

TOTAL COLLEGE PLANNING

The College Journal

Summer 2008



www.totalcollegeplanning.com

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June 2008

7th - SAT Reasoning
and Subject Tests

14th - ACT and ACT
plus Writing

Seniors

Thank teachers and
others who helped you

Thank scholarship
providers for aid

Have your final trans-
cript sent to the col-
lege you will attend

Summer, 2008

Read, Read, Read

Do Something
Interesting:

Job, internship, or
community service;
summer program

Explore Colleges:

Websites, guidebooks,
virtual and real visits

Seniors

Download Applications

Work on Essays

Narrow College List

Prepare for SATs and/
or ACTs

College Tours &
interviews

Underclassmen:

Prepare for fall PSAT

Jump-Start the College Application Process

Summer is a great time for rising seniors to get a head start on college applications. All high school students, however, can use the summer to begin preparing for the college admissions process.

This might mean developing interests you don't have time to explore during the school year. Sign up for a course at a community college in a subject that's not offered at your high school. If you're interested in history, volunteer at a museum. If you're thinking about becoming a veterinarian, get a job (paid or volunteer) at an animal hospital or shelter.

Keep a journal. Think about what's important to you and how you see your future. This kind of self-assessment will help you identify colleges that will be a good match. You'll also have material to use in your college application essays.

Prepare for the SAT or ACT. Reading newspapers, magazines and books will build your vocabulary and increase comprehension. Buy The Official SAT Study Guide or the ACT Guidebook and take a practice test each week. If your schedule is packed with AP classes, sports and extracurricular activities during the school year, summer might be the best time for a test prep course. You might also wish to review for any needed SAT Subject tests if these will be required by the colleges to which you'll apply.

Seniors who haven't finalized their college list should research prospective schools. Most colleges have lots of information about programs and student life on their websites. Contact alumni from your high school who attend colleges you're interested in and ask what they like and don't like about their school.

If possible, visit colleges that sound interesting.

While you won't see many college students, especially on smaller campuses that don't have summer sessions, there will be other high school students visiting, and you can check out future classmates. A summer campus visit doesn't truly convey what the school is like during the school year, but you can always return to the schools after you're admitted, to sit in on classes, spend the night in a dorm, eat in the dining hall, and get a real feel for college life.

With research, comes information. Information needs to be organized. Summer is the perfect time to set up a filing system to keep track of college brochures and applications.

This is also the time to complete one application that can serve as a prototype. Getting all your academic honors, extracurricular activities, and community service on paper now will lower the stress level when you're facing the UC application in November. Starting your application essays early means you'll have time to rewrite them and make sure you're submitting your best work. The Common Application (used at about 350 colleges) will be available at www.commonapp.org by the beginning of July.

Start researching scholarship opportunities. Many websites, including www.fastweb.com and www.scholarships.com offer scholarship search engines. For information about financial aid, www.finaid.org is a great resource.

Every task that gets done now means one less thing to worry about later. But it's also important to take time for fun. The college admission process can be stressful, and the best way to avoid burnout is to give yourself permission to spend some time doing whatever you enjoy.



Focus on Careers: Criminal Justice and Forensic Science

The continuing popularity of such “true crime” TV shows such as *CSI—Crime Scene Investigations*, has spurred an unprecedented interest in careers in forensic science and criminal justice. According to the American Academy of Forensic Scientists, careers in forensic science allow practitioners to “combine science and service in the interests of society, justice and public safety.” In the criminal justice system, it is the forensic scientist who performs a scientific investigation to determine the facts of a case. Forensic scientists also work in the civil justice system, determining issues such as the validity of a signature on a will or determining a corporation’s compliance with environmental regulations. Careers in forensic science and criminal justice are spread out through a number of subspecialties.

Criminal investigators conduct investigations into suspected violations of federal or state law. They try to determine if there is enough evidence present to solve a crime or prosecute an alleged criminal. Criminal investigators usually are police officers. *Criminalists* identify, analyze and interpret the physical evidence found at a crime scene in an effort to determine the facts of a crime.

Education

Forensic scientists are, first and foremost, scientists, and all specialties require a minimum of a bachelor’s degree in science. As with all scientists, the forensic scientist needs to be good at analyzing data and seeing connections. Intellectual curiosity and the tenacity to follow a puzzle to its conclusion are vital. Forensic scientists also need to have good verbal skills, be attentive to detail, have the ability to write an understandable scientific report, and be able to work as a member of a team.

Criminalists need a bachelor’s degree in chemistry, biology, microbiology or a related science. After further training, many choose to take an exam for certification by the American Board of Criminalistics. A bachelor’s degree in engineering is the basic requirement for a *forensic engineer*. Advanced engineering degrees and continuing education are recommended for this field.

Advanced degrees are required for many of the other branches of forensic science. *Forensic Dentists* and *Pathologists* have either dental or medi-

This evidence is used to link the victim and the crime scene to the suspect. After analyzing and interpreting the evidence, the criminalist provides expert testimony at trial.

Forensic Engineers apply the science of engineering to both criminal and civil cases. These engineers may investigate the cause of product failure, the origin of fires, or why an accident occurred.

Forensic Dentists identify human remains from natural disasters, terrorist activity, crimes or missing persons. Bite-mark analysis and injury analysis are often part of the job description of the forensic dentist.

Forensic Pathologists apply the principles of pathology and medicine to legal needs. They investigate the causes and circumstances of death.

Forensic Anthropologists identify victims of crime or disasters through study of their skeletal remains.

Forensic Psychologists and *Psychiatrists* address such issues as competence to stand trial and assessment of mental illness. Some analyze past behavior to predict future behavior.

cal degrees and then undertake further specialized training. *Forensic Anthropologists* usually have a PhD in anthropology with a specialization in human anatomy and the skeletal system. *Forensic Psychiatrists* first need a medical degree, then training in psychiatry, and further study of forensic psychiatry. *Forensic Psychologists* generally have a master’s or PhD in behavioral science.

Criminal investigators often work their way up in rank through the police department. Although a bachelor’s degree may not be required, advancement is more likely for those individuals with college degrees.

Although you do not need to major in forensic science in order to train for these positions, colleges are increasingly offering a major in this specialized field. The Forensic Sciences Foundation has a wealth of information available at their website, with links to the professional organizations of each of the subspecialties described above. Learn more at www.forensicsciencesfoundation.org

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Focus on Finances: Providing Financial Education



Parents of seniors have spent much of this year supporting their teens through the college search and application process. Still more hours may have been consumed with financial aid forms and making plans to meet college ex-

penses. No rest for the weary yet—you still need to address the money management issues that will affect your child as he or she gets ready for this next phase of life.

- Set up a bank account. Since your child will have an ongoing need for money at college, you'll want to be able to easily transfer money to his account. An online bank account may be the most useful, especially if they have special student accounts available that will give parents access to bank information. Find out which banks have ATMs close to campus—college kids usually don't write many checks. Be sure to check on fees for using an ATM that's not part of your bank's network. Those fees add up!
- Make plans to protect student property. College kids tend to have a lot of valuable electronics and com-

puter equipment. Renter's insurance can protect your investment if these items were to disappear. Your homeowner's policy may also cover dorm room possessions—check with your agent. A special laptop lock will keep this equipment safe—college kids often don't lock their dorm doors.

- Health insurance—check out options provided by the college and compare these policies with your family medical coverage.
- Car insurance—once again, check with your agent. If your child will not have a car at college, you may be eligible for a discount on your auto rate.
- Discuss credit card dangers—college students are besieged with credit card offers—discuss how the misuse of credit cards can affect their ability to get credit in the future. Look into debit card options or provide your offspring with a card in your name.
- Decide how much to budget for incidentals. College Board estimates personal expenses at about \$3,700/year. That's a lot of pizza!

Getting Ready to Leave Home

If you thought all the difficult college-related decisions have been made, you'll need to reconsider that idea as you begin the process of leaving home. First comes "stuff". Although most students seem to want to take all of the contents of their room, there simply isn't enough space at college to do so. You'll likely be sharing your living space (sometimes with more than one roommate), so it's a good idea to speak with your roommate during the summer, and agree on who brings what. There really isn't either space or need for three plasma TVs. Check, too, with your college about items they suggest you bring from home. Many residence halls have rules prohibiting some devices that may include microwave ovens, popcorn makers, etc. Others arrange a low cost rental of appliances that you can share with your roommates.

A visit to your doctor is also in order. You'll want up-to-date medications for allergies or asthma, and will need to be current with vaccinations, especially for hepatitis B and meningitis. Consider how ready you are for this change emotionally, and speak with a counselor about concerns or fears if that seems appropriate. Remember, too, that colleges are well-equipped to meet your physical and emotional needs while you are away from home, but you'll need to be proactive in asking for these services. This is also time to consider how well equipped you are with basic life skills. Have you ever done your own

laundry, made your bed, cleaned a bathroom? If not, some basic cleaning/laundry lessons will make you more popular among your peers. If you'll be bringing a car to campus, you should know the basics of automobile maintenance. Learn how to check tire pressure and coolant levels, find out what to do about a flat tire, or how to deal with an auto accident.

Budgeting is a big item. Have a talk with your parents about their expectations about spending, and come to an agreement with them on the handling of checking accounts, credit or debit cards, and cell phone plans.

It's also a good idea to talk with your parents about their expectations about communication. Agreeing on an extended conversation once or twice a week may relieve pressure for all involved. E-mail and IMing your folks also helps.

Plan to get involved at school. The most successful students also tend to be those who engage in extracurricular activities. Seek out a "mentor professor" - someone you meet and admire, and with whom you may be able to work. Their recommendations will help you on to the next phase of your life. Determine early to ask for help. Without your parents around for everyday advice, you'll do best if you seek help from the counselors and advisors at your college.

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Rank, GPA, Grade Inflation—Their Effect on College Admissions

Years ago, a C average was the norm. Today, however, a cumulative average of 3.0 may well place you in the bottom half of your graduating class. What's happening to high school grades, and what effect does this have on your chances of admission?

High schools may calculate grade point average (GPA) in any number of ways. Most common is the 4.0 scale in which an A is worth 4 points, a B is 3 points, a C rates 2 points, and a D carries only 1 point. Numerical averages awarded at some schools may also be converted to a 4.0 scale. Additional points may also be awarded for honors or AP classes, resulting in students with weighted GPAs in excess of 4.0.

Since high school policies vary greatly, colleges often recalculate their applicants' GPAs, applying the same scale to all prospective students. They may only include certain courses in their calculations (generally only core classes such as English, math,

social studies, foreign language and science) and may choose not to award extra points for more advanced classes. Even when extra points are not added, colleges will take note of the rigor of the applicant's high school program and consider that in the admission decision.

Class rank descriptions also vary by school. Many high schools have done away with rank entirely, preferring to release only decile rankings or no rank at all. (A grade distribution allows colleges to form their own opinions as to place in class.) Some high schools award the same rank to numerous students, making even designations such as valedictorian or salutatorian of dubious use in the admissions process. When numerous students from the same high school apply to a particular college, that admissions office will compare the academic records of these applicants in making decisions.

When finalizing your college list, you'll need to consider the effect of all this on your chances of admission.

Website of the Month: www.careprogram.us

This website, founded by a concerned judge, addresses the misuse of credit in the United States, and focuses much of its efforts on teaching teenagers and young adults how to use credit wisely. In addition to giving presentations across the nation, Judge Ninfo of the US Bankruptcy Court writes a column for NextStep Magazine, which is then reprinted and ar-

chived on this website. Past articles address such topics as talking to teens about debt, getting out of college debt-free, how to build a budget, do teens really need a credit card, and say no to debt in college. Many of these articles can form the basis of good talks between parents and teens in the summer before students leave for college.

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