview. These are conducted in the admission office and usually take about 45 minutes. While the interview is a chance for you to learn more about the school through hearing about it and asking questions, the primary purpose of this type of interview is evaluative. Even so, if the interview develops into a relaxed conversation, this is usually a good sign.

Alumni Interviews Many colleges, so overwhelmed by the numbers of applicants in recent years, have stopped offering interviews by members of their admission staffs. Instead, colleges enlist and train alumni who live in the area. For some colleges, this is a required part of the application process and for others it is an option. The alumnus will usually contact you a couple of weeks after your application is received by the admission office. Meetings often take place at the office or home of the interviewer, or a mutually agreed upon location. Approach these interviews as conversations. Take advantage of the opportunity to learn more about the school. Some interviewers will have a list of questions which they are expected to ask. Whether they say the interview will "count" or not, you can be sure that your interviewer will send a report back to the school and that this report will become a part of your application file.

What you can do to prepare:

- Schedule your interview well in advance if you are seeking one at the school.
- Do your homework before the interview. Review the school's literature and know the basics about the institution. In addition, be prepared to comment on particular programs that combine your talents and interests.
- Be prepared to ask questions.
- Dress neatly and cleanly. If in doubt, dress conservatively. Do not try to overly impress with your appearance.
- During the interview, be honest; be YOURSELF. Listen and take time to reflect. Try to be energetic and enthusiastic. Make eye contact and use a firm handshake.
- Know the name of the person who interviewed you and send a brief thank-you note within a few days of your interview.
- Express yourself well and clearly and demonstrate self-confidence and maturity.

The Student Athlete

The college application process takes on some special considerations for potential student-athletes. If the student fills a need of a college team, however, the results can be very rewarding.

REALISTIC ASSESSMENT

The first and most important task which the student-athlete faces is to make a decision about the extent to which he would like to devote himself to athletics in college. Many sports in college are year-round commitments. Depending on the school, the coach, and/or the sport, much of the student-athlete's time in college will not be his own. It is important to talk with student-athletes already in college as you decide for yourself what role you would like athletics to play in your college search and, subsequently, in your life as a college student. The next step in pursuing your field of dreams is to make a realistic assessment of your athletic talent. This must usually be done with the guidance and

input of the coach at NHS or outside of the school. Are you an athlete, a player, who will be of interest to college coaches? At what level? At what schools?

THE NCAA AND THE CLEARINGHOUSE

Most colleges and universities belong to the NCAA, and there are divisions of schools within the NCAA. Division I institutions are the larger sports power-houses. Division I schools usually recruit student-athletes in more than one sport and they can offer athletic scholarships. Within Division I are sub-divisions for football. Division II institutions also recruit and sometimes offer scholarship money, but not nearly as much as at Division I schools. Division III institutions may or may not recruit actively and they do not offer athletic scholarships. Note that some Division I schools, as a matter of institutional or league policy, do not offer scholarship money: the Ivy League and some Patriot League schools are examples.

The NCAA has established regulations which determine whether or not a student-athlete is eligible to play college athletics, and these regulations differ according to Division. Students who have any interest in playing at a Division I or Division II school should register with the NCAA Clearinghouse (www.eligibilitycenter.org) in the spring of the junior year. Students must have SATs or ACTs released directly to the Clearinghouse. The student-athlete must be registered and qualified before he can play in college. **The student-athlete and his parents should become familiar with these rules, as a violation would make the student-athlete ineligible to play at any NCAA member institution.**

PRESENTING YOURSELF

The student-athlete must actively pursue those institutions/programs/coaches in which he/she is interested. It would be a good idea to have a sports "résumé" which he/she will distribute to coaches. The athletic résumé should include athletic and academic information presented in an easy-to-read format. Many student-athletes, depending on the sport, also prepare highlight videos or DVDs. College coaches say they find these helpful, but they should not be more than five to ten minutes in length.

THE COURTING PROCESS

Depending on how interested coaches are in having you join their team, senior year can be a time of excitement and confusion. The student-athlete must become familiar with the rules regarding campus visits, but at the same time, he/she must be certain to speak with student-athletes already playing at the schools in which he/she is interested. The Letter of Intent is a document sometimes used when the coach and the student-athlete have agreed to "accept each other." The recruiting process halts when the Letter is signed, but admission to the institution could still be pending. Student-athletes must always remember that even the best-intentioned coach has only one thing on his or her mind: the success of his or her team. Usually, many potential players are juggled and recruited for a smaller number of positions to be filled. *Remember that the admission office, not the coach, offers admission to a college.* Be sure to get all offers or "guarantees" of admissibility or "slot ability" *in writing* before making any final decisions.

Special Talents

THE ART PORTFOLIO

Any student applying to an art school or who intends to major in art at college will be required to submit a portfolio as part of the application process. For students who plan to apply to a college with an art major, Newburyport High School offers a Portfolio course. The format of a portfolio is as follows:

- Most colleges will require a selection of slides documenting your work, usually no more than twenty submitted in a slide file page or on a CD. Be sure to check the college requirements as they vary by school.
- Each slide should be labeled with your name and a number which corresponds to a typed list accompanying your slides. The list should have a title for each slide, identification of the media, an indication of size, and a brief description of the project or work.
- You should also include a brief (*half page, typed*) artist's statement which describes your interests

and accomplishments in the visual arts.

Other formats are possible, including electronic portfolios and submission, depending on the scope and type of your work and the college you are considering. Consult your art teachers and the admissions offices of your target colleges.

MUSIC AND THEATRE - THE APPLICATION PROCESS

The following information is intended as a guide for students who have demonstrated a special talent in music or theater. We encourage students to create a recorded audio or videotape and a short resume outlining musical and/or dramatic achievements. Creating this tape and resume will showcase your musical/dramatic abilities and help set you apart from many other applicants.

Some points to remember:

- College drama and music program requirements vary. Please check carefully regarding each school's audition procedure. In most cases, auditions will take place in February or March. Some schools offer regional auditions in New York or Boston. The earlier you register, the better, as spaces will fill up quickly. If you do not intend to major in music or theater, but wish to showcase past achievements, you may send an audio or videotape, CD or DVD.
- The tape should be professionally recorded with high quality equipment.
- Choose your pieces wisely. Some schools will specify required genres; select pieces that will show your talent in the best light. Choose a variety of pieces to demonstrate different abilities.
- Send the tape to the college admission office as well as the school's music/theater department. Enclose a letter and the resume outlining your past achievements.

Financial Aid

With the total costs of many private colleges now exceeding \$40-50,000 per year, financial aid is a topic on the minds of an increasing number of people. Perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind regarding financial aid is this: You will not know whether or not you qualify for assistance, and you will not receive any aid, if you do not apply. It is not uncommon for more than half of the students at some very well known schools to be receiving some type of financial assistance. There are two different types of financial assistance offered by colleges and universities:

NEED-BASED ASSISTANCE

The US Department of Education provides information on the financial aid process at www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov. Every school will require that you submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) www.fafsa.ed.gov in order to be considered for aid. The FAFSA is only available on-line. You must register on this web-site www.pin.ed.gov to receive a pin number which acts as your signature before filing the FAFSA. Many schools will also ask you to complete the CSS Profile, www.profileonline.collegeboard.com, a second form, available in the early fall, with which you must send a processing fee. Both forms are submitted to processors who then calculate your expected family contribution and forward that information to you and to any schools you have indicated on the application. The FAFSA calculations are based on federally legislated methodology. The CSS Profile calculations take additional discretionary information into account, as requested by the various schools to which you are applying. A step by step, walk through the financial aid process is available at www.mefacounselor.org.

Some colleges ask that applicants for financial aid submit the school's own financial aid form directly to the school, in addition to the FAFSA, and sometimes the CSS Profile as well. If this is the case for a school to which you are applying, be attentive to deadlines and provide complete information.

The Financial Aid Office at each institution will take the information provided by the form processor and put together a financial aid "package" which might be some combination of grant, scholarship, loan, and/or work-study. Unfortunately, an increasing number of colleges are not able to meet 100% of the demonstrated need of their applicants. That means there might be a "gap" between what you can afford and what the college can provide to assist you. Information on all forms of financial aid is available in both English and Spanish at:

<http://www.mefacounselor.org>.

Grants and scholarships are monies given to you by the college which do not have to be repaid. The Pell Grant is the largest of the federal grant programs, and its awards range from \$200 to \$5550. Determination is made on the basis of information provided by review of your FAFSA. The Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (*SEOG*) is another federal program (*administered by the colleges*) for students with exceptional need. Awards range from \$100 to \$4000 in addition to the Pell grant.

Loans must be repaid and have different terms. The Stafford Student Loan is a federal program (*administered by private lenders*) based on need. The loan is interest free while the student is in college and until repayment begins. The federal government pays interest while you are still in school and for six months afterwards. The repayment period is five to ten years, and there is a 5% origination fee subtracted from the loan. Perkins Loans of up to \$5500 per year are federally funded and are offered by the colleges. They are based on need. The federal government pays interest while you are still in school and for six months afterwards. Unsubsidized Stafford Loans are de-signed for students who do not demonstrate need. The terms are the same as for the Stafford Loan described above, except that interest must be paid while the student is in college. Re-payment of principle begins upon graduation. PLUS (*Parents Loans to Undergraduate Students*) and SLS (*Supplemental Loan to Students*) Loans are also not based on financial need, but you usually must first apply for Pell and Stafford Loans before being considered. Both have yearly maximums. Interest accumulates while you are a student, but payment can be deferred until after graduation. The repayment periods are five to ten years.

College Work Study is employment which you must take while in school, earning a salary which you are expected to contribute toward your expenses. The program is administered by the colleges, and the financial aid or work study office will help you find an on-campus job which qualifies.

MERIT-BASED ASSISTANCE

A growing number of colleges and universities are making available scholarship money which is awarded not on the basis of need, but for some outstanding quality or accomplishment demonstrated by the student. The only way to learn of these awards is to seek them out; check the literature you receive from the schools to which you are applying and do a search on the web.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Many privately-funded scholarships are also awarded each year, from businesses, associations, civic groups, corporations, and others. As information on these awards is received by the Counseling Department, the news is published on Naviance. Helpful web sites on financial aid and free scholarships searches:

www.fastweb.com

www.finaid.org

You should NOT need to pay to apply for financial aid or scholarships. If a service or company offers to find a scholarship or financial aid for a fee, DO NOT sign up or pay anything without checking with the Counseling Office. Unfortunately, there are many scams out there poised to take advantage of families during this complicated and stressful process.

Time Out-Gap Year Options

As college admissions have become increasingly competitive, a number of students opt to defer college admission and explore other avenues for a year before attending college. Many colleges support this idea-Harvard even encourages students to take a year before entering college or during college. The following list of programs highlights a few of the options available, including two services that match students with appropriate options. The Counseling Department has a more thorough list available for students interested in investigating this opportunity.

AFS International Programs, Inc.

Provides intercultural learning opportunities with the aim of promoting a more just and peaceful world.

Students age 18 and over work in over 50 countries in community service organizations or businesses in countries abroad while learning new skills, the language and culture. **(212) 299-9000 <http://www.afs.org>**

City Year

Putting idealism to work-City Year, an AmeriCorps program, is a national service organization which unites young adults, ages 17-24, from diverse racial, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds for a demanding year of full-time community service, leadership development, and civic engagement. **(617) 927-2600 <http://www.cityyear.org>**

National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS)

NOLS is a wilderness education school offering expedition courses in eight countries from ten days to a full semester in length. Students learn leadership skills, wilderness first aid, and outdoor skills while learning about responsible outdoor recreation. **(307) 332-5300 <http://www.nols.edu>**

School for Field Studies, Environmental Field Studies Abroad

Students will conduct hands-on, community-focused environmental fieldwork on programs in Australia, Canada, Kenya, Costa Rica, Mexico, and the British West Indies. **(800) 989-4418 <http://www.fieldstudies.org>**

The Experiment in International Living

An international nonprofit organization promoting intercultural learning through homestays, educational group travel, study abroad, language training au pair, and other cultural immersion programs in over 25 countries. **(800) 345-2929 <http://www.experiment.org>**

The Center for Interim Programs

Founded in 1980, with offices in Massachusetts and Colorado, Interim is a service that enables people to pursue structured alternatives to formal education or work by matching clients' interests with over 2,500 internships, volunteer positions and cultural study programs worldwide. **(617) 547-0980 <http://www.interimprograms.com>**

Time Out Associates

A service that works with individual clients to search for options for summers, semesters and full year experiences. Clients include high school and college students looking for a break before taking the next step. **(617) 698-8977 <http://www.timeoutassociates.com>**

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