

TOTAL COLLEGE PLANNING

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www.totalcollegeplanning.com

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

Character Counts

April 2008

Seniors - Final acceptance letters should arrive this month

Prepare for AP Exams

Juniors - Visit colleges

12th - ACT and ACT plus Writing

Seniors - compare offers of admission

Seniors - evaluate financial aid packages and explore college funding options

May, 2008

1st - common reply date for college decisions

3rd - SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests

5th - 16th - AP exams

Juniors - work on resume

Juniors - speak to advisor about military colleges or ROTC programs

Seniors - make final college choice

Seniors - notify colleges that you will not attend

You hear a lot about the importance of grades, AP courses and test scores in the college admission process. But a 4.3 GPA and 2300 SAT score mean nothing if a student is seen as dishonest or immoral. Integrity is one of the less discussed, but very important parts of the college admissions process.

Admissions officers are assembling a freshman class of students who will be studying and living together, and one of the questions they consider as they read applications is "Would I want this person in my community?"

There are many ways to assess the character of a student. Admissions officers pay close attention to counselor and teacher recommendations. While they probably won't reject a student for smoking a cigarette on school grounds, disciplinary action for cheating is a major red flag. Even more serious is academic dishonesty that occurs late in a student's high school career.

There is an epidemic of cheating in high school. One group of high-scoring students started a moneymaking scheme where they would take the SAT for other students. While college admissions officers do like to see students demonstrate an entrepreneurial spirit, they would rather not recruit future Enron executives.

Students are under a lot of pressure, and it can be very tough to resist the temptation to cheat. With competition for college admission at an all-time high, if everyone else is doing it, students might fear being at a disadvantage if they don't cheat. Even strong students who don't need to cheat might fear being labeled selfish if they

don't share the answers to a biology test.

While unethical behavior may bring rewards in the short term, kids who cheat can't feel genuine pride in their accomplishment. Once they start, it's tough to stop cheating, and they may be afraid they can't manage in college without the advantage they believe they gain by cheating.

The intense competition for admission also makes it easy for some students and parents to justify exaggerating accomplishments on college applications or having someone other than the student write an application essay. But the University of California and other schools do ask some students to verify what is on the application. And if an essay looks like it wasn't written by a student, admissions officers can download the student's SAT/ ACT essay and compare the writing styles.

Even after being admitted, students can jeopardize their college future. Some families are tempted to "double deposit," sending the enrollment deposit required by May 1 to two schools, so the student can have the summer to decide which one he prefers. But the family may lose much more than a few hundred dollars, since there have been cases where both schools have revoked the offer of admission.

Of course, there are many students who do not cheat. They write their own application essays. They have truly earned their grades and scores, and can feel confident about their ability to succeed in college. They have integrity, and that's good news for them and for the rest of us.

"Personality can open doors, but only character can keep them open."

Elmer G Letterman



Focus on Careers: Careers in Law

TV programs have introduced all of America to the legal profession. Students and their families either are lawyers or know lawyers, or believe they know what lawyers do. This is a profession that has grown rapidly; almost a million lawyers now practice in the United States with the total number multiplying more than four times since the 1950's. Although law school applications have decreased in recent years, new law schools continue to open and all of their available places are filled. The profession is expected to continue to grow at least through 2016. But what is it that lawyers actually do?

A lawyer acts as both advisor and advocate. As advisors, lawyers draft legal agreements, explain the legal consequences of actions to their clients, counsel clients about their rights and obligations, and advise clients on both personal and business matters. In the position of advocate, lawyers represent their clients in court and also help to resolve business and personal disputes through negotiation outside of court. Some lawyers serve as

"To be a successful lawyer, students should have good reasoning skills, a strong vocabulary, the ability to read critically and write clearly, possess a good memory, and be able to listen and communicate well."

Education

It takes at least seven years of full-time study after high school to become a lawyer. This includes four years of college (a bachelor's degree is required for law school admission) and three years of law school. Some universities also offer joint BA/JD degrees which sometimes shortens the time to a degree. There is no recommended "prelaw" major. College students can major in any area of interest but should pursue a curriculum that emphasizes such areas as English, government, philosophy, history, economics, foreign language, public speaking, psychology, computer science, and mathematics. Students interested in specializing may also want to include courses in accounting (for tax law) or engineering and science (patent law). Competition for available spots in law school remains heavy. Acceptance depends upon the applicant's undergraduate grades, scores on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), the quality of the student's college, related work experience, and a personal interview. To practice law in the U.S., applicants must graduate from an ABA or State accredited law school and pass a written bar ex-

judges and preside in the courtroom. Others specialize in representing corporations while about ten percent work in governmental positions.

To be a successful lawyer, students should have good reasoning skills, a strong vocabulary, the ability to read critically and write clearly, possess a good memory, and be able to listen and communicate well. Because all lawyers are *officers of the court*, lawyers are governed by strict regulations and should possess strong ethical values. If you are interested in becoming a trial lawyer, you'll also need to be able to think on your feet, speak easily in front of an audience, and be able to plan courtroom strategy.

High school students looking toward becoming attorneys should take as many high school classes that involve critical thinking as they can. Courses in philosophy, advanced study of foreign languages (consider taking Latin), and a well-balanced load of humanities, sciences, and mathematics will prepare you well for college and pre-law classes. Activities such as debate and mock trial will also help.

amination. Individual states also have additional requirements for admission to the State Bar.

High school students are encouraged to get a firsthand look at legal careers by interning at local law offices or through their local State Attorney's office. Pre-college summer programs that introduce students to the law profession are held at colleges that include Columbia, Cornell, Drexel, Ithaca College, Washington & Lee as well as others. (You can search for an appropriate summer program at www.EnrichmentAlley.com) For more information about preparing for careers in law, try the section on legal education on the American Bar Association site at www.abanet.org/legaled/prelaw/prep.html and also check out www.LawForKids.org.

Related careers include *paralegals* who work as assistants to lawyers, *mediators* who help people resolve disputes without going to court, and *court reporters* who record everything said as part of a formal trial. These careers require fewer years of advanced education, but they do not offer the varied opportunities that come with a law degree.

Focus on Finances: Comparing the Cost of Attendance



The total cost of attending a particular institution includes both expenses that are paid to the college as well as additional costs that are incurred as a result of going to that college. *Tuition* is what you pay in order to attend classes. Tuition may be a flat amount for a semester, or may vary depending upon number of classes chosen when based on a per credit cost. *Fees* may include such items as laboratory deposits, materials fees for art studios, health club membership, etc. *Books and supplies* can also add a hefty amount to the school budget, typically costing between \$500 and \$700 per year.

Additional costs associated with attending college include *room charges*, generally dependent upon type of living arrangement. You'll pay less sharing a triple dorm room than opting for your own room, and may save money by sharing a house or apartment with other students. *Board* (meals) costs also depends upon your choices. Most col-

Considering a Military Academy

The U.S. Service Academies, also known as Military Colleges, are among the top-ranked institutions in the country. Very competitive in admission, their applicants usually rank in the top quarter of their high school class, have a minimum of 1200 on the SAT, are active in school and community activities, and generally play one or more competitive sports. Besides all this, applicants must pass both a physical fitness test and a medical exam, and receive a congressional nomination.

The best way to begin to learn about the process is by accessing the academies' websites. Sign on to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point at www.usma.edu, to the Naval Academy (Annapolis) at www.usna.edu, to the Air Force Academy at www.usafa.edu, the Merchant Marine Academy at www.usmma.edu, and to the Coast Guard Academy at www.cga.edu. Completing the pre-candidate application at these sites will enter your name in their data base and let the academies know that you're interested in getting more information. You, of course, are under no obligation to apply. The process takes a good deal of time, however, so it's a good idea to start early, certainly no later than junior year.

You might wonder about life at a service academy. As a

leges require students to have some sort of meal plan if they opt for an on-campus dorm. Flexible spending plans may be available; these provide more options for students who don't want to eat all of their meals in the dining hall.

Personal expenses include spending money, laundry, entertainment, and personal services such as haircuts. Most colleges also require that you be covered for medical and dental expenses under your parents' insurance, or that you participate in their student insurance plan.

Many of these costs are considered when colleges put together a financial aid package. You'll want to compare the terms of each of your colleges' financial aid offer by computing the net cost to you after subtracting any grants and scholarships awarded. Net cost includes loans to both you and your parents, money from savings, and work-study. Finally, consider the average time needed to graduate from each institution. A more expensive institution that graduates most of its' students in four years may be less costly to attend than an annually less-expensive college if it takes live or six to graduate from that institution.

cadet, you're bound by military rules, and in return for your education (full scholarships pay all tuition and living expenses plus give you a stipend) you are required to serve in your branch of the military for a minimum of five years. Cadets study military history, engage in physical training and leadership activities, take courses related to their branch of the service, and major in a field of their choice. Graduates receive a Bachelor of Science in academic areas that include all of the natural and physical sciences, engineering, history, economics, and political and behavioral science. Graduates are then commissioned as officers. (Graduates of the Merchant Marine Academy may opt to be commissioned as officers in any of the three services, or as a reserve officer in the Merchant Marine.) The academies are known for small classes involving rigorous study, as well as for producing leaders. Their graduates, after completion of their military service, are highly sought after by private industry.

West Point, Annapolis, the Air Force, and the Coast Guard Academies all offer summer programs for high school juniors that permit students to try out life as a cadet before they begin the application process. If you'd like to participate, click on the "summer program for high school juniors" section of each academy website.

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5521 Reseda Blvd.,
Suite 107

Tarzana, CA 91356

Phone

(818) 774-9266

FAX

(818) 705-8447

E-Mail:

sacollege@aol.com

Making Decisions / Responding to Offers of Admission

As acceptances roll in, seniors, hopefully, now face the tough decision about final choice of college. If you truly only applied to colleges that were a good fit, you'll now have to consider which is the very best one for you. If at all possible, repeat visits to the campuses are in order, at least to those colleges at the top of your list.

This campus visit, however, should be more in depth than earlier visits. Contact the admissions office, identify yourself as an accepted student, and ask their help in arranging an overnight stay in the dorms. They can also arrange to have you sit in on some classes and experience meals in the dining hall. Spend enough time on campus to visit the library, to check out the computer center, laboratory, and recreational facilities, and to talk with a professor in your intended major. If you're

planning on pre-med or pre-law, learn about the advisement available. Students needing academic support should visit the office of support services. A stop by the placement office will allow you to learn about post-college planning and job placement services available at that institution.

Finances often play a part in the final decision. If the college's financial aid offer was inadequate to enable you to attend that college, a talk with the director of financial aid about special family circumstances may help.

Once you've made your final decision, promptly notify the college of your intent to enroll, and pay any needed deposits and fees to hold your place. Contact each of the other colleges that have offered you admission; inform them of your decision and thank them for their efforts. This is also the time to thank the teachers and counselors who have helped you through this process.

Website of the Month: <http://collegelists.pbwiki.com/Blogs%20-%20Admissions-related>

Want to read the opinions of real students at some of the colleges on your short list? The collegelist wiki (link above) will bring you to admission blogs written by students at such schools as Cornell, Dartmouth, Georgia Tech, Michigan, MIT, Ohio State, Olin, Tufts, Tulane, and Yale. Get the insider's view from those in the know.

On the same page you'll find links to admissions blogs written by admissions officers at some of the aforementioned colleges as well as at Johns Hopkins, Case Western, Bryn Mawr, Northeastern, Santa Clara, UCLA, Vanderbilt, along with many others. You can have fun comparing the words of administrators vs. the administrated.

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