

TOTAL COLLEGE PLANNING

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Seniors - apply for a pin and then complete and send the FAFSA any time after Jan. 1st. Apply online at www.fafsa.ed.gov

Seniors - continue to search for scholarships and apply for those that match your qualifications

Seniors - File any additional college applications

26th - SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests

February, 2008

Juniors - Begin your college search

Juniors—Map out dates and prepare for spring SAT and/or ACT exams

Seniors - Contact colleges to be sure your applications are complete. Send mid-year grades if required. Update colleges with any new information that might affect admission

9th - ACT and ACT plus Writing (may not

The Case for Small Colleges

If you're just beginning your college search, you should be aware that one of the most important considerations in choosing a college is size. A small college of 2,000 students provides a very different experience than a large university of 20,000.

It's like living in a small town versus a large city. People say hello when they see you. Professors greet you by name and stop to chat. Faculty and staff at small colleges are there to help, and the caring atmosphere can help students feel they belong.

For some, anonymity is more appealing. In a big university, you might be able to go all semester without talking to your professors, but that doesn't make for the best educational experience. Students get more out of college when they are engaged. That means interacting with professors and students, doing research, and being involved in campus life. At smaller colleges, this level of engagement is built into the system. It doesn't mean students can't be engaged at large universities, but they have to take the initiative to create that kind of experience.

Some students believe that if they haven't decided on a major or career, they should go to a large university, where they will be able to sample lots of possibilities and figure out what they want to do. But even small colleges offer hundreds of classes each year. Ironically, students often find it easier to discover their passion at a smaller college, where they get extensive advising from professors who choose small colleges because they want to teach undergraduates.

Many students want a college that's bigger than high school. But every college is physically bigger than high school. In addition to classroom buildings for art, music, social sciences, natural sciences, there are residence and dining halls, li-

brary, student union, athletic facilities, counseling offices, health service and more. A college campus doesn't feel as confining as high school.

If students are concerned that they won't find enough interesting people at a small college, they might be reassured to know that there will be more diversity than in high school. They will find students from different parts of the country, as well as from different ethnic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. But all of these students chose to attend this same college, so chances are it will be easier to find people with similar interests. It may also be easier to meet more students, because you get to know people in your classes as well as in your residence hall, and you probably won't have the same students in sociology as in astronomy.

When it comes to extracurricular activities, there may actually be more opportunities at a small college, because there are fewer students competing to write for the school paper or work at the campus radio station. Since smaller colleges generally don't have graduate students, courses are less likely to be taught by teaching assistants, and there are often more opportunities for students to collaborate with professors on research projects.

While small colleges offer many benefits, they're not for everyone. Some students thrive on the excitement of seeing thousands of people walking across campus every day. They know what they want and are assertive enough to pursue it. They get to know their professors during office hours and seek help when they need it. They aren't intimidated dealing with bureaucracy. They will create a sense of community by getting involved in activities. The key to a successful college experience, as always, is finding a good match for each student.



Focus on Careers: Epidemiologist

Epidemiologists study patterns of health and illness within a population. These “virus hunters” may be found in the lab or in the field, working to isolate organisms and prevent diseases. As populations grow and global travel skyrockets, virus outbreaks increase. Fears of bioterrorism, such as an anthrax outbreak, have also spurred interest in careers in this area. The demand for epidemiologists is expected to keep on growing.

As a medical scientist, the epidemiologist must first study biological systems to understand the causes of disease. They may study cause and effect, such as the link between alcoholism and liver disease, or identify the changes in cells that signal medical problems. But mainly, epidemiologists study different illnesses to determine the cause of each disease and how it is spread, and to develop ways to control or prevent the disease.

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Education and Training

A bachelor’s degree in a biological science is the starting point for the education of an epidemiologist. In addition to required courses in biology and chemistry, undergraduates should include classes in math, physics, computer science, and engineering, as well as other classes in their field of interest. A graduate degree in their preferred specialty, such as cytology, bioinformatics, or pathology is the next step. Then comes a master’s degree from a school of public health to provide the minimal educational requirement for employment as an epidemiologist. Some jobs, however, require a Ph.D. or a medical degree; specific training in infectious diseases may also be required.

If all this seems like a lot, you may also want to consider that many medical scientists also spend time in a postdoctoral position. These “postdoc” experiences provide valuable laboratory training, and may lead to a permanent position.

Those epidemiologists who administer drugs or provide gene therapy to patients must be licensed physicians. Epidemiologists who are not M.D.s often work closely with licensed physicians who can

Research epidemiologists conduct research to eliminate or control infectious diseases. Employed by the Federal Government, by independent research firms, or by colleges and medical schools, they may concentrate on a specific disease organism such as those that cause typhus, malaria, or AIDS. Agencies of the Federal Government including the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation provide much of the financial support for research epidemiologists.

Clinical epidemiologists work in consulting roles at hospitals and medical facilities, investigating outbreaks of infectious disease organisms, and creating ways of eliminating them. Clinical epidemiologists often work closely with physicians to find ways to control the spread of disease. They also may be called upon to develop guidelines for the treatment and control of infectious diseases.

dispense treatment. Certification programs in the prevention and control of disease require extra coursework as well as the passing of an examination.

The demand for epidemiologists is expected to grow as a result of the expansion in research into the cause and spread of diseases such as AIDS and bird flu, as well as the growing problem of the resistance of bacteria to antibiotics. The growth of international travel tends to increase the spread of diseases and give rise to new ones. Hospitals, too, are more focused now on infection control, and the public is more aware of the possibility of bioterrorism. All of this has led to expected strong job growth in this field.

Want to learn more? Check out the Guide to Training Programs at the Infectious Disease Society of America, www.idsociety.org. Learn about careers in microbiology at the American Society for Microbiology, www.asm.org or click on the website of the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists at www.aapspharmaceutica.org.

Focus on Finances: Scholarship Scams



Have you ever been invited to a “free scholarship seminar” or received an official-looking letter from a company that “guarantees to find you financial aid or your money back”? If so, you may

have been the target of a scholarship scam. Each year, families trying to find money to pay for college expenses fall victim to such scams; estimates of losses each year are in excess of a hundred million dollars.

Scholarship search firms attempt to attract clients by proclaiming that millions of dollars in college aid goes unclaimed each year. The “unclaimed” scholarships, however, are tied up in trusts or through a company’s program for children of employees. Some scholarship money is earmarked for members of a union or organization. This “unclaimed” scholarship money is not available to the general public. Although scholarship search services offer, for a fee, to provide you with lists of sources of fi-

nancial aid, you can do your own scholarship search on the web for free. Begin your search with sites like fastweb.com or collegeboard.com.

Other scholarship services invite prospective clients to a free seminar. After a general talk, they use high-pressure tactics in a one-on-one meeting to convince families to use their services.

Still other scams claim that you’ve won a scholarship (that you never applied for) and now need to pay a fee for processing. Beware any scholarship offers that come with a fee attached—you should not need to pay money to be awarded a scholarship. Be especially careful if asked for a credit card or bank account number.

Legitimate companies never guarantee or promise scholarships or grants. If you are not sure if an offer of aid is genuine, check with your college advisor or call the Federal Trade Commission at 877-FTC-HELP. More information is available at their website at www.ftc.gov/scholarshipscams.

Creating a Testing Schedule that Works For You

Whatever you may feel about the value of admissions test, for the foreseeable future, they are simply not going away. Therefore, it is to your advantage to create a testing plan that will work for you. There are two ways to approach this task. One way is to first determine the test requirements of the colleges that interest you, and then plan to take all of the tests needed. That way, if none of your proposed colleges require subject tests, you can eliminate these from your testing schedule. The drawback of this plan, however, is that lack of appropriate tests could reduce your college options when you do create your final list.

A second option is to take all the tests you could possibly need for the most selective colleges and in that way keep your options open. With this plan, you would take an SAT Subject Test when you complete the terminal course in that subject area, assuming you have done well in that class. Thus, you might take the Spanish language exam after taking Spanish IV, or the U.S. History exam at the conclusion of that subject. Take two to four subject exams as you progress through high school, and you’ll have completed all of the subject tests that you could possibly need for college admission.

Although relatively few colleges require subject exams, most do want to see the results of SAT or ACT testing. Ideally, you should plan to take each of these exams once, and then repeat the test that yielded the higher score. Once again, to keep your options open, opt for the ACT with the optional writing section. To follow this part of the testing plan, you’ll need to allow for three separate testing dates, preferably all during your junior year. Get out a calendar and create a long range plan. Most juniors test between March and June, but commitments such as participation in sports events may create conflicts. Although you can take both SAT and ACT in the same month (such as in June), you cannot take both the SAT Reasoning Exam and SAT Subject Tests on the same date. For these reasons, you may wish to begin testing earlier (such as January or February of junior year) or may have to delay some testing until the early part of senior year.

Reduce the stress of the college admissions process by taking the time to create your long-range testing plan now—you’ll be really happy that you did!

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The Ratings Effect

The higher the ratings, the more people that want the product. Although many college administrators publicly dismiss college rankings as meaningless, they are under pressure to improve their rankings. Higher rankings mean more applicants and increased selectivity, which in turn drives the college's ranking still higher. Rankings can also impact alumni donations, and even this can affect future ratings. But what effect does a college's ranking really have on the quality of education received by its' students?

To answer that, you need to understand the factors that are considered by the organization providing the ranking. The most widely read is probably that of U.S. News & World Report. To create their annual ranking, U.S. News looks at data supplied by the colleges themselves (SAT scores, GPA, number of applications, alumni

donations, expenditures/student, etc) as well as factoring in a reputational rating by administrators at other colleges, who may not know much about the college they are ranking.

Although there are other ratings guides which use different criteria for ranking, none can accurately assess the quality of teaching. None consider how well prepared graduates are for the job market or for graduate school. They also are unable to rank the quality of each school community that makes that college a good place to attend school.

When choosing the place to continue your education, look at the experience that students have at that institution. Spending four years at a college where you'll be fully engaged in learning and happy and successful as a member of the school community will make that college number one for you—and that's the only ranking that matters!

Website of the Month: www.LII.org

The Librarians Internet Index provides a database of "websites you can trust." This site was originally funded by grants, but now includes a small number of unobtrusive advertisements. Each week, subscribers are sent a free weekly e-mail of interesting new websites focusing on a variety of topics. You don't need to subscribe, however, to search their database of some of the best sites on the web.

For example, a search for "college rankings" returned links to a number of websites that rate colleges and descriptions of each site. Besides U.S. News & World Report, were rankings by Princeton Review, the Washington Monthly, several sites that rank Canadian colleges, and a general discussion of rankings by the University of Illinois.

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