

# TOTAL COLLEGE PLANNING

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[www.totalcollegeplanning.com](http://www.totalcollegeplanning.com)

5521 RESEDA BLVD., SUITE 107

TARZANA, CA 91356

PHONE: (818) 774-9266

SACOLLEGE@AOL.COM

## Bias in the Admissions Office

### December 2008

Underclassmen—  
Review PSAT  
score report with  
advisor and map  
out a plan for test  
preparation.  
Schedule testing  
dates.

Seniors—File any  
additional applica-  
tions before  
deadline dates

**6th—SAT  
Reasoning and  
Subject Exams**

**13th—ACT and  
ACT plus Writing  
Exam**

### January, 2009

Seniors – apply for a  
pin and then  
complete and send  
the FAFSA any time  
after Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>. Apply  
online at  
[www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

Seniors – search  
and apply for schol-  
arships that match  
your qualifications

Seniors – File any  
additional college  
applications

**24<sup>th</sup> – SAT  
Reasoning and  
Subject Tests**

We like to think that when admissions officers read applications, they approach each one with an open mind, eager to learn about that student's strengths and dreams for the future. But what are they really thinking?

At highly selective schools, where most applicants have strong grades and test scores, admissions decisions are largely based on whether the student is a good fit for their school. But even while admissions officers are focusing on institutional priorities, their own life experiences color the way they respond to applicants. It's human nature to feel an affinity for people who share our backgrounds, interests, values or beliefs. And it can be challenging to feel connected to people who don't.

You don't want to worry so much about offending someone that you tone down your application to the point where your voice isn't coming through. But you need to think about what you're communicating. An admissions officer who grew up poor may not respond positively to an essay about a student's third African safari. Resentment is not the reaction you want to evoke in the reader. If you've been lucky enough to have opportunities that other students haven't had, admissions officers won't give you points for your good fortune. You need to show what you've done, not what you've received.

There's no way to know the personal history of the admissions officer who reads applica-

tions from your school. An admissions officer who tried out for cheerleader when she was in high school and never made it may cringe when she reads applications from cheerleaders. But good admissions officers try to be aware of their biases so they can keep them out of the decision-making process.

If your ideas are controversial, find a way to express them that is respectful rather than strident. One student wanted to start an atheists club at his high school and planned to use the experience in college application essays. It could be a risky topic, but if he presented himself as open and non-dogmatic, he could mitigate the risk of offending some readers, while creating a memorable impression.

The good news is that, at many colleges, applications are read by two people, and sometimes by full committees. Having more than one person read an application reduces the risk of bias influencing a decision, since it's unlikely that two different people will have the same bias. Also, with two readers, students have two chances to bond with an admissions officer who could advocate on that student's behalf.

The best approach in preparing college applications is to convey who you are in an authentic and friendly way. That's how you help the reader look beyond any personal bias and get excited about having you as a member of the college community.

*"Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind."*

Dr. Seuss



## Focus on Careers: Design

Gifted with a passion to create, designers use their artistic ability to produce functional items that are visually pleasing. Their influence is seen in the clothes we wear, the physical spaces we inhabit, the merchandise we buy, and the print and web publications we enjoy. Although many designers are employed by corporations and manufacturers, a significant number are self-employed as consultants and freelance designers. Through their vision and skills, they put their imprint on our world.

Before designers can begin to create, they must first consider the needs of their client, looking at both the function of the intended

design, and those features that would be important to users. After determining requirements such as desired size, color, weight, shape and materials, designers prepare sketches to illustrate their vision for the design. Often, computer-aided design tools (CAD) are utilized to make visualizing the final product easier. Industrial designers may use computer-aided industrial design (CAID) tools which also produce machine-readable instructions for automated production machinery. Since design needs for a specific industry may be highly technical, designers generally specialize in a particular area, such as interiors, automobile, clothing and textiles, floral, theatre, industrial, medical, website, or floral design.

## Design Specialties

*Fashion designers* design clothing and accessories. Most are employed by apparel manufacturers, although some design for individual clients. *Interior designers* may specialize in either residential or business design, planning the interiors of both new and existing structures. They must consider their client's taste, needs and budget in planning functional, comfortable, and aesthetically pleasing spaces. *Commercial and industrial designers* use their artistic talents to produce such items as automobiles, kitchen appliances, furniture, toys, and sports and office equipment. *Graphic designers* develop the layout and design of media including magazines, newspapers, web pages, journals, signs, and other publications. Flowers and foliage are the raw materials used to express the creativity of *floral designers*. While the area of specialization may differ, designers have much in common.

Along with a passion to create, designers must have an eye for color and detail, a sense of proportion and balance, and an appreciation for beauty. Sketching ability is important, even with the increasing use of computer-aided design tools. Since designers often work as part of a product development team, strong communication skills are vital as is the ability to understand and solve design problems. Because tastes in style and fashion change, designers must be open to new ideas

and quick to react to emerging trends.

Most entry-level design positions require a bachelor's degree, except for those wishing to work as floral designers or merchandise displayers. The Bachelor of Fine Arts degree includes a study of art and art history, principles of design, and specialized study in each of the design disciplines. Additional courses in business, marketing, and psychology are recommended for designers who hope to freelance. Training in architecture is often helpful for those wishing to work in interior design. Increasingly, familiarity with computer-aided design software is a requirement for job consideration. For many positions, it is the quality of the applicant's portfolio (a collection of the designer's best work) that leads to a job offer.

The National Association of Schools of Art and Design accredits more than 200 postsecondary programs in art and design. For general information contact the National Association of Schools of Art and Design at <http://nasad.arts-accredit.org>. Learn about careers and programs in interior design at the American Society for Interior Designers at [www.asid.org](http://www.asid.org) and at [www.careersininteriordesign.com](http://www.careersininteriordesign.com). For graphic design information, click on the website of the American Institute of Graphic Arts at [www.aiga.org](http://www.aiga.org). Don't forget the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook at [www.bls.gov/oco](http://www.bls.gov/oco).

"Along with a passion to create, designers must have an eye for color and detail, a sense of proportion and balance, and an appreciation for beauty."

## Focus on Finances: The FAFSA and FAFSA4caster



The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is the primary form used by colleges to determine eligibility for need-based aid. In some cases, colleges will not even consider an applicant for merit aid unless that student has first submitted a FAFSA. The FAFSA should be filed as soon as possible after January 1st of the student's senior year, and then yearly while attending college. The FAFSA collects basic information about both the student and his/her parents' income and assets, and uses this information to determine an *expected family contribution* (EFC). The EFC is the amount that the student and family is expected to contribute towards that individual's college expenses during the next academic year. The difference between the EFC and the *total cost of attendance* at your college of choice is known as *demonstrated need*. Colleges use this information to prepare a customized financial aid package for

each admitted student who qualifies for financial aid.

The package may include both grants and loans, as well as self-help such as work-study opportunities. Only some colleges guarantee to meet 100% of established need, so financial aid may not cover all of your expenses at a particular college.

Complete the FAFSA online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) as soon as possible after January 1st. You'll need your 2008 tax return and other financial records noted on the site. It is possible to complete the FAFSA even if you do not have your taxes done yet—this is a case of the earlier the better. You'll also want to apply for a PIN for both student and parent so you can sign your form electronically. Do this now at [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov).

Not a senior? Families of underclassmen can get an early estimation of their eligibility for aid by using the FAFSA4caster at [www.FAFSA4caster.ed.gov](http://www.FAFSA4caster.ed.gov). This online tool will also provide information about other sources of financial aid for college.

## Test Optional Colleges

Wouldn't it be lovely if you didn't need to worry that your scores on the SAT or ACT would adversely affect your chances of admission to your dream school? Students with strong academic records and, perhaps, a touch of test anxiety, might want to consider the test-optional route to college admissions.

According to FairTest, the National Center for Fair and Open testing, over 775 four-year colleges do not use the ACT or SAT Reasoning test to admit a substantial number of their applicants. Some of these schools exempt students who meet a minimum grade point average or class rank from submitting standardized test scores, while others use the SAT or ACT for placement purposes only. Many state universities, such as the Cal State University system, the Oregon State University, and the Universities of Nevada, Texas, and Nebraska are test optional for students who present a qualifying GPA; students who do not meet the minimum GPA may be reconsidered if they present high enough test scores.

A number of highly selective private colleges are also found among the test-optional contingent. Their members include colleges like Bennington, Bowdoin, Holy Cross, Connecticut College, Franklin

& Marshall, Hobart & William Smith, Lewis & Clark, Pitzer, Providence, Wheaton, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Colleges that fall in this category will place much more emphasis on rigor of curriculum selected, grades received, teacher and counselor recommendations, and essays submitted. In some cases, applicants may also be asked to send a graded essay that had been written for their high school.

A number of specialized schools, including art institutes, conservatories, and technical institutes, look more to evidence of talent rather than test scores. Test optional colleges that fall into this category include the Manhattan School of Music, Julliard, Berklee College of Music, The Art Institute of California, The Academy of Art College, and the California College of the Arts, and DeVry University.

Colleges that have moved away from reliance on test scores in making admissions decisions have been very pleased with the results. Many report their applicant pools and enrolled classes have become more diverse without any loss in academic quality.

You can learn more about test-optional admissions at the FairTest website at [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org). Check out the complete list of test-optional colleges to determine if you want to include some test optional colleges on your final college list.

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Suite 107

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Phone

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E-Mail

sacollege@aol.com

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## The PSAT Score Report and College Planning

Underclassmen who took the PSAT in October will be receiving their score reports sometime this month. Students tend to focus solely on their score, but a careful review of the entire report can be really helpful in planning your next moves.

*Scores* for each section are reported on a scale of 20 to 80. An average score for an eleventh grade student will be approximately 48 in critical reading, 49 in math, and 46 in writing. For tenth graders, the average scores are about 43 in reading, 44 in math, and 41 in writing.

*Percentiles* allow you to compare your scores to other college bound students who also took this exam. Scores are also presented as a *range*, since you personally could expect some variation if you were to take similar tests on different days.

The *review your answers* section shows

the question number, the correct answer, your answer, and the level of difficulty of each question. Since your original test booklet will also be returned to you, you should review each question again and discover why a particular answer was correct.

The *improve your skills* section will provide personalized feedback on your academic skills as measured by this exam. Two or three skills are highlighted for improvement for each section, and you'll receive suggestions for improving your performance.

College Board has also provided all PSAT test-takers with free access to My College QuickStart. By entering your e-mail on the PSAT page of [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) you will receive notice as soon as test scores become available, and will be able to view your score report online. A study plan for the SAT based on your performance will also be available.

## Website of the Month: [www.unigo.com](http://www.unigo.com)

A newly-launched college search website is generating a lot of interest among students looking beyond traditional guidebooks for information about colleges.

[Unigo.com](http://Unigo.com) is a collaborative effort that includes profiles of more than 250 colleges as well as student reviews and video clips. Each school's review reflects student

opinions about academics and social life. Prospective applicants can learn about life on that campus, what its like to major in a subject at that campus, and the true story behind campus gripes. These first-person reviews provide users with a real sense of what it is like to be a student at that institution.

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