

College Insights

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March 2018

10th – SAT and SAT plus Writing

9th, 10th and 11th grade students - Make plans for a productive summer. Investigate summer programs, jobs, internships

11th grade students – Create an initial list of colleges

Prepare for spring SAT/ACT exams

April 2018

14th - ACT and ACT plus Writing

(register by 3/9 -
late registration 3/23)

Seniors should have their final letters of acceptance by the beginning of April

Juniors—Visit colleges

Prepare for AP Exams

Seniors—Compare offers of admission; revisit top choices

Evaluate financial aid packages and consider college funding options

Lessons Learned by Parents about Campus Visits

Right about now, as the parents of sophomores and juniors are scheduling flights, renting cars, making hotel reservations and booking spring break campus tours, this whole “college thing” becomes eerily real.

We recently spoke with two experienced parents who have done that recently, and have come out the other side smiling. Here’s their advice.

“I would say that the best thing we did regarding campus visits was to start early. We looked closely at upcoming days off, vacation days, even teacher workdays. If you wait until summer, you may not get a “real” feel of the campus dynamics. We made a point of visiting most schools at two different times to get an idea of school spirit, study habits and student engagement. Weekend sessions are very different. I also learned that colleges offer specialized sessions (engineering, business, honors college, etc.) only on certain days of the week.”

One parent was aware that she was embarrassing her son on a few campus tours when she asked one too many questions. “For me, I need to know everything about the school, the retention rates, the school spirit, the laundry facilities, etc. I always asked the tour guides about other schools they applied to and why they chose this school over the rest. Some questions seemed appropriate in the large group setting and I left others until we were on the student-led tour. I also asked about traditions on campus, study abroad options and the quality of the career services center.” Our advice - parents should ask questions when they must, but leave the bulk of the questions to their child.

This mom’s best piece of advice is to ask your child to write down his thoughts and pros and cons about the college immedi-

ately after settling back in the car, because pretty soon one school can end up looking just like the rest. “I tried not to give my opinion before he did. I didn’t want to color his observations. I would ask the question and then wait until he was all finished to give my opinions.”

The mother of the second family, whose son ultimately applied early decision, started preparing in sophomore year because she felt it was important for her son to have a good working knowledge of each school prior to a visit. She made sure to ask the same questions on each visit. Her son always tried to make arrangements ahead of time to meet with an admissions counselor after the tour. This helped answer questions a student guide was unsure of, and gave the family a valuable point of contact.

You may also find that one visit simply isn’t enough. Families can later take advantage of Open Houses or Discovery Days offered by the schools, because they may provide even more information.

For one mother, the biggest take-away about campus visits was how a school organizes the visit, i.e., the time they may take to match your child with a tour guide who is currently majoring in your child’s area of interest, their willingness to coordinate what you may ask for beyond what is standard, etc. These special touches give you even greater insight into how student-focused each college really is.

Both families found the process eye-opening. They both advised families to enjoy the process because it can get overwhelming at times. Their parting thoughts were to “make sure to stay up on deadlines for testing, applications, essays, scholarships, etc., but then get the tissues ready, because the tears will come when you realize that your baby has grown up and is ready to fly on his own.”

Colleges Offering 3-2 Engineering Programs

- Bowdoin College/ Columbia, Caltech, Dartmouth, U ME
- Brandeis/ Columbia
- Carleton/ Columbia
- Clark/ Wash U, Columbia, WPI
- Colby/ Dartmouth
- Colorado College/ Columbia, RPI, USC
- Davidson/ Columbia and Wash U
- DePaul/ IL Institute of Technology
- Franklin & Marshall/ Case Western, Columbia, Wash U, RPI, Penn State
- Goucher/ Johns Hopkins
- Ithaca College/ Cornell
- Lawrence/ Columbia, Wash U, RPI
- Mount Holyoke/ Caltech, U Mass
- Oberlin/ Caltech, Wash U, Case Western
- Occidental/ Caltech, Columbia
- Pepperdine/ USC and Wash U
- Puget Sound/ Wash U, Duke, Columbia, USC
- Reed/ Columbia, RPI, Caltech
- St Mary's (CA)/ Wash U, USC
- Scripps/ Columbia, RPI, Harvey Mudd
- U of Richmond/ Columbia, George Washington, VA Tech
- Vassar/ Dartmouth
- Wesleyan (CT)/ Caltech and Columbia
- Willamette/ Columbia
- Williams/ Dartmouth

Many others exist—check with colleges that interest you.

Dual Degrees: 3-2 Engineering Programs

Some students love learning how things work and think they might like an engineering career, but they also enjoy studying pure science and maybe even discussing philosophy or literature. A combined 3-2 program offers students the best of both worlds. In a dual degree program, students begin their studies at a college that does not offer engineering. After three years, they transfer to an engineering school, where they complete two additional years of coursework required for their Bachelor of Science in Engineering. They are also granted a Bachelor of Arts degree from their first college.

A number of excellent engineering schools participate in 3-2 programs, including Columbia University, CalTech, Washington University, Duke, Penn State University and Dartmouth. The list of colleges affiliated with these programs is long, and includes small schools such as Drew, Clark and Wesleyan, as well as bigger schools such as Fordham, Hofstra and Georgetown.

The combined program offers flexibility, which is especially helpful for students who are not certain about their academic interests and career goals. Students who are interested in science and engineering can start as a science major and have until junior year to decide whether they want to transfer and add the engineering degree or finish the science degree at their current college in their senior year.

While students don't take engineering courses in the first three years, they do take math and science classes, including calculus, chemistry and physics, which prepare them for the engineering curriculum. With a 3.0 average and recommendations from math and science professors, students should have no trouble being admitted to one of the affiliated engineering schools.

When it comes to preparing for the job market, having three years at a liberal arts

college can give students an edge. They have a more well-rounded education than students who have spent four years in an engineering school. Students who also have a liberal arts degree bring creativity, critical thinking and communication skills that supplement the technical skills they gain in an engineering program, which can make them even more desirable to potential employers.

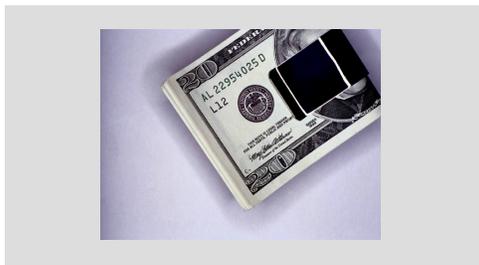
For students who are shy or who thrive in a smaller community, attending a smaller college for the first three years can be a great way to establish lasting friendships and build social as well as academic confidence.

While there are many advantages to 3-2 programs, the one disadvantage is that students have to transfer after three years. They won't be graduating with their friends, and if they are happy at their college, it can be tough to move to a new school, possibly in another part of the country, and start over. For students who don't deal well with change, and would rather know that once they start college, they'll stay there until graduation, a 3-2 program is not the best choice.

For someone who definitely wants engineering, has a strong high school record in math and science, and is more excited about getting a job than spending a lot of time in college, going straight to engineering school is probably the better option. For the student who wants a broader education, needs more time to build a foundation of math and science, or really wants a small liberal arts college experience, the 3-2 program could be ideal.



Financial Matters: Parts of a Financial Aid Package



Students who have applied for financial aid will receive their college's financial aid package soon after notification of their acceptance. Although all colleges use the FAFSA form to determine their offers of aid (and some colleges also utilize additional forms such as the CSS Profile), the packages still may vary a good deal from institution to institution, not only in the amount of aid but also in the type of aid offered. You'll want to compare offers from each of your colleges when deciding which college you will attend.

The most desirable type of aid is **grant** or scholarship money. This is truly "gift" aid, money that doesn't need to be repaid. For some colleges, this may come in the form of a tuition "discount" or as an offer of in-state tuition to a resident of another state. Grants may be merit or need-based. Merit grants are generally offered to students who rank in the top quartile of the entering class or who have another desirable attribute, such as the ability to play the oboe or to quarterback the football team.

Loans usually make up part of the financial aid package; these may be subsidized or unsubsidized loans. The interest on subsidized loans is paid by the sponsor (generally the U.S. government) until the student has completed his/her education and begins to repay the amount borrowed. The interest on unsubsidized loans must be re-

paid along with the principal amount. Repayment schedules vary from loan to loan. Although loans may comprise a part of the financial aid package, families are under no obligation to borrow this money for education. The loan amount is simply money that the family is expected to pay towards college expenses.

Students are often awarded **work-study** funds as part of their package. Work-study provides students with money to be earned through on-campus employment. There are several advantages to work-study jobs over other types of student employment. Money earned in this manner is not considered in determining the following year's financial aid package and on-campus employers tend to be more understanding of the student's primary role as scholar.

Maximizing Your Summer Break

Summer provides the best opportunity for future college applicants to separate themselves from the pack. As the number of students applying to colleges continues its upward trajectory, so too does the need for students to make an effort to distinguish themselves.

So how do you get noticed? Doing something meaningful over the summer is one of the most effective ways to stand out. You don't need to travel the world or cure cancer, but it is important to make sure that whatever experience you choose is substantive. This is a great time for some self-reflection and to identify potential academic and professional aspirations.

Summer is more than a break from homework, tests and the drama of high school relationships; it is an opportunity for students to delve a little deeper into their academic or extracurricular interests.

Some suggestions:

Get a taste of college - Close to home: Private schools and community

colleges offer a variety of remedial and advanced classes during the summer. Students can take a prerequisite for a higher-level course or find a class not offered at their high school.

Pros: A class over the summer can fulfill prerequisite requirements or enable the student to get ahead in the coursework for fall.

Cons: Pretty simple – students aren't crazy about going to school over the summer while so many friends are hanging out and going to the beach; it can be challenging to be truly focused.

Resources: Online classes for credit: Check out The Virtual High School, (www.my.vhslearning.org) a non-profit organization dedicated to online education, which offers 24 AP courses as well as dozens of other classes. Many states also offer online high school classes. Be sure to check with your school counselor to make certain your high school accepts credit for these classes **before** you sign up and confirm how it will appear on your final high school transcript.

Get a taste of college - Far away:

There are two options if you'd like to spend some time checking out a college by test-driving their academics, staying in the dormitories, eating in the cafeteria and hanging out on campus:

Pre-college academic programs – students can study and earn college credits on hundreds of campuses nationwide.

Pre-college enrichment courses – these are special interest courses lasting typically 1-3 weeks.

Pros: Experiencing a real college campus during a 1-6 week summer program is a great way to have a better appreciation of whether the college represents a good fit. What is it really like to be 3,000 miles from home? Is the quaint college town manageable for the summer but definitely deadly for a year-round experience? Many of these programs offer hands-on experiences working in laboratories and guest lectures from experts.

Cons: Credit programs are longer and can be very expensive.



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Wallowing on the Waitlist

Uh-oh. Your eagerly-awaited decision letter from Dream University finally arrives and you learn that you've been offered not the hoped-for place in the class, but a spot on their waitlist. What should you do now?

Your first step is to carefully consider the rest of your college acceptances and determine which of these provides the best fit for you. If necessary, revisit several of your top choices, spending as much time on campus as possible, sitting in on classes and talking to current students. Accept your favorite offer by returning your intent to enroll form along with any needed deposit before the May 1st reply date. Be sure to submit the form and deposit for housing as well. For many schools, the date your deposit is received determines your housing choice. You'll also want to send a nice note to each of the other colleges that offered you a place, thanking them for their interest and explaining that you've made other plans. Letting your other colleges know as soon as possible that you won't enroll allows them to offer your spot to another student.

Now for your waitlist offer. If you are still

truly interested in attending this college, respond promptly to their offer accepting a place on the waitlist. Follow this up with a personal call to your admissions contact, expressing your disappointment as well as your hope of admittance. Ask if the waitlist is ranked in any way and how many students are on it. Inquire about the number of students they expect to take from the waitlist or have taken in prior years. Be sure to find out if there is a cut-off date for the waitlist. This is also a good time to update the admissions officer about new achievements, rising grades, honors or awards. Remind your admissions officer of why the school is a good fit for you and of the many assets you'll bring to campus. You might even wish to send an additional letter of recommendation from one of your senior year teachers. If Waitlist U is your first choice and you will enroll if admitted, tell them so.

Nationally, only about 20% of waitlisted students are admitted each year. If you really want to be among those who are, you need to be proactive in contacting the admissions office and letting them know of your continuing interest in attending.