

TOTAL COLLEGE PLANNING

The College Journal

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September 2008

10th and 11th grade students register & prepare for PSAT or PLAN

Seniors – Finalize your college list; work on applications & essays; review your transcript for accuracy; request letters of recommendation from teachers, counselor, and employers

Meet with visiting college reps

13th – ACT and ACT plus Writing – in selected states only

October 2008

Review test materials & take PSAT either 10/15 or 10/18

4th – SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests

25th – ACT and ACT plus Writing

Attend area college fairs and meetings

Meet with college reps visiting high school

Seniors - Continue work on applications; complete Early Decision/Early Action applications; complete "Profile" if required

Submit "rolling" admissions applications ASAP

Presenting Your Best Application

Fall means the start of another college application season. While academic credentials are certainly the most important factor in their decisions, admissions officers at many schools look beyond the numbers. When colleges receive applications from more students than they are able to admit, a well-done application can help admissions officers differentiate one 4.2 GPA student with a 2100 SAT score from another.

Strong applications weave together a student's values, goals, passions and experiences to illuminate the themes in that person's life. So if you're a political science major, highlight your involvement in student government and any volunteering you've done for political campaigns. If your dream is to start your own business, emphasize the entrepreneurial aspects of your babysitting or lawn-mowing experience.

Start by looking for common threads in the activities you've pursued. How do these activities illustrate your beliefs about yourself and the world? This kind of self-examination will enable you to present yourself in a clear and personal way.

The most dreaded part of the application is the essay, but it can also be the most important. Your essay serves as your voice in the admissions office, since you won't be there to make your case. It's not about impressing admissions officers with a list of accomplishments. You don't want to waste your essay repeating information they will see in other parts of the application. The essay is your opportunity to let admissions officers get to know *you*. It's easier to root for someone you know, and harder to reject that person.

It can be tough to come up with a fresh idea. If you're worried that your topic has been done before, know that it probably has, but you can still make the essay your own by providing details that other people

wouldn't include. Being specific takes your essay beyond the familiar. The truth is that small moments that reveal the way you think or view the world are usually more interesting. One student who took public transportation to school wrote about how she fabricated life stories for the other riders she saw on the bus every day.

The goal is to convey your voice through your writing. You've done a good job if you could give your essay, anonymously, to friends and family and they would immediately know that it was you who had written it.

A great essay gives the reader a sense of a student's personality. Of course, it helps if that personality comes across as likable. That doesn't mean you need to present yourself as a perfect person. Most people don't feel a personal connection to someone who seems too perfect. While you do want to share some of your accomplishments, a little humility is appealing. Admissions officers are human and they respond positively to students who are honest about their strengths and who struggle to overcome their weaknesses. A touch of self-deprecating humor can be endearing.

Admissions officers consider how a student will get along with roommates and other members of the college community. If they sense, either through student's application or through input from counselors or teachers that a student is inconsiderate, disrespectful, or dishonest, it doesn't matter how many AP courses the student has had. If a student is kind, trustworthy, and generous, not only will teachers and counselors be more inclined to provide strong recommendations, but admissions officers will want to champion that student if the application goes to committee.

When a student's transcript, test scores, teacher recommendations, and essays all mesh and convey a clear and appealing portrait, that student has the best chance of success in the admissions process.



Focus on Careers: Veterinary Medicine

Have you thought about being a Vet? If you like and are good at the biological sciences, possess an inquiring mind and a love of animals, can work as a member of a team, and communicate well with others, you may want to consider veterinary medicine as a future career. Veterinarians are instrumental in guarding the health of pets, livestock, and zoo and laboratory animals. Most entered the profession because of a life-long love of animals, but veterinarians must also be able to humanely put down a sick or injured animal that will be unable to recover, as well as to be sympathetic and understanding of the pet owner's feelings of grief and loss.

There are about 86,000 practicing veterinarians in the U.S. today. While men still make up the bulk of practitioners, the gender balance is rapidly changing. At present, more than 60% of all veterinary students are female. Although you are probably most familiar with the local vet who cares for your dog or

cat, other veterinarians work exclusively with large animals such as horses and cows, or may be employed by research laboratories, pharmaceutical companies, the Federal Government, or zoos. Vets in clinical practice diagnose and treat diseases in animals, vaccinate against disease, treat infections and illnesses, perform surgery, dress wounds, set broken bones, advise owners about animal development and care, and generally engage in much the same type of work as physicians. Those with large animal practices visit farms and ranches to perform similar care for horses, cows, and other domestic animals raised for food.

A small number of veterinarians are engaged in research utilizing animals as they seek ways of preventing and treating human health problems such as cancer and AIDS, and in testing the effectiveness and safety of new drug therapies and disease treatments. Others are employed by government agencies to ensure food purity and safety.

Education and Training

To become a vet, students first complete a bachelor's degree with an emphasis in science. Most veterinary medical colleges require pre-vet undergraduate courses in biology, genetics, zoology, embryology, biochemistry, cellular biology, microbiology, organic and inorganic chemistry, physics, and physiology as well as other animal nutrition and biology courses. Math requirements differ but may include calculus, or statistics, or pre-calculus. Core courses in the humanities, the social sciences, and English are also required. Classes in psychology are helpful since vets must also deal with pet owners and employees.

Admission to one of the 28 accredited U.S. colleges of veterinary medicine is exceedingly competitive, with only about one in three applicants accepted. (Statistically, it is more difficult to gain acceptance to Vet school than to Medical school.) Students generally need a minimum college GPA of at least 3.0 to be considered for admission. In addition, applicants must submit test scores from the Veterinary College Admission Test (VCAT), the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), or the Medical

College Admission Test (MCAT), depending upon the specific requirement of the desired school. An important factor in gaining admission is prior experience working with animals, either through employment by a local vet or in research. Volunteer work at animal shelters or working with farm animals is also helpful.

Veterinary students study the basic sciences as well as participate in clinical treatment of animals. Although residency is not required for all vets, those who wish to specialize in a specific area such as surgery or radiology participate in a one-year internship after graduation. Those who wish Board certification in a specialty must complete a two-to-three year long residency in their area such as cardiology, ophthalmology, neurology, or oncology. After graduation, new vets take the North American Veterinary Licensing Exam (NAVLE), as well as satisfy other state licensing requirements. If you want to learn more about training, education and opportunities, contact the Association of American Veterinary Colleges at www.aavmc.org or the American Veterinary Medical Association at www.avma.org.

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Focus on Finances: Co-Op Education



“Cooperative education is a structured educational strategy integrating classroom studies with learning through productive work experiences in a field related to a student’s academic

or career goals.” (National Commission for Cooperative Education) At co-op colleges or in co-op programs, paid internships provide students with practical experience in their area of interest that supplements the theoretical studies of the classroom. Thus, students earn a salary as they gain hands-on experience, and this salary (\$2,500 to \$14,000/year) can be used to help defray educational expenses. As important, co-op students build impressive resumes and establish professional contacts that will be invaluable in their eventual job search.

Most college students today require more than four years to complete the traditional “4-year” bachelor’s degree. Co-op programs may require a bit longer, but in many cases, co-op students complete

Starting Strong

As any college admissions officer can tell you, your academic performance during your high school years is the single most important factor in determining admission. Although test scores and essays, recommendations and activities all play a part in the decision, admissions officials know that academic achievement in challenging classes during high school is the best way to predict success in college. So as you start a new academic year, make every effort to make this your best year ever!

Upperclassmen have already learned how hard it is to raise a grade point average that’s lower than you’d like. Each new term carries less weight in your cumulative GPA, so starting strong from the beginning helps to insure that your GPA will reflect your abilities. Even if you’re not happy with your current GPA, a strong performance this year will help to convince your dream school that you’re a serious competitor.

Let’s look at what “starting strong” entails:

their degrees as quickly as students in more traditional academic programs. In some cases, internships are restricted to summer months; in other programs students may work full or part-time during a semester.

Co-op positions are available in most fields including health services, communications, hotel and restaurant management, government, financial services, computers, education, engineering, media and the arts, and education. More than 80 of the Fortune 500’s top 100 companies participate in cooperative studies programs. More than 60% of co-op students ultimately accept jobs at one of their co-op employers—a real advantage in a tight job market. For all co-op students, their professional experiences while in college result in higher starting salaries once they enter the job market.

Learn more about co-op programs at the National Commission for Cooperative Education website at www.co-op.edu.

- Select appropriate classes. Be sure that your class schedule includes a reasonable level of challenge. A schedule filled with all AP classes may well be a recipe for disaster. Add some balance to your load with courses chosen simply because of your interest in the subject.
- Keep up with assignments. Use a calendar to note dates for both short and long range assignments and exams in all classes. Seeing all this in one place will help you to better manage the workload.
- Ask for help if you need it.
- Choose a reasonable number of extracurricular activities. Remember your first role is “student”. Too many outside activities will play havoc with your grades.
- Take care of yourself. Eat well, make sure you get enough sleep, take time to be with friends and family, choose activities because you really care about them, and learn all that you can.

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Options for Last Minute Testing

Seniors hoping to present higher test scores along with their college applications still have time to show what they can do. Both the SAT and ACT offer a number of test dates this fall for last minute testing. Although most colleges will accept scores through the December test dates, you should check with each of your desired colleges about their individual testing deadlines.

You might consider trying a different test this fall if you've only taken either the SAT or ACT. Although it's difficult to generalize, students stronger in math and the sciences tend to perform better on the SAT while those with verbal strengths tend to get higher scores on the ACT.

There's really no downside to taking the alternate exam—colleges will accept whichever test you submit. Be sure to review coursework if you plan to take one of the SAT subject exams this fall.

On a happy note, an increasing number of colleges are quite willing to accept students who do not submit any test scores. Their test optional policy means that the admissions committee will give greater weight to grades, degree of rigor of curriculum, essays, achievements, and recommendations. Some test-optional colleges ask for graded papers to help in their decision process. See the whole long list of test-optional colleges at www.fairtest.org.

Website of the Month: www.MeritAid.com

A new free site by the people behind Cappex.com, MeritAid helps students to find merit-based scholarships at colleges of their choice. Scholarships are based on student interests, intended majors, leadership, community service and accomplishments. Users can search by college or can complete a profile and find

matches from MeritAid's huge database. This site is not restricted to high school students. Many merit-based scholarships are offered for upperclassmen, so you'll want to bookmark this site and check back later during your college years.

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