

Junior Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

This book has been written with the purpose of exploring and answering the many questions and concerns that you as a junior have as you begin the college exploration process. There are more than 3,500 two-and-four-year colleges in the United States, and with such amplitude of choices it is even more difficult to make the right decision. How will you pick the right one? Beyond taking the right courses and doing well, what steps will you need to follow to get into college? How can your guidance counselor be of help?

Preparing for college will be an extremely exciting period in your life. This transitional period is filled with challenge, opportunity, and decision-making. It can also be a difficult and confusing time. Because the process of selecting a college is very personal, it must begin with self-reflection. You must examine a number of things, including goals, strengths, weaknesses, and reasons for going to college. Then, you must consider the many criteria that will be used in choosing colleges to explore.

When you are going through this awareness or assessment period, it is important to be realistic. As an experienced counselor once said about the college exploration process: "Dream, but keep one foot on the ground."

The information in this guidebook has been researched by many professionals (see Bibliography) and coordinated by your guidance counselors to help you select colleges that meet your needs. Additionally, it has been carefully designed to cover an introduction to admission requirements, procedures, tests, campus visits, and interviews in a logical sequence that demystifies the college exploration process.

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

We recommend that you read this guidebook straight through and then continue to use it as a resource as you follow the suggestions. Each step may require effort over a period of time.

We also suggest that you purchase an organizational system to file the information that you will collect as you proceed in the college exploration process.

HOW TO USE YOUR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR

Counselors are one of the best ongoing resources students have. We are your ally throughout the entire admissions process. It is in your best interest for you to visit with us regularly. We can:

- Begin the admissions process with you by identifying the questions - and finding honest answers. Think about questions such as "Do I want to stay near home? Does the college have my major? How important is size?"
- Review your academic record, suggest areas that need improvement, and recommend courses needed to qualify for college admission.
- Help you with information for filing testing applications and taking standardized tests.
- Provide specific information on your high school performance. Items such as rank-in-class, test scores, and grade point average are all details that colleges ask for when a student applies.
- Provide the necessary forms for financial assistance.
- Show you where to find more information, such as books, brochures, and college websites that deal either with the admissions process or a specific college or university.
- Clarify or explain terms, ideas, and experiences for you that are encountered during readings, campus visits, or interviews with college representatives.
- Write a letter of recommendation to colleges or universities, complete secondary school and mid-year reports, and assist you with applications.
- Offer the emotional support, warmth, and encouragement that you will need during one of the most important periods of your life.

Note: We also want to be supportive to your parents. Please ask them to schedule an appointment to discuss any concerns they may have.

GATHERING INFORMATION ABOUT ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

KINDS OF SCHOOLS

You can acquaint yourself initially with a variety of colleges by talking to your counselor, searching the internet, and checking out books and other published material available in the guidance office.

Although this list is not complete, most students choose an institution from one of the following categories:

COLLEGE:

An institution that offers educational instruction beyond the high school level in a two-year or four-year program.

UNIVERSITY:

An academic institution which grants undergraduate and graduate degrees in a variety of fields. They offer a wide range of academic choices and may provide great resources. Most introductory courses are being taught lecture style. Classes can be taught by graduate students. Professors at major universities are often involved in research.

LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE:

A four-year institution which focuses on the education of undergraduate students. Because most liberal arts colleges are smaller than universities, classes tend to be smaller with more personal attention. These schools emphasize courses in humanities, social sciences, and sciences. In addition, they choose at least one area of in-depth study that is their college "major." Many employers look for graduates of liberal arts programs, valuing their well-rounded preparation.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

A two-year institution of higher learning which provides career and vocational training and academic curricula. These schools generally offer the first two years of a liberal arts education or specialized occupational preparation.

TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS:

These institutions emphasize preparation for specific careers and enroll students who have made clear decisions about what they plan to study. You'll want to be sure of your direction before selecting one of these options.

MILITARY SCHOOL:

Federal military academies prepare officers for the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Merchant Marines. These institutions are the U.S. Military Academy, the U.S. Naval Academy, the U.S. Air Force Academy, and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. They require recommendations and a nomination by a U.S. senator or a U.S. representative. Private and state-supported military institutions, however, operate on a college application basis as does the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. They all offer degree programs in engineering, technology and many other majors with concentrations in various aspects of military science.

HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES:

These institutions find their origins in the time when African-American students were systematically denied access to most other colleges and universities. Students at historically black schools have a unique opportunity to experience an educational community in which they are a part of a majority. They often find committed faculty mentors who encourage their expectations of success.

FINDING OUT

If there is one part of the admission process that is easy to handle, it is obtaining information about colleges. There are various ways to get information.

College Representatives

College representatives from various campuses will visit your high school throughout the year. Sometimes they will meet with students informally during lunches and provide formal sessions in the evenings. You can learn two very important things from college reps: what a school is like and what type of students it wants. You also are given the opportunity to ask specific questions about the college and get expert answers.

College Fairs and Open Houses

By attending RISD's College Fair, you can meet a great number of representatives from different areas of the country. Brochures and catalogs are often available to you. Many times you can sign up to receive more material by mail. Sometimes, the college representatives are alumni. This is often an opportunity to ask questions beyond the typical application process. Ask specific questions about life on campus, particular dorms, extracurricular activities and more. Many college and universities also hold off-campus information sessions for prospective students. Listen carefully to announcements at your school and check often with your counselor if there is a particular college or university that you are interested in.

Internet

Most colleges maintain their own Web pages allowing the student to have a wealth of information at their fingertips. Financial aid and scholarship information can also be found through the Internet. Most schools encourage applying to college directly on-line.

People

Students often overlook people they know. Often these people can provide very specific information that you would not ask a college representative. Talking to people often fills in the blanks. Whether you talk to alumni, people working in careers that interest you, older friends in college, or your parents, you can learn so much from those around you. Take advantage of those people you know!

So Now What...?



Making a List and Finding a Match

Once you have gathered information about a variety of schools, you are ready to begin to make a tentative list of schools that you might want to investigate further. It is important that you learn what these colleges are really like so that you can limit your list. You will want to read all about these schools, look at their websites, and talk to people about the various schools. You might even want to visit some schools while scheduling an interview and tour. This is not a final list but a list of schools to which you might actually apply. This list of colleges should interest you for a variety of reasons.

Compare your own academic and personal qualifications to those of students attending that specific school. Large public universities usually make their admissions decisions based largely on objective information, including the number and difficulty of high school courses, grade point average, class rank, and standardized test scores (SAT I, SAT II, and/or ACT).

Private and highly selective institutions will also consider special talents, community service, personal qualifications demonstrated by extracurricular and leadership activities, and other unique qualities that you can bring to the college campus. Many selective colleges will weigh application essays, recommendations, and interviews in evaluating candidates.

As you narrow your college list, select one or two institutions that present an admission challenge. Your counselor calls these colleges “reaches” because the admission criteria are competitive, and a small percentage of applicants are admitted. Also, make sure your final list includes a number of “mid-range” colleges – colleges where qualifications closely match those of the current student population. Include a “safety” college or two, where your statistics exceed the profile of most students. Give at least as much thought to your “mid-range” and “safety” colleges as you do to the “reaches.” Apply only to colleges at which you believe you would be happy for four or more years.

How many schools should you apply to? That depends on you. Most counselors agree that you should be able to narrow your choices to no more than five or six if you are applying to a range of competitive schools.

Often students talk of finding the perfect school. However, chances are that you will find several schools that are excellent choices for you. You should narrow those options to a few that seem to be the best match for you.

The trick is to plan early and organize your search. With time on your side, you can find schools that you can apply to that will fit your interests, style, and your goals.

COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS

COMPETITIVE COLLEGES:

Competitive colleges simply do not have enough space for all the qualified students who apply for admission. In fact, many of the students who are not admitted could be quite successful in that college. Sometimes these schools are listed in categories as most competitive, highly competitive, and very competitive.

SELECTIVE COLLEGES:

Selective colleges do not have quite enough space for all the qualified students who apply. Most, but not all students who meet those colleges' requirements are admitted. The schools in this category are often referred to as very competitive or competitive.

OPEN ADMISSION COLLEGES:

Open admission colleges do have enough space for the qualified students who apply each year. Often they serve a more regional or local group of students who choose one of these colleges as a good place to begin and then decide it's a good place to stay. These colleges are also known as noncompetitive schools.

Competitive/Selective Colleges: *What's That All About?*

Most colleges admit most applicants who meet their standards. However, if you decide to apply to a "selective" or "competitive" college, you should note that not all applicants are accepted. That means you must prepare your application with great thought!

What courses have you taken during your high school career? A challenging academic program is a must. Four solid college preparatory classes are a must. Five are even better! Remember to take advantage of the honors, Pre-AP, and Advanced Placement courses that are offered at your high school.

Your application will represent you. It is far better to do a good job on a few applications than to apply to many colleges without doing a quality job on each application. Selective institutions will carefully evaluate your ability to express yourself. Put time and care into the essays. Think about the many aspects of yourself that could distinguish you from other applicants. How can you express the unique person that you are? The best essay is one that no one else could have written.

Some highly competitive schools require an interview; others make one available to you. This is your time to present yourself as a real person, not an application. Make the most of that!

Most selective or competitive institutions require recommendations from a counselor and one or two teachers. Choose teachers who know you well. Also consider someone in your community who can shed light on a different aspect of your profile. If you have a talent, whether it is in the arts, athletics, or writing, try to find a way to share it with the admission office.

Sometimes an applicant has an absolutely clear college choice. Early decision allows that institution to know of your commitment to that college.

Your application should highlight your abilities, accomplishments, interests, and contributions to your school and your community. Remember that even the most competitive colleges look to find reasons to admit students rather than deny them. Your application should be well prepared. That will give the colleges a clear picture of your best qualities and qualifications.

As you collect and read through the material, take particular note of the admissions requirements of colleges that interest you and record the information on the College Requirements Worksheet.

COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS WORKSHEET

Arrange the schools on your preferred list in three groups to reflect the difficulty you will encounter in being admitted to those schools. In the first group, place those schools that you would like to investigate further. These schools are those where you only stand a chance of being admitted. They are known as “Reach” schools. In the second group, list the colleges that are “Mid-range.” These colleges are probable admissions since the average grades and test scores of those admitted are similar to yours. And finally, put in the third group those schools that are sure admissions “Safety” schools, because your grades and test scores are well above the minimum required.

Determine how your grades and test scores compare to those required for schools you list.

Name of College	Required GPA*	My GPA	Minimum				My Scores					
			SAT			ACT	SAT			ACT		
			CR	M	W		CR	M	W			
Reach Schools:												
Mid-range Schools:												
Safety Schools:												



RISD GRADUATION PROGRAMS

	DAP (Distinguished Achievement Program)	Recommended Program	RISD High School Program (Previously Regular)
ENGLISH*	4.0	4.0	4.0
MATHEMATICS*	4.0	4.0	3.0
SCIENCE*	4.0	4.0	3.0
SOCIAL STUDIES*	4.0	4.0	4.0
HEALTH*	.5	.5	.5
SPEECH*	.5	.5	.5
FINE ARTS*	1.0	1.0	1.0
PHYSICAL EDUCATION*	1.0	1.0	1.0
LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH (LOTE)*	3.0	2.0	2.0
Additional Elective*			OR 2.0
ELECTIVE COURSES*	4.0	5.0	5.0
TOTAL UNITS OF CREDIT	26.0	26.0	24.0

**See course options in the RISD Secondary Program of Studies*

Distinguished Achievement Program



Students who wish to complete the Distinguished Achievement Graduation Program must:

- Complete ALL course requirements for the **Recommended Graduation Program**, and
- An additional unit of the same Language Other Than English (LOTE) – total of 3.0 units, Note: This will reduce the number of electives to 4.0 units. (The total number of units for graduation remains 26.)
- Complete four advanced measures (see page 10 of this handbook).

DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

A Special Honors Seal for Graduation



Purpose of the Distinguished Achievement Program Seal

The purpose of the Distinguished Achievement Program is to recognize students who have performed at a level clearly beyond that expected of high school students. In addition to the course requirements, students must complete advanced measures at the college or professional level that are assessed by an external review process.

How Will an Award be Acknowledged?

Students who complete this program will have a seal affixed on their Academic Achievement Record (AAR) to reflect this honor.

Who Qualifies?

Students who wish to complete the Distinguished Achievement Graduation Program must:

- Complete ALL course requirements for the Recommended Graduation Program, and
- An additional unit of the same Language Other Than English (LOTE) – total of 3.0 units
Note: This will reduce the number of electives to 4.0 units. (The total number of units for graduation remains 26.)
- Complete four advanced measures. Students may choose any combination from the following list:
 - ↘ Earn a score of 3 or above on a College Board AP exam (each exam can count as one measure).
 - ↘ A score on the PSAT that qualifies a student for recognition as a Commended Scholar, or higher; as part of the National Hispanic Scholar Program; or as part of the National Achievement Scholarship Program (may count as only one advanced measure).
 - ↘ A grade of 80 (3.0) or higher on academic college courses that count for college credit.
 - ↘ Complete original research or project judged by a panel of professionals in the field that is the focus of the project; or conducted under the direction of mentor(s), reported to an appropriate audience, and related to the required curriculum set forth in §74.1 of the Texas Administrative Code (relating to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills). A student may have a maximum of two research/projects which count as one of the four measures.

All Distinguished Achievement Program graduates fulfill the Texas Grant academic requirements.

No substitutions are allowed in the Distinguished Achievement Program Seal.

Please see your counselor if you wish to apply for the DAP seal.

COUNTDOWN CALENDAR



JUNIOR YEAR: WHAT SHOULD I DO DURING THIS YEAR?

Investigate your opportunities beyond high school. What are your goals? Take the PSAT. It is a great practice for the SAT. Attend the college rep visits and attend the RISD College Fair.

Identify important factors in developing a plan. Two-year or four-year school? Work? Location? Cost? Kind of atmosphere? Variety of study programs available? List schools you are considering and collect information. Have you included all possible choices? What information do you need? How can you get it? Learn about scholarship opportunities.

AUGUST

- ✧ Review your graduation plan.
- ✧ Junior year grades are extremely important, as is the rigor of your coursework.

SEPTEMBER

- ✧ Attend the RISD College Fair and gather information.
- ✧ Begin to talk to parents, teachers, and recent graduates of the school you are interested in.
- ✧ Talk with your parents about college costs. Knowing now how much they can contribute may affect your decision about where to apply.
- ✧ Identify sources of college and career information in your school counseling office, guidance publications, college guidebooks, and college websites.
- ✧ Discuss any interest in the service academies with your counselor.

OCTOBER

- ✧ Take the PSAT/NMSQT to practice for the SAT I and to qualify for scholarships offered by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation.
- ✧ Develop lists of your interests, educational priorities, talents and abilities, social and cultural preferences, and personal qualities.
- ✧ Begin to develop your college resume.

NOVEMBER

- ✧ List college features that suit your interests, needs, and abilities. Begin to rank them in order.

DECEMBER

- ✧ Review your PSAT results and decide whether you would benefit from an SAT preparation course.

JANUARY AND FEBRUARY

- ✧ Check with your colleges to see if they require or prefer the ACT or the SAT I. Most colleges will accept either, and some counselors recommend taking both since many students do better on one than on the other. The ACT examines knowledge learned in school; the SAT I is a reasoning test.
- ✧ Consider taking the ACT or SAT I. Register to take one in the spring.
- ✧ Discuss your senior curriculum with your guidance counselor.

MARCH

- ✧ Identify the characteristics of a college that matter to you (size, location, cost, academic rigor, social environment, diversity, etc.) and finalize your list of schools to visit.
- ✧ Plan to visit schools while they are in session.

APRIL

- ✧ If you need to take the SAT II in June, you must register now.
- ✧ Remember you cannot take the SAT II at the same time that you take the SAT I.

MAY

- ✧ Take Advanced Placement tests given at school, and prepare to take the SAT I or ACT tests if you plan to apply to colleges early. Remember that you can take either the SAT I or the SAT II in June but not both. You can take the ACT also.

SUMMER

- ✧ Think about essay topics, and consider who might write your recommendations.
- ✧ Counselors advise entering the senior year with three or four schools in mind that are likely to accept you and one or two “possible.” Visiting the schools now will help you create a list.
- ✧ Finalize your college resume, including activities, honors, leadership positions, and job experience. You will need this information for college applications and scholarship forms. Give to your counselor and teachers.
- ✧ Update and complete the Junior Project (or senior information sheet).

JUNIOR PROJECT: SENIOR/COLLEGE INFORMATION SHEET

PART I

The completion of this form is required prior to requesting counselor recommendations. Please keep in mind that your counselor is asking for information which sets you apart from your peers.

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION FOR COUNSELOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

PARENT RECOMMENDATION

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Your son/daughter may be applying for admission to a college which requires a counselor recommendation. We know that you have insight into his/her background, interests, special talents, and ambitions. Although you may feel biased, we welcome your comments. Please feel free to complete this form either individually or together; you may attach additional pages if necessary. When complete, please return this form as soon as possible to your counselor.

Name of student: _____ Student ID: _____
Parent or guardian: _____ Counselor: _____
Home address: _____ Zip Code: _____
Home telephone: _____ Business phone: _____
College major/interest: _____

College plans: 1st Choice _____
 2nd Choice _____
 3rd Choice _____

I. To the Parent/Guardian:

A. Tell what you would like the admissions committee to know about your son/daughter regarding:

1. Personal qualities
2. Unusual talents
3. Academic strengths
4. Worthwhile community activities

B. Describe the assets/characteristics that will set your son/daughter apart from thousands of college applicants.

C. Explain your son's/daughter's role in the life of your family.

D. Discuss your son's/daughter's reactions to any unusual circumstances and/or situation in your family life.

(May attach additional pages if you like)

JUNIOR PROJECT: SENIOR/COLLEGE INFORMATION SHEET

PART III

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Name of Activity	School Year 9, 10, 11, 12	Office Held (if any)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

COMMUNITY OR CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Name of Activity	School Year(s)	Office Held (if any)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

HONORS RECEIVED

SPECIAL INTEREST AND/OR WORK EXPERIENCE

Colleges under consideration: _____

Planning major in college: _____

JUNIOR PROJECT: RESUME

The preparation of your resume is an excellent beginning for the student entering the college selection process. This resume will assist teachers in writing recommendations. It can also be used in college interviews.

There are many ways to organize and format a resume. Basically, the resume should reflect simplicity and clarity. The form is your option. Remember to include:

- I. Standards
 - A. Organized logically
 - B. Neatly written or typed
 - C. Free from spelling errors
 - D. Presented in an outline form
 - E. Limited to one page
 - F. Honesty in qualifications and experience

- II. Information to be included
 - A. Name, address, phone number
 - B. Small photograph of self (optional)
 - C. Educational information
 - 1. *Name and address of high schools attended*
 - 2. *Dates you attended each school*
 - 3. *Subjects studied - in general*
 - 4. *Awards and extra-curricular activities*
 - D. Work experience
 - E. Hobbies and interests
 - F. Unique experiences (travel, camp, volunteer work, etc.)
 - G. References (secure permission from person before using)
 - 1. *Name*
 - 2. *Address*
 - 3. *Phone*

TYPES OF TESTS

There are many types of tests used for college and some other post-secondary admissions. However, the two widely used college admission tests are the SAT I and the ACT. Many colleges accept either one, but some institutions require one or the other. It is essential that you check the policy at the colleges you are considering.

Each student is responsible for registering for these tests and for requesting that scores be directly reported by the testing services to the institutions to which you are applying. "Official" scores are those sent by the testing organization directly to the college admission office.

PSAT/NMSQT: This is a 2 hour and 10 minute exam. It contains verbal, math, and writing skills sections. The PSAT/NMSQT is given yearly each October, and juniors are encouraged to register for this test. Sophomores should also take it for practice. Results may forecast your future SAT scores. Some colleges also use scores from tests taken during the junior year for academic scholarships.

SAT: This test measures verbal and math, and writing reasoning skills and abilities. There are seven testing dates per year. All competitive colleges and universities accept the SAT I for admission. Registration can be completed through collegeboard.com.

ACT: (American College Testing Program) The ACT assessment is comprised of 35-50 minute tests in academic areas of English usage, mathematics usage, reading, and science reasoning. A writing exam is also available. Check with your college choices.

SAT SUBJECT TESTS: There are 22 one-hour subject tests that measure knowledge and ability in specified areas. The tests fall into six general subject areas ranging from English to the sciences. Many four-year colleges require three subject tests. These tests are offered on several dates during the year. The best time to take the SAT II is soon after a student completes a related course.

SAT II tests are not part of the standard three hour SAT I. They are usually given on the same day and in the same place as the SAT I. You cannot take the SAT I and the SAT II on the same day. Each SAT II test lasts an hour, and you can take up to three of them on a test day. Not all SAT II tests are given on each test date.

AP: (Advanced Placement tests) In May of each year, these three-hour examinations are given to students who have completed any AP course offered at the Richardson ISD high schools. If the student makes a certain score on the exam, college credit or advanced placement in college courses is possible. You should check with your college choices to review their policies. These examinations do require a fee and are optional to those students enrolled in AP courses.

THEA: THEA provides information about the reading, mathematics and writing skills of the students entering public colleges or universities. The THEA Test has been approved by the Texas Higher Education Coordination Board, under Senate Bill 286, *Texas Education Code, Section 51.3062: Texas Success Initiative (TSI)*, for use by Texas institutions of higher education as an

assessment instrument for entering students. The THEA Test provides the diagnostic data required by this legislation.

The Texas Success Initiative (TSI) requires testing and advising of students who attend a public college or university. The program assesses a student's basic academic skills in performing effectively in college-level coursework. All students applying for admission to a Texas state-supported college **must** complete a Texas Success Initiative assessment (THEA or an approved TSI assessment).

Who Must Take the Test?

Students who plan to enroll in a Texas public college or university must take an assessment of academic skills before enrolling in any college-level coursework. The THEA test has been approved to meet these state testing requirements.

For further information about whether and when the student must be tested, contact the advising office at the Texas college or university you plan to attend.

Who is Exempt from Taking the Test?

There are exemptions. It is important that the student check with the testing office or the advising office at the college or university they plan to attend.

Where can I get more information, including registration?

The *THEA Registration Bulletin* is your best information source, and is available at no cost in your high school counselor's or college admission's office. It is also online at <http://www.thea.nesinc.com/>.

The CEEB and ACT number for your school is:	Berkner – 445841	Lake Highlands – 441758
	Pearce – 445839	Richardson – 445840

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS IN ADDITION TO COURSEWORK COMPLETION

TAKS: (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) This test is mandated by the Texas Education Agency and is based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, which is the curriculum that is taught in the classroom. Students must pass all four parts of the test (English Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science) in order to fulfill graduation requirements. The test is given for the first time in the spring of the eleventh grade, and if a student does not pass one or more subject-area tests, they will have several more opportunities to retake those tests.

MOST OFTEN ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT TESTING



1. **When should I take a College Admissions test?**

In the spring of your junior year, you should consider taking both college admission tests (SAT and ACT).

2. **Why should I take the SAT and ACT?**

- ✧ **To place** your name on the mailing lists of the colleges and universities around the country which have entrance standards and programs that match your interests and high school preparation.
- ✧ **To help** you assess your own level of readiness for college-level work compared to your peers all across the nation. This comparison is reported in percentiles on your score report.
- ✧ **To present** tests to the college as part of the application. Keep in mind application deadlines and allow four to six weeks for the testing source to process and mail your scores.

3. **How should I prepare for these tests?**

- ✧ Take solid academic courses, at the most challenging level possible, in each of the four years in high school, including the senior year.
- ✧ Read from a wide range of books, magazines, and newspapers. Focus on a weekly news magazine and read it cover to cover on a consistent basis.
- ✧ Become familiar with the test formats, including how the test is organized, the kinds of questions it asks, the terms and concepts it uses, and how it is timed and scored.
- ✧ Consider the possibility of taking RISD SAT and/or ACT preparatory classes.



Please Note: You may do this on your own, using the publications by the College Board and ACT services at no cost to you or your family.

4. **How often should I take these College Admissions tests?**

If junior year scores are satisfactory, there is no reason to retake the test. However, nearly half of all college-bound students will go for it at least once more in the fall of their senior year. October or November test dates are best. December will work for colleges with deadlines in January or beyond. Later test dates may mean that scores don't reach colleges in time.

5. **When should I take the SAT Subject Tests?**

You will probably do best on an SAT Subject Test if you take it as close as possible to completing the course (or courses) in the subject while the material is still fresh on your mind. If you decide to take an SAT Subject Test in a subject that you have not studied recently, you

should consider reviewing the course content material thoroughly and methodically over several weeks' time.

Find out the requirements of the colleges to which you may apply. Colleges that use the SAT Subject Tests and their results as part of their admission process often require that you take the tests no later than December of your senior year. (If you are applying early decision, check with your college.) Some colleges use the results for placement purposes only. You might be able to take the tests later during your senior year.

6. What happens if I don't pass THEA?

If you score below passing colleges will typically require you to complete some remedial courses before you will be able to take upper-level classes. You can always retake those sections of the THEA you did not pass.

7. Where can I get more information on THEA?

The *THEA Registration Bulletin* is your best information source; it is online at <http://www.thea.nesinc.com/>.



WHEN DO I APPLY?

Admissions Programs

Each college has its own admissions deadline. Some schools have more than one. Understand the different terminology as you enter into the application process. Remember to check the individual school for its admission deadlines.

Rolling Admissions

Many colleges use the “rolling admissions” plan. It differs most importantly from the regular admissions process in the timing of decision making. An institution reviews applications all year. As the application is received, it is processed and offers decisions to students soon after. Be aware that housing applications are separate. Consider applying early!

Regular Decision

This is the procedure through which most applications are handled. Typically, you complete your application online in the fall semester.

Each institution sets a specific final deadline for completing applications and responds to completed applications by a specified date. You may apply to other colleges as you wish.

Early Decision

This is a well-established procedure through which you apply to your first-choice college, usually in the fall and often in November of your senior year. While applying, you sign a contract declaring that you will not attend any other institution if you are admitted.

Most applicants under the “early decision” plan apply before the regular admission date and hear their admission status before the regular notification date. If you apply under this plan, remember that you must sign an agreement that you will attend if admitted. A college may give an early decision applicant extra consideration in the admission process because of this commitment. This plan should be for the student who wants that specific college! You won’t be able to compare aid packages offered by other institutions if you make an early decision commitment.

Early Action

Here is another admissions plan requiring an early application. The early action plan, used by a few very selective colleges, should not be confused with early decision. Usually you apply for early action to colleges where you are reasonably sure of admission. Your application is evaluated as “accept,” “deny,” or “defer.” Under this plan, you apply early and you hear the admission decision early, but you don’t have to make a commitment. You may apply to other schools and wait until the reply date to make your decision. Unless you have top credentials, early action can be risky because you could be denied early in the process rather than deferred as usually happens in Early Decision.

Helpful Hints

- ✓ Make copies of everything you send.
- ✓ Keep track of the due dates for each application and check off the dates when you apply.
- ✓ Send exactly what is asked for in an application. More is not always better.



VISITING THE COLLEGE CAMPUSES

RISD JUNIOR AND SENIOR STUDENTS



- A maximum of four (4) college visitation days are available to students to be taken between the summer before their junior year and the end of their senior year, as determined by the student. A student may take no more than 2 days a year.
- Approved college visitations taken during the senior year will not be counted against senior final exam exemptions.
- To obtain approval for designated college visitations (excused absence), a student must; 1) submit a note from parent/guardian prior to planned college visit(s) indicating college location(s) and absence date(s); and 2) upon return submit documentation of visit(s) submitted on college letterhead that must include student's name and date of visit.
- Students who do not provide the necessary documents for absences for college visits will receive an unexcused absence.
- Students are responsible for making up any work missed during the absences.

WHEN TO GO

Many students will visit college campuses in the spring of their junior year, the summer before the senior year, or in the fall of their senior year. Often colleges will offer preview weekends for high school students, which is another time to visit a campus. It is important to check out a particular school when that school is in session. While admissions officers have more time to talk to you in the summer, you might not get a real idea of what the college is all about.

PREPARING TO VISIT

Students should contact the admissions office for an interview, find out the times of campus tours and information sessions. If you have special interests that you plan to pursue in college, you should mention this to the admissions office before you arrive on campus. The office can arrange for you to visit particular classes, talk to specific faculty members, or visit with coaches and students. Preparing for a visit means studying up on a school so that you know what to see and what questions you want answered.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

Colleges want to interest visiting students in applying and enrolling in their schools. Most schools provide the visitor with well-organized tours that show off their schools. Many also have group information sessions where students can learn about most aspects of the college. Students come away with a good picture of the school in a relatively short period of time.

You should begin your college visit at the admissions office. You can join tours or group information sessions there, or, if necessary, pick up a map for a self-guided tour. To have a good campus visit, you should at least:

- ✓ *Take a tour of the campus. Your visit should include seeing classrooms, student housing, the student union, the library, and the admissions office.*
- ✓ *Attend a group information session.*
- ✓ *Pick up a copy of the newspaper.*
- ✓ *Visit the financial aid office for applications and information if you will be applying for aid.*

Students who plan on spending a full day at a school will want to add the following activities to their visit:

- ✓ *Sit in on at least one class in an area that interests you.*
- ✓ *Have a meal in a campus dining hall.*
- ✓ *Talk to students about what the school is like. This is a good time to ask questions about campus activities, dorm life, classes, majors, and social opportunities.*
- ✓ *Talk to faculty members to learn about programs that interest you.*
- ✓ *Talk to coaches if you want to participate in sports.*
- ✓ *Walk around the whole school.*

WHY AN INTERVIEW?

There are two reasons for scheduling a college interview. First, it is an opportunity for students to become real people to the admissions officers instead of a combination of grades, scores, and activities on an application. Second, it lets students learn more about a college.

The importance of the interview in the admissions process varies enormously. It is certainly NOT the most important factor in a student being admitted to a college. Some colleges don't even hold interviews, and other schools will not file the interview notes with the application. However, at some schools an interview can make a difference in a student being admitted to the college. You can't change your grades or scores, but a good interview can make you a more attractive admissions prospect to a school. This is especially true if you are applying to a selective school and you are not at the top of the list for admission.

A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

College admissions officers agree that there are certain basic rules that must be followed in order to have a successful interview:

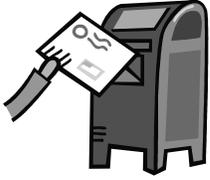
- ✓ *Be prepared.*
- ✓ *Arrive early for the interview.*
- ✓ *Dress conservatively.*
- ✓ *Participate actively in the interview.*
- ✓ *Be yourself.*
- ✓ *Send a thank-you note.*

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE INTERVIEW

Prepare to answer basic questions. Remember that the purpose of the interview is to allow the college to get to know you. No matter where you interview, the interviewer is quite likely to ask questions about the type of person you are, your values and goals, and your reasons for wanting to attend that college. Although you should be familiar with the college, interviewers are not terribly impressed when the entire interview revolves around discussions about the campus. This is information that students should already know!

Think about:

- ✓ *Why do you want to attend this college?*
- ✓ *What are you thinking of as a possible major? Why?*
- ✓ *What do you see yourself doing in the future? Five years from now? Ten years from now?*
- ✓ *What are your most important contributions to your high school?*
- ✓ *How would you describe yourself to a stranger? (Use adjectives.)*



AFTER THE CAMPUS VISIT:

A thank-you letter to the admissions office for having seen you is a nice gesture. Such letters should be relatively noncommittal unless you have already made a firm decision.

COLLEGE VISIT SUMMARY SHEET

Upon completion of your visit, write in your responses to the issues contained here. Do this for each college visited and then compare your summaries for each.

NAME OF COLLEGE: _____ LOCATION: _____

DATE OF VISIT: _____ INTERVIEWER: _____

Student Body

Impression of student body in terms of appearance, style, degree of interest and enthusiasm, diversity of their social religious, ethnic background.

Academic Factors

How serious about academics is the school and the student body? How good are the facilities for academic pursuits? How varied is the curriculum? How strict or flexible are the requirements?

Campus Facilities and Social Life

How complete and modern are the facilities such as dormitories, dining room, student center, cultural center, athletic facilities? How active is the social life? How diverse is it? What are the rules for students? Is it predominantly a commuter or dormitory campus?

Overall Impression

What did you like least and most; what seemed different or special about it? What type of student do you feel would be happiest here? Are you that type?

Rating

On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being the top grade) rate the college on the basis of your interest.

SPECIAL PROCEDURES

SERVICE ACADEMIES AND ROTC SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

While all juniors should begin exploring possible educational programs following graduation, you must begin as soon as possible to insure that you receive full consideration if you are interested in the service academies and the ROTC scholarship programs.

The first step in securing an appointment to one of the academies is to contact the academy and ask for a pre-candidate questionnaire.

The second step is to contact each of your senators and your congressman and ask that they consider you as one of their nominees.

The Coast Guard Academy has an admissions procedure similar to other highly competitive colleges. There is no nomination process involved.

ROTC scholarship programs involve a competitive application process as well.

COLLEGE SELECTION FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFERENCES

Students with learning differences should begin college planning early in the junior year to accommodate necessary evaluations and test results needed to do realistic planning for college.

You and your parents must carefully examine the programs and services available to identify a number of colleges that meet your individual needs. There is no one best college for students with learning differences. Rather, there are a number of colleges that can probably meet your needs. Families researching accommodations for a student with learning differences will find approaches for the applicants that vary considerably. You should apply to a number of desirable colleges in hopes of being accepted by one or more.

You may reference the checklist on the following page as a resource.

COMPARING COLLEGE CHARACTERISTICS

You can compare colleges in a number of ways...

ACADEMICS:

The type of academic atmosphere and variety of course studies should be considered when choosing a school.

You should try to match your academic abilities to the school's profile. Colleges offer a variety of majors or courses of study. If you are unsure of what your major will be, then look for a school (usually called a liberal arts college) that has a wide variety of majors.

SIZE:

Colleges range in size from 150 to 80,000 students. There is a great difference between attending a small school (1,000-2,000) usually referred to as a college. Small schools offer you more personal involvement, a community atmosphere, and small classes (from 5-50 students). Large schools tend to be more impersonal, allow you to be more anonymous, and offer class sizes of anywhere from 20 to 1,000 students.

You should ask yourself:

- ◇ *Will I feel closed in and trapped at a small college?*
- ◇ *Will I welcome the personal, friendly atmosphere a small college affords?*
- ◇ *Will I feel lost and overwhelmed at a large institution?*
- ◇ *Will I feel more independent and free at a large university?*
- ◇ *Will I want large or small classes? Would I like to have a good deal of interaction with my instructors during class or would I prefer a large, more impersonal style of instruction?*
- ◇ *Will I want a campus that offers sororities and fraternities, as do many of the large colleges and universities?*
- ◇ *Are the athletic facilities important to me? Generally, the larger universities offer the greatest range of sports and facilities.*

ATMOSPHERE:

Any group of people working and living together creates their own atmosphere. Each college has a particular atmosphere or environment that affects the performance and satisfaction of each student there.

The type of atmosphere a college offers can best be discovered by visiting the campus and talking to as many people as you can.

COST:

Obviously, a major factor to be considered is the cost of attending a college. The total cost for a year, as computed by the college financial aid office, includes tuition, fees, room and board, books, supplies, transportation, and personal expenses. Total costs are less at a community college than a private school.

LOCATION OF COLLEGE:

There are many reasons why the location of the college may be important to you. You should always consider the expense of travel, the need for independence versus the desire to stay near your family, and the effects of living in a particular climate.

When considering the location of a college, think about the campus setting. The physical environment of the college you go to may be very important to you. Some people prefer the social, cultural, and economic activities of a large city. There are also many colleges and universities which are in rural settings with widespread campuses located many miles from the nearest metropolitan areas. The decision of a location and campus setting for your college should ultimately include those schools where you will be most comfortable living for the next two to four years of your life.

WORKSHEET FOR COLLEGE SELECTION

CONSIDERATIONS	YOUR PRIORITIES	COLLEGE #1	COLLEGE #2	COLLEGE #3
LOCATION				
SIZE				
TYPE (PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE)				
TYPE (2-YEAR VS. 4-YEAR)				
DEGREE(S) OFFERED				
ACADEMIC LEVEL OF STUDENTS				
EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES				
CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT				
HOUSING				
COST				
SCHOLARSHIP/ FINANCIAL AID				

OVERVIEW OF THE FINANCIAL AID PROCESS



The cost of attending a particular institution should be a consideration. It is a factor in the final selection and must be viewed in light of the many sources of financial assistance available to students today. Although not applicable until your senior year, we have listed the following activities and helpful hints which will be provided to give you as many options as possible for paying for college.

1. Information about scholarships is distributed through your guidance counselors. Students can apply for a variety of scholarships that range in award as well as criterion.
2. Check out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid on line.
3. You will be asked to include information from your tax forms on the financial aid forms. In addition, many of the colleges require a copy of the family's tax return before they put the student's financial aid "package" together.
4. Notify the college(s) under consideration that you are interested in financial aid. Remember that scholarships are also called financial aid.
5. **File Early!** If, as a senior, you file on or immediately after January 1, you have the best chance of receiving a larger portion of grant money in your aid package. (Strive to provide clear and accurate information at the time of filing for aid. Incomplete and/or inaccurate information will delay the process.)
6. **Scholarships or Grants:** This money is often called "gift aid" because it does not have to be repaid. It may be given for academic merit, need, special talents or skills, etc.

7. **Work/Study:** This is money earned by you during the school term in a job obtained through the help of the financial aid office of your college. The hours and location of the job are always compatible with your academic life.
8. **Loans:** Loan programs are available to you and your parents from the college and/or from a lending agency.
9. Inquire at your college/university about the co-op programs and internships as a way to earn while you learn.
10. If you must borrow, be cautious!

Financial aid is designed to provide an open college choice to students from all financial circumstances. Explore the opportunities that may be there for you.





INTERNET SOURCES

The Internet has emerged as an essential reference tool for the college search. Information that once required a letter to the college can be found with just a few keystrokes.

You can use the computer in college admissions by:

- ✓ *Searching databases for colleges and scholarship*
- ✓ *Communicating with colleges and filing applications and scholarships*
- ✓ *Registering for standardized tests and submitting aid forms.*

You can find information on colleges, scholarships, admission tests, and more. In addition, each college has a Web site. Use these sites to read online catalogs and check admission requirements and financial aid.

Students can also read the college's online newspaper and see lists of campus events and programs. Information about various organizations and activities can also be found online.

GENERAL COLLEGE SITES

ACT Online

<http://www.act.org/>

ACT's website offers sample questions and testing tips for each subject area in addition to online registration for the ACT, test dates and other education and career planning information.

Alumni.NET

<http://alumni.net>

Find email addresses of recent alumni of colleges you like. Students can ask about their school experiences.

Applications Online

<http://www.petersons.com/ugchannel/>

This site allows students to apply to more than 1,000 colleges through the Web or by U.S. mail.

<http://www.applytexas.com/>

The online home of the common application, available for download or in apply on line format.

<http://www.weapply.com/>

The Princeton Review and Apply! Technologies offer applications to more than 500 schools via download or CD-ROM.

Campus Tours

<http://www.campustours.com>

College campus visits can be done at home. This site links the student to virtual tours, interactive campus maps, webcams, videos, and campus pictures of many U.S. colleges and universities.

College Board Online

<http://www.collegeboard.com/splash>

This site offers a variety of services and information for the college-bound student. Students can register online for the SAT I and SAT II. There are even practice questions.

College is Possible

<http://www.collegeispossible.org>

This site, put together by a collection of colleges and universities, is full of information on preparing for, paying for, and choosing the right college.

FAFSA on the Web

<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>

This site provides the student with the form that must be completed in order to receive federal student aid. Students can submit the form online or by regular mail.

FastWeb

<http://fastweb.monster.com/>

The busiest free scholarship search site online. Students complete an informational questionnaire and receive a list of scholarship opportunities that match their criteria.

FINAID

<http://www.finaid.org/>

Sponsored by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. The Financial Aid Information Page offers in-depth coverage of every facet of financial aid.

NCAA Guide for College-Bound Student Athletes

<http://www.ncaa.org>

Get information on academic eligibility and core course requirements, plus graduation rates for athletes and academic support services available at colleges.

THEA Information

<http://www.thea.nesinc.com/>

You will find practice tests, how to register for the THEA, and other valuable information regarding this assessment.

U.S. Department of Education: Federal Student Aid (FSA)

<http://studentaid.ed.gov>

The government provides 75% of aid distributed to students. This website is filled with authoritative information about the U.S. Department of Education's federal student financial aid programs.

U.S. News

<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/home.htm>

U.S. News posts its annual college rankings on this site, as well as other content. It also offers a college search program and message boards.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Special thanks to the many authors of books listed below which often were utilized as resources for this guidebook. Many may be located in your guidance office, school or local library and may also be purchased at local bookstores.

- Barron's Profiles of American Colleges**, Barron's Educational Series, Inc., Woodbury, New York.
- Best Buys in College Education**, Edward Fiske (Time Books).
- Comparative Guide to American Colleges**, James Cass and Max Birnbaum, Harper and Row.
- Don't Miss Out**, Leider and Leider.
- 50 College Admission Directors Speak to Parents**, Sandra F. MacGowan and Sarah M. McGinty.
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- How to Prepare for the ACT Assessment**, Barron's Educational Series, Inc., Woodbury, New York.
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- PACT, National Association of College Admission Counselors.**
- Paying for your Education: A Guide for Adult Learners**, The College Board, New York.
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- The College Cost Book**, The College Board, New York.
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- The Gourman Report**, National Education Standards.
- The One Hour College Applicant**, Lois Rochester and Judy Mandell.
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