College and Career Readiness Handbook

Commerce High School

CHS envisions our students striving to be better tomorrow than they are today and graduating as self-reliant, employable champions.

Tigers never quit!

The Guidance and Counseling Office along with the College and Career Center are valuable resources for the college research and application process. Here your Counselors and Transition Coordinator are available to assist you through this journey. This handbook is intended to be used as a guiding tool by all students and parents at any stage of the college planning process. Blue hyperlinks throughout this handbook will guide you to additional resources.
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Why College?

You may be wondering why it's important to start working on your college plans early. Here are

Five Ways Ed Pays

Reason 1: Greater Wealth

Individuals with a 4-year college degree earn an average of $22,000 more per year than those with only a high school diploma.

Reason 2: More Security

Individuals with only a high school diploma are about twice as likely to be unemployed as those with a 4-year college degree.

Reason 3: Better Health

Individuals ages 25 to 34 with a 4-year college degree are 70% more likely to engage in vigorous exercise than those with only a high school diploma.

Reason 4: Closer Family

Parents with 4-year college degrees are 68% more likely to have attended a concert or live show with their children than parents with only a high school diploma.

Reason 5: Stronger Community

Individuals ages 18 to 24 with a 4-year college degree were 75% more likely to vote in the 2008 election than those with only a high school diploma.
Family Connection

Naviance Family Connection is a web-based service designed especially for students and parents. Naviance Family Connection is a comprehensive website that you can use as a tool to help you in making decisions about colleges, scholarships, and careers.

Naviance Family Connection will allow students and parents to:

Get Involved in the Planning and Advising Process -- complete online surveys, and manage timelines and deadlines for making decisions about colleges and careers;

Build a Resume – To make the college application process as easy as possible, beginning in 9th grade, use Naviance to track work experience, honors, awards, community service, extracurricular hours, leadership experiences, and more.

Research Careers – Naviance Family Connection offers the "Career Interest Profiler" as an online career interest assessment for students based on Holland's Interest codes.

Students may also link directly to the college database to find colleges that offer an educational path to each career;

Take a Personality Profile – “Do What You Are” The feature begins with a personality inventory and concludes with a report describing the student's personality type, potential careers, and related majors. The results link students directly to detailed career profiles, which include educational requirements, salary data, and in some cases even multimedia presentations.

Research Colleges – Compare your GPA, standardized test scores, and other statistics to actual historical data from our school for students who have applied and been admitted in the past;

Sign Up for College Visits -- Find out which colleges are visiting our school and sign up to attend those sessions;

Apply for Scholarships -- Check the most up-to-date list of scholarships that are on the local, state and national level;
8 STEPS TO COLLEGE

1. MAKE UP YOUR MIND TO GO TO COLLEGE
2. GET GOOD GRADES IN GOOD COURSES
3. TAKE ENTRANCE EXAMS
4. EXPLORE SCHOLARSHIPS
5. APPLY TO COLLEGE
6. FILL OUT THE FAFSA
7. BORROW SMART
8. CONGRATULATIONS!

LEARN MORE AT WWW.AIE.ORG/8STEPS
Responsibilities. . .Whose Job Is It, Anyway?

STUDENT

We expect that the student will:

• Do the best academic work of which you are capable, freshman through senior year.
• Engage in thoughtful, honest reflection and analysis of your aspirations, hopes, goals, strengths and weaknesses and apply this knowledge of yourself to your advantage in the application process.
• Use Naviance as a tool to engage in post-secondary planning.
  1. Do the research to find and apply to colleges that seem to be a “good fit” for you.
  2. Be aware of and meet the deadlines for admissions, scholarships and college entrance assessments.
• Seek help, if you need it, for completing applications, writing essays and securing recommendations. Please come see Coach O’Neal/Mr. Sturch for any help you need. We are here to help you!

PARENTS/GUARDIANS

We expect that a parent will:

• Log-in to Naviance Family Connection to assist your student in post-secondary planning.
• Encourage your student to explore a variety of options when selecting colleges or universities.
• Participate in college research with your student, especially the campus visit and interview process required by some of the admissions offices.
• Encourage your student to ask questions of financial aid and admissions personnel themselves.
• Allow your student to complete the applications with your support.
• Keep the counseling staff informed of any information that affects post-secondary plans (illness, economic changes, grief issues).
• Attend parent information sessions as often as possible.
COUNSELOR and TRANSITION COORDINATOR

The primary responsibility of your child’s College and Career Coordinator in the college planning process is to help students (and parents) navigate through the maze of the application process and transition into post-secondary study. The College and Career Coordinator are available to:

• Advise students about colleges and programs that might be suitable.
• Guide students through the Naviance system to determine the links between career interests, college choices and high school courses.
• Guide students through the application process including appropriate standardized tests, visits by college representatives and important deadlines for both admissions and scholarships.
• Offer opportunities for assistance with the online application, essay revision, resume critique, interview preparation, etc.
• Write letters of recommendation as requested for college applications and scholarships.
• Provide information on college affordability and the financial aid process.
# Freshman Year

## College & Career Readiness Action Plan

### Summer Before High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Review your 9th grade course selections. Be sure you have considered and selected rigorous courses as appropriate (Pre--AP, AP, ).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complete required summer assignments for Pre--AP, AP, Pre--IB or IB courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attend freshman orientation at your high school.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make it a habit as you travel over the next 4 years to visit colleges in the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Get involved in extracurricular activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Parent(s)/Guardian(s) | Encourage your student to read! Look for books, magazines, newspapers, or blogs your child may enjoy. Reading is the single best way to prepare for college entrance exams! Help your student be involved in extracurricular activities. |

### Fall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Do well in your classes. Your academic record and GPA are cumulative and start on day one of high school!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Become familiar with supports your teachers offer through their websites, tutorials, study groups, etc. Learn to use these supports regularly and seek help when you need it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Get involved in extracurricular activities, clubs and community service. Colleges will want to see your involvement, and it’s never too early to start working toward leadership opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Begin your search for possible careers and colleges using your Naviance account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Start updating your NAVIANCE “My Resume” file to keep track of your community service, extracurricular involvement, honors and awards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take the PSAT in October. On test day, provide an appropriate and professional email address to receive information from colleges.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

- Attend Parent meetings @CHS
- Start thinking about **funding** your student’s college education.

### Spring

#### Student

- Review PSAT results with English and Math teacher as well as your parents. Use your results for future academic planning.
- Check your GPA and class rank after finals. This will be updated at the end of each semester.
- Review your sophomore year course selections. Submit any requested changes to your counselor.
- Get organized. You may begin receiving mail/email from colleges, sometimes as a result of taking the PSAT. Keep the information in a file or digital folder.
- Register and prepare for AP exams if you have taken an AP course this year.

#### Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

- Help your child make summer plans. This is a great opportunity to explore new interests and learn new skills. Colleges will look for students who have seized meaningful summer activities.
# Sophomore Year

## College & Career Readiness Action Plan

### Summer before High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Read, read, read!</strong> Reading is the single--best way to prepare for college entrance exams!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete required summer assignments for Pre--AP, AP classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in meaningful summer opportunities: work, volunteer, job shadow, and/or visit a college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect to the test prep materials offered through the College and Career office at CHS. (free PSAT, SAT, ACT prep and much more).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Fall

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Student</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Update your NAVIANCE “My Resume” file and “Colleges I’m Thinking About”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay involved in extracurricular activities, clubs and community service and start seeking leadership opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take the PSAT in October.</td>
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</table>

### Spring

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<tr>
<th>Student</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review PSAT results with English and Math teacher as well as your parents. Use your PSAT code to access <a href="#">My College QuickStart</a> to get personalized feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revisit your four--year plan and chosen Program of Study. Consider and select rigorous courses as appropriate (Pre--AP, AP, and dual--credit).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore dual credit opportunities through CHS and TAMU-C partnership. Start the enrollment process with your <a href="http://www.applytexas.org">www.applytexas.org</a> / TSI testing if you plan to take classes in the summer or next fall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with your counselor to discuss your academic plan and course selections for junior year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student (continued)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If interested in applying to a <a href="#">U.S. Military Academy</a> as a senior, contact your local Congressional representative to obtain a timeline of application procedures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Parent(s)/Guardian(s)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attend Parent Meeting, Dual credit meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review with your student his/her PSAT scores. Talk about strengths and areas that need attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue talking with your student about their college/career aspirations. Which qualities is he/she looking for in a college? Use NAVIANE “Supermatch” to narrow down options and update “Colleges I’m Thinking About”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage your student to begin self-advocating. Walk your student through conversations with their teachers, coaches, counselors, administrators, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Junior Year
College & Career Readiness Action Plan

### Summer Before Junior Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continue to read, read, read!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete required summer assignments for Pre--AP, AP, courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in meaningful summer opportunities: work, volunteer, job shadow, and/or visit a college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure your junior year course selections are in place. Your junior year will be your last chance to make an impact on your academic record (transcript, GPA, and rank) before applying to college!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Fall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Submit any summer coursework grades to the Registrar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See your counselor if you are on free/reduced lunch for financial assistance associated with college entrance exams and college application fees. ACT &amp; SAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update your NAVIANCE “My Resume” file.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue researching colleges using NAVIANCE college search. Update your “Colleges I’m Thinking About” and “Colleges I’m Applying To” lists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check “Upcoming College Visits” on NAVIANCE and sign up for any colleges of interest; revisit this regularly!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to use your two excused College Visit Days (check with your attendance office for proper procedures). Consider attending special events designed for prospective students at your potential colleges. Demonstrated interest can be a factor in admission decisions!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay involved in extracurricular activities, clubs and community service and seek leadership opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take the PSAT/NMSQT in October. This is the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying exam!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consider taking a full-length practice SAT/ACT before sitting for the real test

Plan your college admission testing timeline, paying close attention to registration deadlines.

Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

- Get the facts about what college costs. Find out how financial aid can make college affordable.
- Research costs associated with the college application process (SAT and ACT registration, college visits, college application fees, etc.)
- Make plans with your student to visit college campuses. Use the campus visit checklist to get the most out of these experiences.

Spring

Student

- Attend the college corner, offered on Wednesdays, in Library.
- Review PSAT results with English & Math teacher as well as your parents. Use your PSAT code to access My College QuickStart to get personalized feedback.
- Consider taking a full-length practice SAT/ACT before sitting for the real test.
- Register to take the SAT and/or ACT. Determine if your potential colleges require SAT Subject Tests and register for those as appropriate. During registration for the SAT or ACT, take advantage of the free score reports, as additional reports are subject to a fee.
- Revisit your four-year plan and chosen Program of Study. Consider and select rigorous courses as appropriate (Pre--AP, AP, & dual--credit). Be mindful of college admission requirements.
- Register and prepare for AP exams if you have taken an AP course this year.
- Start drafting your college application essays.
- Explore summer opportunities such as summer enrichment, work and volunteering.
- Talk with at least one teacher about writing a letter of recommendation for college admissions.
- Start researching scholarship opportunities to be aware of qualifying criteria.
- Register with the NCAA Eligibility Center if necessary (student athletes).
- Visit the College and Career Center to look up additional information on colleges that interest you.
- Plan to attend a college application workshop over the summer at TAMU-C.

Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

- Attend the college corner, offered on Wednesdays, in Library.
- Review PSAT results with English & Math teacher as well as your parents. Use your PSAT code to access My College QuickStart to get personalized feedback.
- Consider taking a full-length practice SAT/ACT before sitting for the real test.
- Research costs associated with the college application process (SAT and ACT registration, college visits, college application fees, etc.)
- Make plans with your student to visit college campuses. Use the campus visit checklist to get the most out of these experiences.
Attend Junior Parent Night/college planning night. Find out what other information meetings are available (ex: financial aid).

Ensure your student is registering for an SAT and ACT.

Senior Year
College & Career Readiness Action Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summer Before Senior Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider who you will ask to write your letters of recommendation, if required. Complete the student brag sheet found in NAVIANCE that teachers and counselors will reference when writing your letter. Remember to give three weeks notice prior to the deadline to ensure a thoughtful, quality letter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review your SAT, ACT, SAT Subject Tests, scores. Consider registering for fall test dates, keeping in mind college application deadlines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend a college application workshop if offered at your school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize your college application timeline; pay special note to application and scholarship deadlines.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Parent(s)/Guardian(s)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourage your student to finalize a college list and begin the application process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete the parent brag sheet found in NAVIANCE that teachers and counselors will reference when writing your student’s recommendation letter. Allow at least three weeks prior to the deadline to ensure a thoughtful, quality letter.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Fall</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit any summer coursework grades to the Registrar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with your counselor and review your transcript for accuracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finalize your college list and update “Colleges I’m Applying To” on NAVIANCE. Pay close attention to admission deadlines (early action, early decision, regular). Create a calendar or timeline to stay on target.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check your college’s scholarship deadlines. They often occur before the application deadline.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Retake the **SAT** and/or **ACT** to improve scores for admission or scholarship requirements.

Register for **SAT Subject tests**, if required for college admission.

Request letters of recommendation as needed. Remember to complete the student brag sheet found in NAVIANCE that teachers and counselors will reference when writing your letter. Give three weeks notice prior to the deadline to ensure a thoughtful, quality letter.

### Student (continued)

- Submit college applications, fees, transcripts, letters of recommendation, resume, etc. as part of the process outlined by each college.
- Visit the Guidance and Counseling Office for support with your college application process.
- Update your college application results in NAVIANCE as they come in.
- Frequently check the NAVIANCE Scholarship List for scholarship opportunities.

### Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

- Attend Senior Parent Night.
- Review the college application timeline your student has created to help them meet the deadlines.
- Offer to look over your student’s college applications. Remember, this is your student’s work, so remain in the role of advisor and proofreader and respect his/her voice.
- Begin preparing for financial aid by applying for your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (**FAFSA**) Personal ID Number (PIN).
- Be prepared to have your tax information ready in early February in order to submit the FAFSA as quickly as possible. Institutional financial aid is awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

### Spring

### Student

- Apply for your FAFSA PIN and complete the **FAFSA** with your parent(s). Consider attending a financial aid workshop for assistance with the application. FAFSA can be used to offer grants, loans, work study and scholarship money. (This is a free application.)
- If there are changes in your academic courses or extracurricular program since your initial application, notify your colleges.
Certain colleges may request a seventh semester transcript; submit requests for these as necessary.

Frequently check the NAVIANCE Scholarship List for scholarship opportunities.

Register and prepare for AP exams if you have taken an AP course this year.

**Student (continued)**

Check deadlines at colleges regarding housing, scholarships, general financial aid, and orientation programs. Request housing and pay deposit, if applicable.

Take ACCUPLACER if needed to meet TSI (college-readiness standards); consult your Transition Coordinator for testing information.

Deliver copies of all scholarship offers and awards to your counselor. This information will be used at the Senior Awards and Recognition Night.

Complete the Senior check-out process with your counselor, including ordering your final transcript

**Parent(s)/Guardian(s)**

Prepare and submit the FAFSA, available January 1st.

Help your student process college responses and make a decision where to attend.

Help your student complete the paperwork to accept a college’s offer of admission, submit tuition deposit, and other required paperwork.

Finalize housing arrangements and pay deposit, if applicable.
Types of Institutions

There are many different types of institutions represented among the more than 4,000 colleges and universities in the United States. Here are the basics on types of colleges:

Public colleges are funded by local and state governments and usually offer lower tuition rates than private colleges, especially for students who are residents of the state where a college is located.

Private colleges rely mainly on tuition, fees and private sources of funding. Private donations can sometimes provide generous financial aid packages for students.

For-Profit colleges are businesses that offer a variety of degree programs which typically prepare students for a specific career. They tend to have higher costs, which could mean graduating with more debt. Credits earned may not transfer to other colleges, so be sure to check with the admission office at each college.

Four-Year colleges offer four-year programs that lead to a bachelor's degree. These include universities and liberal arts colleges.

Two-Year colleges offer programs that last up to two years that lead to a certificate or an associate degree. These include community colleges, vocational-technical colleges and career colleges.

Liberal Arts colleges offer a broad base of courses in the liberal arts, which includes areas such as literature, history, languages, mathematics and life sciences. Most are private and offer four-year programs that lead to a bachelor’s degree. These colleges can prepare you for a variety of careers or for graduate study.

Universities often are larger and offer more majors and degree options—bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees—than colleges. Most universities contain several smaller colleges, such as colleges of liberal arts, engineering or health sciences. These colleges can prepare you for a variety of careers or for graduate study.

Community Colleges offer two-year associate degrees that prepare you to transfer to a four-year college to earn a bachelor's degree. They also offer other associate degrees and certificates that focus on preparing you for a certain career. Community colleges are often an affordable option with relatively low tuition.
**Vocational-Technical and Career Colleges** offer specialized training in a particular industry or career. Possible programs of study include the culinary arts, firefighting, dental hygiene and medical--records technology. These colleges usually offer certificates or associate degrees.

**Colleges with a Special Focus:**

- Arts colleges
- Single-sex colleges
- Religiously affiliated colleges
- Specialized-mission colleges

**Military Service Academies**

**United States Merchant Marine Academy**
ATTN: Public Affairs Officer

**United States Coast Guard Academy**

**United States Military Academy**
ATTN: Public Affairs Office Taylor Hall, Bldg. 600

West Point, NY
10996--1788
(845)938--2006

**United States Naval Academy**
ATTN: Public Affairs Officer 121
Blake Road

Annapolis, MD
21402--5000
(410)267--2291

**United States Air Force Academy**
ATTN: Public Affairs Officer 2304 Cadet Drive, Suite 320
How to Choose a College

There are ways for parents and students to be good college shoppers. Students need to know the right questions to ask of themselves and of the colleges. The following questions and considerations are important:

- **ASK YOURSELF**
  - What am I passionate about?
  - How do I spend my time?
  - How do I learn best?
  - What are my friends like?
  - Who do I want to be in the future?

- **DECIDE WHAT MATTERS**
  Some people care about sports and dorms; others care about what they want to major in. Look at your answers to the questions in Step 1. What do they say about you and what you might like in a college?

- **CHECK OUT OPTIONS**
  - What am I passionate about?
  - How do I spend my time?
  - How do I learn best?
  - What are my friends like?
  - Who do I want to be in the future?
Common Errors Made by Parents and Students When Selecting a College

Adapted from *Playing the Selective College Admissions Game* by Richard Moll

**Assume that the most expensive and selective colleges are best.**
College selection is a consumer activity in a buyer’s market. There are bargains in quality schools. The “best school” is really a relative expression; any school can be best for a particular student. No school is best for everyone. Schools should be selected in terms of a student’s interests and needs, NOT for prestige.

**Leave college selection entirely in the student’s hands.**
Students and parents each have a responsibility in this choice; each must define an appropriate role and discuss concerns and interests with the other. Parents influence the choice even when they encourage their children toward independent responsible decisions. The parent who remains silently and passively in the background is doing the student a disservice.

**Believe that college choice is an irrevocable career choice—where you begin college will determine your entire professional life.**
Many students today transfer during their undergraduate years; many adults do not choose their careers based on their undergraduate course of study. Choosing a college is just that; it is an important decision BUT certainly not one that can determine your entire future.

**Choose a college only because of its academic record.**
Most students don’t! They want athletic opportunities, social life, a stable environment, lots of activities and fun. These are important additional reasons for choosing or rejecting a college.

**Consider the local college only if you can’t get into better places.**
Public colleges today offer some of the best bargains in education. Faculty, program, and quality of life can be better than at private schools. Just because a school is close to home, it should not be overlooked.

**Don’t apply for financial aid.**
Families should not assume that they wouldn’t qualify for money. The great majority of students enrolled in four–year undergraduate programs receive financial aid. Some scholarships are awarded through the financial aid packet at the college.

**Assume Liberal Arts are a dead end and will not help you get a job.**
Most employers want students who can think critically and express themselves clearly and articulately. A liberal arts education will help you secure a job, assume advancement in a career and prepare you for graduate school.
Wait for the last minute to make college plans. The process of college selection takes many months. The more time you allow yourself, the more likely your ultimate decision will be based on fact and a thoughtful evaluation of your needs and interests.

What Colleges Look for in an Applicant

Each year colleges build a new freshmen class. This means they are looking for students with good credentials and will contribute to making the college a more interesting and diverse place. What do you bring to the table?

Proven Academic Achievement
The most important factor in the college admissions decisions is your academic transcript. Colleges are looking for strong grades in an academically challenging program.

Specifically, they will be looking at the types of courses you have taken, the number of courses, the level of courses and the grades you earned. Did you take the most challenging academic program that you are capable of handling? How did you perform in the courses you have taken?

Standardized Test Scores
The amount of weight placed on standardized test scores in the admissions process varies from college to college. Standardized scores provide colleges with a measure to compare students from different schools. As a general rule, the more selective the college the more important test scores are due to the rigorous and academically challenging programs offered at selective institutions. It’s important to remember that standardized test scores are only one of many factors that college admissions officers consider when evaluating an application. You must send your scores directly from the testing agency to the college to which you are applying. We recommend taking both the SAT and ACT tests. Colleges always choose the score that works in your favor.

Extracurricular Involvement/Work Experience
Here the emphasis is on quality rather than quantity. College admissions officers are not interested in a list of ten activities with little time commitment and involvement. Admissions officers are looking for those students who have invested their time, energy and commitment to pursuing one or two activities in-depth. In short, admissions officers are looking for those individuals who will make a genuine commitment/contribution to their college community.

Application
The content of the application will reflect a great deal about you. It is very important that you invest time and thought into each application, as some schools have the application double as a scholarship application.

Essays
This is the part of the application that students often rush to complete. The essay is a critical factor in the admissions decision, and it is entirely under your control. Take the time to think about and write an essay that demonstrates your writing ability and makes your application
“come alive.” The essay is your golden opportunity to let them know more about you, your values and your goals. All English 3 teachers have students write one college essay in the spring semester.

**Interview**
Some colleges require or recommend an interview while others do not. For some schools, the interview is provided solely to inform you about the college and provide you with an opportunity to ask questions. For other schools, the interview provides admissions officers with additional information about you and your future goals. Depending on the school, this information may or may not be used during the application decision-making process.

**School Recommendations**
The school recommendation is written by the student’s counselor. As your primary advocate, the counselor attempts to present an assessment that is fair and accurate and that emphasizes personal qualities. The purpose of this comprehensive letter is to provide information that is not included elsewhere in the application. All recommendations remain confidential to ensure integrity. Students may choose which counselor writes their school letter of recommendation depending on the relationships that have been developed over the past three years.

**Teacher Recommendations**
Most state universities do not request teacher recommendations. Each college has its own specific requirements for teacher recommendations, but when requested, two are usually required. Some colleges are very specific and ask for recommendations from teachers in certain disciplines. The teachers you choose to write your recommendations should be from your junior and/or senior year courses and should be able to speak to your abilities and accomplishments in the academic setting.

**Outside Recommendations**
These recommendations can sometimes be helpful if they speak to an aspect of your life not otherwise related in the application. Feel free to use the school forms for outside recommendations.

**Automatic/Guaranteed Admission**
Even if your academic record guarantees your admission to your chosen university, it is imperative that you complete all steps in the application process. The application and essay may be used for scholarship consideration, honors college selection, and determining your major.
College Entrance and “For Credit” Testing

TIP: A limited number of fee waivers are available for students who receive free/reduced lunch. See your counselor or the College and Career Center for more information.

Testing opportunities for potential college credit and/or placement
Students may explore testing opportunities while in high school and/or after college enrollment. Some institutions offer departmental exams in addition to the exams listed below. AP, CLEP, IB, ACT, SAT, SAT Subject Tests (SAT II) and other institutional developed credit and/or placement exams -- using the AP search engine, type in your school name. Select the link in the titled: “AP Credit and Placement Policy on the Web.” There you will find the institution’s testing policies.

AP (Advanced Placement)
The Advanced Placement program is administered in specific content areas. The curriculum is college level and gives students the opportunity to challenge themselves in a specific area, i.e. American History or English Literature. National tests in the content areas are administered in the spring and while the exams are not for college entrance, qualifying results on the exams can result in receiving college credit. These tests are scored from 1--5. Each college awards credit differently so do not assume you will receive credit the same way from every institution.. Students will receive exam registration information from their AP teacher(s) in January.

PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test)
The PSAT is a multiple--choice test that measures verbal and mathematical reasoning abilities important in doing college work. It is designed for college--bound students in 11th grade and is given once a year in October. The PSAT is administered to every 11th grade student in CHS, free of charge. The test is useful in the following ways:

1. Provides excellent practice for taking the SAT (this test is similar to the SAT)
2. Indicates the student’s academic strengths and weaknesses
3. Provides useful feedback for planning the student’s high school and college course of study
4. Via “My College Quick Start” provides valuable feedback on content knowledge
5. The 11th grade PSAT is used for qualification for the National Merit Scholarship Competition.
6. For 9th and 10th graders the PSAT is an indicator to consider when choosing high school courses.
7. Students gain knowledge of tested areas that can be strengthened prior to the SAT or ACT.

The PSAT date for this year is: **Wednesday, October 19, 2016**

**COLLEGE ADMISSIONS TESTS**

1. **ACT**
2. **SAT**

After receiving PSAT scores in December, 11th grade students will register for the SAT or ACT.

**ACT Testing Calendar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Date</th>
<th>Registration Deadline</th>
<th>(Late Fee Required)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 10, 2016</td>
<td>August 5, 2016</td>
<td>August 6-9, 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 22, 2016</td>
<td>September 16, 2016</td>
<td>September 17-30, 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 10, 2016</td>
<td>November 4, 2016</td>
<td>November 5-18, 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 11, 2017</td>
<td>January 6, 2017</td>
<td>January 7-20, 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 8, 2017</td>
<td>March 3, 2017</td>
<td>March 4-17, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 10, 2017</td>
<td>May 5, 2017</td>
<td>May 6-19, 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ACT**
The ACT is an assessment accepted by 100 percent of four-year colleges and universities as one measure to determine admission and predict success in a college student. Questions in English, mathematics (through trigonometry), reading comprehension and science reasoning are given in a multiple-choice format. Scores are reported free of charge to a maximum of four colleges the student has selected if identified at the time of application. Students generally take the ACT in the spring of their junior year and then again during the fall of their senior year if a better score is desired. Always choose the ACT plus writing section.

**SAT Reasoning Test**
The SAT is used for admission consideration by 100 percent of four-year colleges and universities in the United States. Canadian and European schools, as well as universities in other countries, often also require the SAT for students graduating from a high school with an American diploma. SAT scores provide colleges with a way to compare the academic preparation and ability of students who apply for admission. The SAT measures the verbal and mathematical reasoning skills the student has developed over many years, both in and out of school. In general, it is recommended that the SAT be taken in the spring of the junior year and repeated in the fall of the senior year if needed.

**SAT Testing Calendar**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Test Date</th>
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<tr>
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<td>September 2, 2016</td>
<td>September 16, 2016</td>
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<td>November 5, 2016</td>
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<td>December 3, 2016</td>
<td>November 4, 2016</td>
<td>November 18, 2016</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
SAT Subject Tests

The SAT Subject Tests are one-hour, multiple choice tests in specific subjects. Unlike the SAT that measures more general abilities, SAT Subject Tests measure knowledge of particular subjects and the ability to apply that knowledge. Some colleges require SAT Subject Tests for admission or placement purposes. Some require various combinations of tests; others permit students to choose. If the college the student has chosen requires that one or more SAT Subject Test be taken, then the student needs to plan carefully to take the test as soon as possible after completing the course in that subject, while the material is still fresh in his/her mind. The student must determine which tests are required at the university to which he/she is applying. Note that some SAT Subject Tests are only given on certain dates; for example, Hebrew is only given once a year in June. The subject tests currently fall into five general subject areas including:

- **English**: Literature and Language Proficiency
- **History and Social Studies**: American History, Social Studies and World History
- **Mathematics**: Mathematics, Biology E/M, Chemistry and Physics
- **Foreign Languages**: French, German, Modern Hebrew, Italian, Latin and Spanish

SAT Subject exams vary in price based on the subject.
Terms You Should Know

Early Decision – a program in which a student receives early notification of a college admission decision.
The student must agree in advance to enroll in the college if he/she is accepted. This is called a “binding” agreement. Students may apply early decision to only one college; it should be a clear first choice. Application deadlines for early decisions are usually in November, with decision letters mailed by mid-December. Students who are contemplating applying under the early decision plan should take all their admission tests (ACT, SAT I, SAT SUBJECT TESTS, TOEFL) by the end of their junior year.

Early Action – a program that gives students early notification of a college’s admission decision
Unlike early decision, the early action plan does not require a prior commitment to enroll if accepted. Students may apply to more than one school under the early action plan. An applicant accepted under early action usually has until May, the national candidate’s reply date, to respond to the offer of admission.

Single-Choice Early Action -- is a new option offered by a few colleges
This plan works the same way as other early action plans, but candidates may not apply early (either early action or early decision) to any other college. Your child can still apply to other colleges under regular decision plans and is not required to give a final answer to the early- -- application college until the regular decision deadline.

Rolling Admissions – a policy in which a college considers applications almost immediately after receiving them
Decision letters are mailed within a few weeks after the application is filed. Colleges with rolling admissions continue to accept applications only until the class is filled, so it is best to apply early.

Open Admission – a policy in which any applicant with a high school diploma is accepted
At state universities that have this policy, open admission is usually limited to state residents. All community colleges have open admission.

Waiting List – (also called Wait Listed) a list of students who are not initially accepted but who may be later, depending on the number of accepted students who enroll
Most colleges ultimately accept only a fraction of the students on the waiting list. Students are notified during the summer, if not sooner.

Deferred – Early Action Student the admissions office wants to reconsider with remaining applications
Many schools have a limit set for the students they can/will admit from the early application pool. Deferral means you will likely have another review of your file.
Tips for the Application Process

**TIP:** Save and safeguard your log-in information for your application and specific college accounts.

**TIP:** Fee waivers that are used for SAT/ACT test may be used to waive the college application fee.

The [Apply Texas Application](www.applytexas.org):

- Used for all in state schools in Texas and some private schools.
- This application DOES NOT require teacher or counselor recommendations. A Secondary School Report is not required either. The ONLY reason a state institution wants additional documents is if the student is in need of support for their application for admission. If you do not meet automatic admission standards, you may want to consider requesting recommendations from teachers or your counselor.

[Common Application](http://www.commonapp.org)

Go to the college webpage you are interested in, and apply through them directly.

Essay Writing

Not all colleges and universities require a personal essay. However, those that do are looking at two things:

1. How well you write.
2. Who you are as a person.

Give yourself time to think about what you want to portray about yourself. An essay is your opportunity to talk about how you’ve grown from your experiences.

**Top Ten Tips for Writing a College Essay**

1. **Start early.** The more time you have, the less stress you’ll have. And you’ll have plenty of time to give the essay your best effort.
2. **Be yourself.** Take a moment to think about what interests you, what you love to talk about, what makes you sit up and take notice if it's mentioned in class or on TV. Then write about it.

One of the biggest mistakes students make is "writing what they think others want to hear, rather than about an issue, event, or person that really had significance for them," says Richard M. Fuller, dean of admission and financial aid at Hamilton College (NY). An essay like that is not just boring to write—it's boring to read.

3. **Be honest.** You're running late (see #1), you can't think of what to write—and someone e-mails you a heartwarming story. With just a tweak here and there, it could be a great essay, you think. It's what you would have written if you'd just had enough time.

Don't be fooled! College admission officers have read hundreds—even thousands—of essays. They are masters at discovering any form of plagiarism. Adapting an e-mail story, buying an essay from some Internet site, getting someone else to write your essay—admission people have seen it all.

Don't risk your college career by taking the easy way out.

4. **Take a risk.** On the other hand, some risks can pay off. Don't settle for the essay that everyone else is writing. Imagine an admission officer up late, reading the fiftieth essay of the day—yours. Do you want that person to nod off because he or she has already read ten essays on that topic?

"The danger lies not in writing bad essays but in writing common essays—the one that admission officers are going to read dozens of," says Scott Anderson, associate director of college counseling at Mercersburg Academy (PA). "My advice? Ask your friends what they are writing—and then don't write about that!"

5. **Keep in focus.** This is your chance to tell admission officers exactly why they should admit you. Unfortunately, some students try to list every single reason—their stellar academic record, their athletic prowess, their community service—all in a page or two. When that happens, the essay looks like a grocery list.

Instead, read the essay question carefully and jot down a few ideas. Then choose the one that looks like the most fun to write about. Stick to that main theme throughout the essay. You don't have to list all your achievements—that's what the rest of the application is for. Use the essay to help the admission officers get to know you as a person.

6. **Write and rewrite.** Don't try to write a masterpiece on your first try. It's not possible—and all that pressure is likely to give you writer's block. For your first draft, write anything that comes to mind about your topic. Don't worry too much about grammar or spelling. Just get it down on paper (or computer screen). Then let it "rest" for a few hours or a few days.

When you come back to the draft, look for ways to make it more focused and better written. Some people are "fat" writers: they write long, wordy first drafts that need to be shortened later. Others are "skinny" writers: they write short and simple first drafts and then need to add details or examples to "flesh out" the skeleton. Either way, don't be afraid to make major changes at this stage. Are there details that don't really relate to the topic? Cut them. Do you need another example? Put it in.

Here are two other things to try:
o Remove the introductory and concluding paragraphs, and then see if your essay seems stronger. These paragraphs are often the most likely to have unnecessary detail.

o Go through the essay and cut out every "very" and every "many." Words like these are vague, and your writing is often stronger without them.

7. **Get a second opinion.** Even best-selling novelists ask other people to read their manuscripts before they’re sent to the publisher. When you’ve rewritten the essay to your satisfaction, find someone who can give you advice on how to make it even better. Choose a person you respect and who knows something about writing—a favorite English teacher, a parent, a friend who writes for the school paper. Ask them to tell you what they like best about your essay—and what you can do to improve it.

Criticism of your writing can be tough to hear, but try to listen with an open mind. You don’t have to make every change suggested—after all, it’s your essay and no one else’s—but you should seriously consider each suggestion.

8. **Proofread.** Finally, you’re ready to send your essay. Not so fast! Read it over one more time, looking for those little errors that can creep in as you write or edit. If you’re using a computer, also run a spell check.

Sometimes, it can be difficult to catch minor typos—you’ve read the essay so many times that you see what should be there rather than what is there. To make sure you catch everything, try reading your essay out loud or having someone else read it out loud to you. Another strategy is to read the essay backward, from the last sentence to the first. That makes it just unfamiliar enough for errors to stand out.

9. **Don’t confuse applying online with sending e-mail.** Applying online is just as serious as applying "the old-fashioned way." It may feel like you’re sending e-mail, but you’re not.

"One thing I’ve often seen is that students who apply online submit sub-par essays," says Palmer Muntz, director of admission at Oregon Institute of Technology. He has found that essays submitted online tend to be much shorter than those submitted on paper. In addition, students often use e-mail language—no capitalization, or abbreviations such as BTW or "thanx"—which are not appropriate to a formal document. Make sure that you put as much effort into an online essay as you would if you were sending it snail mail.

10. **Don’t expect too much from an essay.** The application essay is important, but it’s not the only thing that is considered. "Can [the essay] make a difference in getting the ‘thin versus thick’ envelope? Absolutely," says Fuller. "But that is the exception rather than the rule."

That’s because admission officers look at the whole package—your academics, extracurricular activities, standardized tests, and other factors. A great essay rarely makes up for a weak academic record. On the other hand, a mediocre essay won’t necessarily consign your application to the "deny" list. So make your essay as well-written as you can, but don’t put so much pressure on yourself that the rest of the application fades in importance.

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**Tips for Campus Visits**

Juniors and Seniors are allowed two college visits during the school year. With the proper documentation, these visits are considered excused absences. Students must turn in proof of
their visit to the attendance office to ensure their absence is excused. Please see your attendance office for details at least one week prior to your visit per the CISD student handbook.

Junior and senior years are the best times for students to visit colleges. Spring or summer vacation is a good time for juniors to begin the process. Here are some tips to help you in your planning.

- Try to visit when the college is in session.
- Call an admissions office at least a couple of weeks prior to your visit and inquire about campus tours and the advisability of scheduling an interview, particularly if you plan to apply or have a special department that interests you.

A campus visit provides you with the opportunity to find a college that is a good academic and personal “fit.” Ideally, visits should be arranged to allow you the opportunity to attend some classes and spend a night in the residence hall. Give yourself time to explore the campus, and visit the cafeteria, library and bookstore. Talk to students, and try to make an appointment with a faculty member in your area of interest. Don’t hesitate to ask questions; you are the consumer!

Keep a log of your visits, writing down your impressions of the college immediately after your visit. Be sure to write a thank you note to the admissions office.

**What can you learn?**

A visit enables you to evaluate more completely the environment and atmosphere of the particular college. Your visit is your chance to ask questions. For a list of questions, reference the next section “Questions to Consider about Colleges.”

**Questions to Consider about Colleges**

Review the following questions and choose those factors that are most important to you and will help refine your college list.

**Admissions**

- What standardized tests are required for admission to this school (SAT I, SAT SUBJECT TESTS, ACT)?

- When is the admissions deadline?

- What percentage of applicants was accepted last year?

- What is the average rank/grade point of currently enrolled freshmen?

- What were the average SAT, ACT test scores for last year’s freshman class?
• How selective are the admission standards at this institution?
• What is the recommended high school academic preparation program for this school?
• Does this school require letters of recommendation?
• Does this school require a personal essay?
• Does this school offer Early Decision/Action admissions?
• When and how are students notified of admission decisions?

Academics
• Does this college have the major/programs I am interested in?
• What is the reputation of the department or major I am interested in?
• What is the student/faculty ratio for undergraduate courses?
• How many courses do most undergraduate students take each term?
• Who teaches introductory courses -- faculty members or teaching assistants?
• What is the average class size of freshmen introductory courses?
• What is the format of the school calendar (semester, trimester, quarter)?
• Is there an honors program?
• Does this school offer a cooperative education program?
• Are there exchange programs with other colleges?
• What opportunities are there to study abroad?
• Are internships available in my field?
• What percentage of students is accepted into the graduate program of their choice?

Student Body
• What is the size of the freshman class?
• What is the total enrollment for this school?
• How diverse is the student body?

Student Services and Programs
• Will I be assigned an academic counselor or a faculty advisor to help me choose my courses?

• Is there a career counseling center for help with resume writing, interviewing and job placement?

• Is there a personal counseling center available?

• Will I have access to health care on campus?

**Student Life**

• What types of activities are offered for students outside of the classroom?

• Are intramural sports available?

• What percentage of students lives on campus, and what percentage commutes?

• Do most students stay on campus for the weekend?

• How prevalent are fraternities and sororities?

• What is the campus crime rate?

• Can I have a car on campus?

• How do students get to and around campus? (public transportation, bikes, parking availability)

• What is the campus honor code?

**Housing and Dining Facilities**

• Are the dorms co-ed or single sex?

• Are apartments available for off-campus housing?

• Will dorms be available after my freshman year?

• How close are the dorms to the classrooms and dining facilities?

• Are there any “special” dorms available (languages, honors, international, major specific, etc.)?

• Are most freshmen dorm rooms single, doubles, triples or quads?

• How are roommates assigned?

• Are there a variety of food plans available?
Campus Facilities

- What resources and services are provided by the library?
- What academic support does the college offer (tutoring, disability support, writing center)?
- What recreation and sport facilities (gyms, tracks, pools, etc.) are available?
- How accessible are the computer labs?

Cost and Financial Aid

- What is the total cost to attend this college/university (tuition, room and board, books and supplies, travel expenses and living expenses)?
- Are there any special fees for my particular program or major (lab fees, material cost, etc.)?
- Does this school offer scholarships?
- Are there opportunities to find on–campus jobs?
- Does this school offer tuition payment options?

Tips for Admission & Scholarship Interviews

These suggestions will help:

- Try to relax and be as poised as possible. Be genuine and honest.
- Stay positive about your current school and your experiences.
- Be prepared to discuss your own interests and plans: the reason you chose the college, your leisure time activities, the sort of reading that interests you, the size and character of the school from which you come. Be prepared with some examples of good experiences and challenging experiences.
- Maintain a professional demeanor throughout the entire interview.
- Do your homework! Ask intelligent questions. Do not waste time asking questions that could have been answered by careful reading of the college website or brochures.
- Take a copy of your resume and a current transcript with you if possible.
- It may help to practice with someone, in front of a mirror, or just out loud.
- Get the name of your interviewer so you can continue corresponding with him/her.
Possible questions you may be asked:

- Why do you want to go to college? Why are you interested in this college?
- What is unique about you?
- What is your greatest strength as a person and as a student?
- What significant events have occurred in your life thus far?
- Tell me about an assignment you are particularly proud of.
- What have you contributed to your high school community?
- What can you offer our college community?
- Do you have any questions? Always have questions prepared.

**Financial Aid Information**

Financial aid forms are available annually online. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/) should be filed as soon as possible after January 1 each year, as students must meet individual school deadlines in order to receive certain types of funding (loans, grants, and scholarships). The CSS PROFILE form (used by many private colleges and universities to award their own private funds) can be submitted electronically as early as mid-September. The CSS is a College Board product that requires a fee to file.

Aid from most of the major federal programs is awarded on the basis of financial need. When you apply for federal student aid, the information you report is used in a formula, established by the U.S. Congress that calculates your Expected Family Contribution (EFC), an amount you and your family are expected to contribute toward your education. Your EFC is used in an equation to determine your financial need as follows:

\[
\text{Cost of College Attendance} - \text{Expected Family Contribution} = \text{Financial Need}
\]

There are basically three types of federal financial aid:

1. Grants: monies that are not paid back and work much like scholarships.
2. Work Study Program: jobs for students that allow them to help meet educational expenses. Work Study funds are not calculated against them when applying for future aid.
3. Loans: monies that are paid back with interest.
TIP: The Financial Aid Office at the specific university you plan to attend is probably your best resource for your financial aid questions.

Scholarship Information

- Use your Naviance Account for your best Scholarship Search Tool! Log-in to your Naviance Portal, click the “college” tab, then select the National Scholarship Search link. You will be searching a scholarship database via Sallie Mae.

- Be aware of the scholarship deadlines at the colleges to which you are applying. Know the scholarship application process. Some deadlines are as early as December 1st.

- Once you have been accepted, research further scholarship opportunities available from each college.

Tips for Searching:

1. When is the deadline? Has it already passed?
2. Do I qualify? Am I the candidate they are looking for?

3. Am I willing to fulfill the requirements to apply? (Spending an hour on an essay can pay-off in a big way!)

4. Am I willing to fulfill any additional obligations if awarded the scholarship? (minimum GPA, social appearances, minimum credit hours.)

Commerce High School awards around $800,000.00 in local scholarships every May. Please be aware of the packets we give you in the college corner to fill out, the week before Spring Break. These local givers look at gpa and extracurricular activities.
The College-Bound Athlete

The best general information for any student wishing to participate in collegiate athletics can be found at the internet site [www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org). The NCAA is the governing body for all collegiate athletics. You will find the most current regulations regarding academic core requirements, financial assistance and scholarships, and applications on their website. The NCAA requires all prospective athletes to apply online through the Eligibility Center.

The following information is general but provides a guideline for you. To be certified by the [NCAA Eligibility Center](http://www.eligibilitycenter.org), you must:

- Graduate from high school.
- Register with NCAA your junior year.
- Submit a transcript showing six semesters of academic work.
- Submit ACT and/or SAT scores.
- Earn a grade point average that meets the index requirements for either Division I or Division II schools and matches your assessment scores.

The new rules governing core courses are detailed on the [Eligibility Center](http://www.eligibilitycenter.org) website. Students who graduate on the Recommended Plan or Distinguished Achievement Program should meet the requirements.

Applying for Athletic Grants and Scholarships

Collegiate institutions and athletic associations have regulations that affect the recruiting and college eligibility of prospective student athletes. This includes the awarding of financial aid. Traditionally, these grants are offered by college coaches. Aid may be awarded in one of the following ways:

- Full or partial tuition waivers.
- Waiving out-of-state tuition surcharge.
- Campus-based employment.
- Full NCAA or NAIA grant that includes tuition, room, board, books and fees.
- Partial NCAA or NAIA grant.

When you apply for aid, you should:

- Talk to your coach and make sure he/she knows your intent to play collegiate athletics.
• Request a letter of recommendation from your coach.

• Send a letter to the college coach outlining your high school athletic achievements and your college athletic intentions.

• Make a video highlighting your play.

• Maintain good statistics about your play.

• Register with the NCAA Eligibility Center before your senior year.

• Talk with your counselor to make sure you have the required credits in the required classes.

• Maintain a file of all correspondence with college coaches.

• Update sports participation (amateurism) information often, especially if you participate in events outside the normal high school season.

When you visit campuses, include a visit with the coaches and athletes. By talking with other athletes, you will be able to construct a clear picture of what your life might be like as a college athlete. Your decision to accept an offer is personal and should be made carefully with your parents/guardians.