

TOTAL COLLEGE PLANNING

The College Journal

March 2009



www.totalcollegeplanning.com

5521 RESEDA BLVD., SUITE 107 TARZANA, CA 91356 PHONE: (818) 774-9266 SACOLLEGE@AOL.COM

Finding That Great Match

March 2009

Underclassmen—
Make plans for a productive summer. Investigate summer programs, jobs, internships, and opportunities to visit college campuses.

Juniors – Create an initial list of colleges

Juniors—Prepare for spring SAT/ACT exams

14th – SAT

Reasoning Exam

April 2009

Seniors – Final acceptance letters should arrive this month

Juniors – Visit colleges

Prepare for AP Exams

4th - ACT and ACT plus Writing

Seniors – compare offers of admission

Seniors – evaluate financial aid packages and explore college funding options

One student loves the non-competitive academic atmosphere at Haverford College that makes learning much more enjoyable.

Another student praises the intense competition at UC San Diego, which motivates her to do her best work.

Two great schools. But not great for every student. Both of these students had done their homework, made good matches and are thriving.

When a student is in an environment where he feels good about himself, he's more likely to be successful academically and socially. The right fit seems so obvious. But in this time of high anxiety about college admission, students and parents often pursue the most popular colleges and lose sight of whether those schools are the best matches.

Just as in romantic relationships, there's more than one potential match out there if you remain open to possibilities. There's no perfect person or college. But there are some very good schools (and people) that offer opportunities for growth and satisfaction.

Self-assessment is crucial to making a good match. If you don't know what you're looking for, chances are you won't find it. While grades and test scores are major factors in college admission, it's important to use your heart as well as your head to find the right school. This means thinking about what kind of college experience you want.

Is a balance between work and social life important? Some schools, including MIT, University of Chicago and Swarthmore, have very demanding workloads.

A student who is more motivated by intellectual curiosity than grades might like Reed College, where students have to ask if they

want to know their grades. Or Evergreen State College, where students receive narrative evaluations instead of grades.

Someone who likes to get totally immersed in a subject might like Colorado College or Cornell College (in Iowa), which operate on a block plan, where students study a single subject for three and a half weeks.

For a student who does well when he likes his teacher, but loses motivation if the teacher doesn't inspire him, it might be important to find a college with small classes, where professors and students have close relationships.

There are many non-academic factors that also contribute to a student's happiness in college. A green, lush environment can be soothing and lower stress levels. But some students thrive on the excitement of an urban environment. Schools like George Washington University, Boston University and NYU offer all the cultural resources of great cities, as well as opportunities for internships at government agencies, theater companies and corporations. The downside is that all this involvement in the city may mean there's less sense of community on campus.

Social life is a major part of the college experience, and it's important to find a school where there are people who share similar interests and values. A student who likes being around artsy people might be drawn to Bard College. A basketball fanatic might head for Duke University, where students camp out for days to get tickets for games.

These are just some of the factors that go into making a good college match. It takes a little more time and effort, but a student who clarifies his educational goals, values and interests is more likely to find a school that will allow him to grow and realize his potential, as well as enjoy his college years.



Focus on Careers: Engineering

In today's increasingly technological society, it is engineers who are behind almost all of the exciting new gadgets that impact our lives. Using their knowledge of math and natural sciences, engineers create the technologies that benefit mankind. From cell phones and digital devices, to computers, roads, cars, and food technology, engineers influence all aspects of everyday life. Although engineers are employed in a wide variety of fields, their work links the desires of society with commercial responses to those needs. For example, engineers design and supervise the construction of roads, buildings, bridges and transportation systems. They design and implement methods of using natural resources to supply energy to fuel the country's requirements. Engineers are responsible for designing products as well as the machinery needed to make those products, and are involved in developing new materials to increase the performance and durability of existing products. Some engineers use their training to improve the quality of healthcare or the safety and effectiveness of foods and pharmaceuticals. Because of their specialized educa-

Engineering Education

The Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) provides accreditation for over three hundred colleges and universities. At most of these schools, engineering students spend their first two years studying humanities and the social sciences as well as math and science, and taking introductory courses in engineering. During the last two years of college, students specialize in their area of interest, taking most of their courses in their chosen field of engineering. Some colleges offer a general engineering curriculum; students then pursue graduate degrees in order to concentrate on a single engineering specialty. All engineering graduates need to continue their education throughout their careers in order to stay current with technological advances.

tion, starting salaries for new engineering graduates are considerably higher than for graduates entering other career fields.

What does it take to become a successful engineer? Personal qualities include an aptitude and interest in science and mathematics; the ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing; a creative, analytical, and questioning mind; and an attention to detail. High school courses that include extensive science, computer, and math courses as well as a broad background in the humanities will prepare you well for engineering school. A bachelor's degree in engineering is needed for just about all entry level jobs, with many requiring more advanced training. Most engineering students pursue degrees in civil, electrical, or mechanical engineering, or in electronics, but engineering students may specialize in any of seventeen specialties that include such areas as aerospace, environmental, biomedical, chemical, industrial, nuclear, and marine engineering. You can learn about this "alphabet of careers" at www.engineeringk12.org/students/What_Is_Engineering/Engineering_Alphabet/default.php.

High school students interested in learning more about careers in engineering should consider joining the Junior Engineering Technical Society (JETS) – check them out at www.jets.org. The Society for Science & the Public maintains a list of summer programs in science and engineering directed to high school students at www.societyforscience.org/stp/index.asp. You can also search through several hundred science, engineering, and math programs at www.EnrichmentAlley.com.

For more information about ABET-accredited engineering programs click on www.abet.org and the American Society for Engineering Education's K12 center at www.asee.org/k12/index.cfm.

"From cell phones and digital devices, to computers, roads, cars, and food technology, engineers influence all aspects of everyday life. Although engineers are employed in a wide variety of fields, their work links the desires of society with commercial responses to those needs. "

Focus on Finances: Comparing Financial Aid Packages



If you've applied for financial aid and filed all the paperwork by the appropriate deadline, an award letter outlining the college's offer of financial assistance should arrive close on the heels of your notification of

acceptance. The following should help you to understand what that package really means.

When comparing financial aid packages, the bottom line is the final cost of your education to you and your family. Since the total cost of education varies for each college, you'll need to compare your packages in terms of several factors. First, compare the ratio of grants (gift money) to loans for each school. Packages with larger grants than loans are obviously most desirable. Next, consider how much you and your family are expected to contribute and compare this amount to your total grant award. Are you and your family comfortable with this *Expected Family Contribution*? Will your earnings help toward meeting the expected amount?

Now, compare loans types offered and their terms. The most desirable loans are subsidized student loans with low, deferred interest; these loans do not

have to be repaid until after you have completed your education. Private, unsubsidized family or student loans generally require that repayment begins within sixty days of receiving the loan money.

Most financial aid packages also include work-study. Keep in mind that you are free to decline this type of aid; although there may be significant benefits to work-study employment, some students prefer to find their own jobs on or off-campus.

Call the college's financial aid office to learn how outside scholarships may affect your financial aid package. While some colleges allow students to use these in place of loans, other colleges subtract this amount from any grant aid that you've been awarded. Ask, too, if you are likely to be awarded a similar package in succeeding years, assuming family finances remain at the same level. Some parts of your package may not be renewable, and this could affect your future cost of attendance.

The final decision about college choice needs to be a family decision, made by weighing numerous factors to determine the best choice for both you and your family. With skyrocketing college costs, finances may count heavily in your ultimate college selection.

The Skinny on Subject Exams

Although the University of California system has traditionally been the largest user of SAT Subject Exams, many other selective private colleges also require these tests as part of the application process. The UC system recently announced that they will be discontinuing this requirement for students who will be entering college in 2012 and later (beginning with the current high school freshmen class), but the requirement still stands for current tenth through twelfth graders. As of this time, no other colleges that use the Subject Exams in admission have followed the UC lead, so we can assume that those currently asking for the exams will continue to do so. So, if you are currently in grades nine through eleven, should you plan to take Subject Exams?

Unless you are positive that you're headed to a college that does not require the SAT Subject Exams, it's a good idea to keep your college options open, and to take exams in several subjects in which you've done well. The exams should be taken when you've completed (or nearly completed) your last

year of study of that subject. For example, if you're taking an honors or AP World History class this year and are doing well, you should plan on taking the June World History Subject Exam. The Math II exam can be taken in junior year at the end of a pre-calculus class. Foreign language exams are appropriate if you've had three or more years of study of that language and have achieved proficiency.

The return of the "score choice" option allows students to choose whether or not they want colleges to see their scores on these tests as well as the SAT Reasoning Exam. It is expected that more students will be encouraged to attempt more subject exams because of this policy. Keep in mind, however, that some of the very colleges that currently require Subject Exams are the same colleges that have already announced that they will want to see scores from **all** exams taken.

It's best to discuss the issue of which exams to take, as well as when to take them, with your college advisor. This decision needs to be based on your individual strengths and college goals.

Military Colleges

Have you thought about attending West Point or Annapolis? Does a career as an Air Force or Coast Guard officer appeal to you? If you're considering attending a military academy, you'll want to start your research and application process while still a high school junior. Here's some advice to get you started.

First of all, you need to have the "right stuff". That includes being a U.S. citizen between the ages of 17 and 22. You'll need to have exhibited leadership qualities through your participation in scouting, school government, or community activities. Academic qualifications include an above average high school record and strong scores on the SAT or ACT. You'll need to be physically fit with above average strength, endurance, and agility. In addition, you'll need good physical and mental health. If you meet these requirements, start a file at the service academy of your choice and complete their forms during the spring of your junior year.

Next, you'll need to apply to your Congressman or Senator for a nomination to the academy. Write and ask about their process for granting nominations. Sons and daughters of career military members are eligible for a Presidential nomination,

as are the children of deceased or 100% disabled veterans. You won't need a nomination for the Coast Guard Academy.

It's smart to attend one of the Academy's one-week summer seminars during the summer before senior year. These intensive sessions will provide you with a first-hand look at the life of a cadet, and also give the Academy time to get to know you. Several sessions are offered at each of the service academies.

You should receive your nomination by fall of senior year, and then arrange to take needed tests and evaluations. The decision to admit will be based heavily on academic factors (about 60%), with leadership strongly considered (30% of decision). Only about 10% of the decision rests on physical assessments, but you will need to pass both the physical fitness test and medical exam to be qualified for admission. Students judged to be a bit weaker in academics, but otherwise fully qualified, may be offered a spot in an Academy Prep program before being reconsidered for admission. For more information, log on to the website of the academy of your choice: www.usafa.af.mil (air force), www.usma.edu (army), www.cga.edu (coast guard), www.usna.edu (navy), www.usmma.edu (merchant marine).

Total College Planning

5521 Reseda Blvd.,
Suite 107

Tarzana, CA 91356

Phone

(818) 774-9266

E-Mail

sacollege@aol.com

www.totalcollege

planning.com

Total College Planning

5521 Reseda Blvd., Suite 107

Tarzana, CA 91356