

PROVIDENCE



College Planning Guide 2025-2026

Junior and senior years of high school require decisions to be made that will likely be among the most important of your lifetime. Among these decisions is the formation of a post-secondary plan. The choices that you make NOW will often impact other life choices so you should be very thoughtful and strategic about this decision.

We recognize that each student begins the college planning process with different goals and at different places and we hope to meet each of you where you are to best encourage and guide you. We expect YOU to take the leap into self-discovery to identify the right path for you, and you can expect US to support and encourage you along the way.

This packet will provide you with resources designed to help you stay focused, on track, and prepared throughout the college application process. You are bound to have questions that may not be covered in this guide that are more specific to you and your future plans. Be your best self-advocate and seek out assistance from the people in your life who can help.

One of the major functions of the PHS Guidance Office is to help prepare students for the transition from high school into their post-secondary choice. For the majority of PHS students, that transition is to a two or four-year college or university, but for some the next step takes them to a career or technical school, the military, or into the work force. We do our best to work with all students to help create an individualized plan that makes sense for that student based on his or her long-term goals.

All the work we do with students, including selecting appropriate courses, preparing for standardized tests, providing opportunities to do personality and career inventories, and meeting individually with them, is part of the process of working toward that goal. This manual seeks to provide detailed information on the things that students need to understand and do to prepare for the transition out of high school, the resources that are available to them as they walk down that path, and the ways in which we support them through that process.

Working with students to set personal college and career goals is one of the most rewarding things we get to do as counselors. We look forward to supporting our students through this exciting process and are always available to answer specific questions from students and parents on their journey at Our Lady of Providence High School.

Our Lady of Providence High School Guidance Department

Administrative Assistant

Amy Delaney

adelaney@providencehigh.net

Freshman/Sophomore Counselor

Jaimie McRae

jmcrae@providencehigh.net

Junior/Senior Counselor

Travis Gabehart

tgabehart@providencehigh.net

Learning Differences Coordinator

Leah Crone

lcrone@providencehigh.net

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Factors in Admission Decisions

There is no definite plan or specific combination of factors that will guarantee a student admission to their preferred institution. Colleges and universities review many aspects of prospective student applications in order to determine which students will be admitted. In addition to considering the merits of each applicant, most universities also consider the composition of the entering class as a whole in order to ensure that a diverse group of students with a variety of academic and extracurricular interests will enrich the campus experience. Institutional characteristics, such as enrollment size and acceptance rate, also impact the importance of admission factors.

TABLE 7. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2017

Factor	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
Grades in All Courses	220	74.5	15.0	5.5	5.0
Grades in College Prep Courses	220	73.2	16.8	5.9	4.1
Strength of Curriculum	219	62.1	21.9	8.7	7.3
Admission Test Scores (SAT, ACT)	221	45.7	37.1	12.2	5.0
Essay or Writing Sample	220	23.2	33.2	24.1	19.5
Student's Demonstrated Interest	218	16.1	23.9	28.0	32.1
Counselor Recommendation	218	15.1	40.4	26.6	17.9
Teacher Recommendation	219	14.2	40.2	26.5	19.2
Class Rank	220	9.1	29.1	34.1	27.7
Extracurricular Activities	219	6.4	42.9	32.0	18.7
Portfolio	219	6.4	11.9	26.9	54.8
Subject Test Scores (AP, IB)	219	5.5	18.3	35.2	41.1
Interview	219	5.5	16.4	28.3	49.8
Work	217	4.1	28.6	36.9	30.4
State Graduation Exam Scores	218	2.3	8.7	18.8	70.2
SAT II Scores	216	1.9	5.6	14.8	77.8

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2018–19.

JUNIOR YEAR TIMELINE

Fall/Winter

- Utilize online college search tools (i.e. <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search>)
- Meet with college reps visiting PHS.
- Attend national, regional, and local college fairs.

Spring

- Begin visiting college campuses
- Work hard on your studies—your grades from junior year are the last full picture of your academic work that admission representatives will see. Be sure you finish STRONG!
- Decide what teachers you would like to write your recommendation letters and ask them if they can do that for you BEFORE you depart for the summer.
- Register for and sit for either the SAT or ACT examination.
 - PHS CEEB Code: 150540
 - SAT: Register online at www.collegeboard.org
 - ACT: Register online at www.actstudent.org
- If you hope to play Division I or Division II College Athletics, you should create your account with the clearinghouse to start the process of determining your eligibility. There are minimum GPA and test score requirements for both Division I and Division II which will be covered at greater length later in this packet.
 - NCAA Clearinghouse website: www.ncaa.org

Summer

- Keep visiting college campuses.
- Narrow your list of potential college choices.
- Begin to research scholarship opportunities.
- Make a Common Application account on commonapp.org. The application should be available for submission August 1.

SUMMERTIME TO-DO LIST

Best activities to engage in during the summer before Senior year:

1. Narrow down colleges - Selecting a college is likely one of the biggest decisions you will have to make in the next year. By the time you return to PHS, you should have narrowed down your list of realistic prospective colleges.
2. Consider a change in testing strategy - Perhaps you didn't do as well you would have liked on the spring SAT or ACT? Summer is the time to take a practice (or official) tests and switch gears if needed. There will be at least one rainy/gloomy/too-hot-to-go-outside day in every summer vacation.
3. Visit some of the colleges on your list - Summer is a good time to make some visits to the schools you may be interested in to help you narrow down your list and visiting college campuses should be a part of your summer plans.
4. Get a JOB - Gaining valuable work experience contributes to your overall experience in many ways, helping to save money, learning about responsibility and time management, building upon your resume, and demonstrating a strong work ethic to admission counselors. Employment of any kind is good, but working in a leadership position, an academic area, or in a job related to what you hope to major in would be ideal.
5. Volunteer - Community service is an excellent way to demonstrate valuable work and leadership experience. Nonprofits are always looking for volunteers, so it shouldn't be difficult to find a volunteer organization near you that could use an extra pair of hands for a few hours a week during the summer. Maximize the potential impact by choosing a field that is related to what you are interested in Majoring in when you get to college. For example - are you interested in medical school? Volunteer at a Hospital. Are you interested in Education? Volunteer at a Library. Are you interested in Politics? Volunteer for a local congressman/woman.
6. Summer Enrichment - Consider an academic program at a local university to keep your mind sharp!
7. Polish up your College Essay - Become familiar with the essays that you will be asked to write as each colleges admission process and start working on them! Take advantage of the opportunity to express your individuality. The essay should help the reader understand who you are and what's important to you and fill in the blanks between the data: GPA, test scores, extracurricular activities, and letters of recommendation. Tell YOUR story! Colleges look for students who are dedicated to academics but they want to build a well-rounded incoming freshman class. Admission officers look for those who demonstrate interesting and diverse qualities, not just those who spend 100 percent of their time studying. Colleges need and want students who are committed to activities that they are passionate about. The summer creates opportunities for students to demonstrate this quality, whether it's in a structured summer program for teenagers, or individually. The last thing you want to communicate is that you are lazy, spending two months on the couch watching television and playing video games. Colleges don't offer admission to unmotivated students but to those who are strong academically and demonstrate a commitment to activities outside the classroom. Summer is the best time to show colleges that YOU are more than your GPA or your ACT/SAT score.

SENIOR YEAR TIMELINE

August/September

- Use a planner to keep track of college-related dates (A tracking worksheet is available in the back of this guide as a resource)
- Meet with your guidance counselor to finalize your list of colleges.
- Request letters of recommendation from teachers if you didn't ask before summer break (3-4 week notice).
- Review the list of college reps visiting PHS on Google Classroom.
- Register for the fall SAT or ACT if you would like to improve your scores.
 - PHS CEEB Code: 150540
 - SAT: Register online at www.collegeboard.org
 - ACT: Register online at www.actstudent.org
- Begin to fill out admissions applications.
 - College/University's main website
 - Common App
- Continue to work on your application essays.
- Attend college fairs in your area (check NACAC fairs and local offerings).

October/November

- File the FAFSA and CSS (if applicable) starting October 1st .
- Check all application deadlines and submit your materials on time.
- Request transcripts on Parchment at least 10 school days prior to any application deadlines. For November 1st deadlines, requests should be made by October 15th.
- Follow up with admission offices to make sure all application materials have been received.
- Remind teachers of early deadlines for applications, if applicable.
- Be sure to include any required fees with your applications.
- Make copies of all documents you send through the mail or submit online. Keep organized files.
- Continue visiting college campuses to see more (sit in on classes, meet with profs, etc).
- Check email and mailbox for decision letters.

December

- Take the SAT or ACT, if applicable (For many colleges, this is the last test they will accept).
- Begin to actively pursue scholarship opportunities.

- Request transcripts for any applications due during Christmas break. For January 1st deadlines, requests should be made by December 1st.
- Write thank you notes for teachers who wrote your LORs.
- Check email and mailbox for decision letters and/or financial aid packages.

January/February

- Continue to meet application deadlines.
- Confirm that all your application materials have been received by each school to which you applied.
- Be prepared to receive more decision letters and/or financial aid packages.

March/April

- Maintain organized files of all admissions correspondence that you receive.
- Do final visits if needed (overnight, if possible).
- Compare financial aid packages and address concerns with admission/financial aid officers
- Prepare for AP exams, if applicable.
- Make sure that you accept an offer of admission before May 1st , and send in any required deposits and paperwork.

May

- Pass all necessary classes to graduate from PHS
- Celebrate!
- Be certain the Guidance Office is aware of what college you plan to attend so that your final transcript is forwarded to the appropriate place.

USEFUL LINKS

The Common Application: www.commonapp.org

The College Board (SAT/AP): www.collegeboard.org

The ACT: www.actstudent.org

FairTest – List of Test Optional Schools www.fairtest.org

FASTWEB Scholarship Search: www.fastweb.com

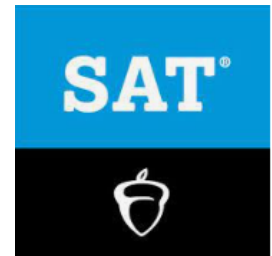
FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid): www.fafsa.gov

CSS Profile: www.cssprofile.collegeboard.org

NCAA Clearinghouse: www.eligibilitycenter.org



ACT vs SAT



What is the difference between the ACT and the SAT?

Which test should I take?

Many students and parents begin the college prep process by comparing the ACT and SAT tests. Both ACT and SAT scores are used for college admissions decisions and awarding merit-based scholarships. Most colleges do not prefer one test over the other. Students are encouraged to attempt both and then re-test with one or the other.

ACT	vs	SAT
Four required separate sections Reading, English, Math, Scientific Reasoning; OPTIONAL: Essay	CONTENT	Three parts Reading, Math & Writing OPTIONAL: Essay
Four separate sections ranging from 35 – 60 minutes, each subject area is completed before moving on to the next content area; 30 minute essay section at end of test is optional.	FORMAT	Reading – 65 minutes, 52 questions; Math: 80 minutes, 58 questions; Writing & Language – 35 minutes, 44 questions; Optional Essay - 50 minutes
Each subtest scored 1- 36; composite score also 1 – 36 (not a strict average of the four sections); essay also scored 1 -36 but NOT included in composite score	SCORING	Each section scored 200 – 800; both sections included in overall score for a maximum possible total 1600
ACT (No Writing): \$46 ACT Plus Writing: \$62.50 (Fee Waivers may be available for eligible students)	COST	\$46 for test \$60 for test with essay (Fee waivers may be available for eligible students)
Four scores can be sent to colleges along with registration fee; \$13 per school after fourth selection; students not obligated to send scores anywhere, but will pay an additional fee if sending scores after testing (\$13 – \$16.50 per score per school)	SENDING SCORES	Four scores can be sent to colleges along with registration fee; \$12 per school after fourth selection; students not obligated to send scores anywhere, but will pay an additional fee if sending scores after testing (\$12 per school)
Each individual ACT test is independent and must be sent separately to schools – scores do not accumulate on test record	TEST RECORD	Each individual SAT test is independent and must be sent separately to schools – scores do not accumulate on test record
Every four year school in the US accepts the ACT (with the exception of the Webb Institute in NY)	SCORE ACCEPTANCE	Accepted by all four-year colleges in the US – preferred by schools outside the US
No Subject Tests or equivalent – however, some colleges allow ACT to be substituted for BOTH SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests in admission	SUBJECT TESTS	One-hour multiple choice Subject Tests available in languages, sciences, math, social studies and literature – completely separate from SAT Reasoning Test. Commonly required by highly selective colleges and universities as part of the admission process.
No penalty for incorrect answers – blank and incorrect responses incur the same “points off”	TEST STRATEGY	No penalty for guessing
Six times per year never on same date as SAT	FREQUENCY	Seven times per year never on same date as ACT
www.actstudent.org	REGISTER ONLINE	www.collegeboard.org

CREATING YOUR COLLEGE LIST

When using the BigFuture College Search, you match with potential schools by choosing a set criteria. We would like all our students to have a strong list of at about 5-7 schools they are interested in learning more about in the spring of junior year. Use this space to keep notes about your preferred colleges – and identifying whether they fall into the “Safety”, “Best Fit”, or “Reach” category for you.

Safety- “I am 100% sure I will get into this school if all else fails”

Best Fit- “These schools match with my wants/needs and my academic profile fits their admitted profile”

Reach- “I really like this school, but it’s a bit of a stretch due to my academic profile/cost of attendance”

Safety Schools	Best Fit Schools	Reach Schools

Tips for a Successful College Visit

Adapted from: <https://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/college-visits> Authored by: Rob Franek

College visits are probably the most fun part of the college application process. When it comes to researching potential schools, there's no better substitute for figuring out if a campus will feel like home. No website, guidebook, or testimonial will give you a better feel for a school than you'll get by seeing it for yourself. Many students change their minds after a campus visit. This is obviously preferable to changing your mind after you enroll! Get the most out of your time on campus with our college visit checklist:

1. Mind the calendar. Schedule your visit while school is in session. You won't get a realistic idea of student life over the summer or while the college is on any other sort of break.
2. Meet the experts. Talk to the current students—they may soon be your peers. If they have a problem or complaint, they will probably share it with you. If they love their school, they won't be shy about it either. Come prepared with some questions to ask—specific ones will get you more interesting (and helpful) answers.
3. Meet the other experts. Get to know the admissions office. Let them know what interests you about the school so they can direct you to the best place for further investigation. Collect contact information and send a brief, friendly e-mail thanking them for taking the time to talk to you. Colleges do keep track of which applicants have demonstrated genuine interest in the school. A visit is a great way to demonstrate your interest and learn more about the school.
4. Take the campus tour... While it's the most obvious thing to do, the official campus tour is worth your while. (Find out if you need to register to get a spot.) It gives the school a chance to show off its best features, like the newly-built theater or their rooftop planetarium. While you're walking around, check out the flyers and bulletin boards and pick up a school newspaper to get a sense of what's going on.
5. ...then venture out on your own. The official tour will probably steer you clear of the school's less attractive features, like the shoddy dining hall or the tiny gymnasium. Take your own un-official tour by wandering around campus. If there are any facilities that are important to you, find them and have a look for yourself. Make sure your destinations include the library and the first-year dorms.
6. Be a student for a day (or night). Some schools sponsor overnight programs in which you can stay with a current student. This is a great opportunity to get a deeper sense of campus life and interact with your potential future friends and roommates. Even if you don't stay over, most schools will allow you to sit in on lectures. Browse the course catalogue before you arrive or ask the admissions office what classes are in session that day.
7. Save the best for last. You'll get better at visiting colleges with practice. As you compare schools, you pick up on the aspects you like and the aspects you're not so fond of. You also figure out the right questions to ask, as well as the best campus spots to gauge student life. For that reason, visit your favorite schools last, so you'll be in the best position to make comparisons to the others on your list.
8. Keep a record of every college visit. If you visit many schools, your memories of them are bound to overlap. Use a note-taking or voice-recording app on your phone, or plain old notebook and pen, to keep track of the details you like and the stuff that you don't like. When more questions arise (as they most definitely will), you can fire off an email for an answer rather than visiting a second time.
9. Don't rush to judgment. Try not to base your opinion of a school on bad weather or one boring class. There are bound to be sunny days and more interesting classes. Same goes for overnight visits—you might end up staying with a student who has very different interests than you do. At the same time, trust your gut. Sometimes it's love at first sight. Other times, something feels wrong (even if you can't put your finger on it).

Campus Visit Checklist

Campus

- ☐ attend a large visit day program
- ☐ experience an individualized, student-led tour
- ☐ explore the surrounding area around campus

Dorms

- ☐ tour the dormitories on campus, especially the freshman halls
- ☐ stay overnight if possible
- ☐ ask about security on campus (you can even ask for a report!)
- ☐ ask about policies regarding off-campus housing

Academics

- ☐ see examples of classrooms and lecture halls
- ☐ meet with an advisor or even a program chair/professor
- ☐ see what student services are available i.e. tutoring, writing labs
- ☐ find out the student-to-faculty ratio
- ☐ ask about research opportunities, professor office hours
- ☐ ask what the four/six-year graduation percentage is

Student Life

- ☐ see what clubs/organizations are most popular
- ☐ discover what campus life is like on the weekends (is it a "suitcase" campus?)
- ☐ ask about Greek life and its prominence on campus
- ☐ see what do students do off campus for leisure

Health/fitness

- ☐ ask what health/wellness services are offered (is it free?)
- ☐ check out the fitness center

Dining

- ☐ try the food! (seriously)
- ☐ investigate meal plan options and policies

Career Services

- ☐ find out what services the school offers for internship/job prep and placement
- ☐ ask about alumni involvement and success stories

College/University Name: _____

Rate it!

On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the best, rate each of the following:

- ___ **Campus aesthetics** (Is it pretty? Gloomy? Inspiring?)
- ___ **Classrooms/lecture halls** (Are these areas conducive to your preferred learning environment?)
- ___ **Academic offerings** (Majors, professor engagement, research opportunities, etc)
- ___ **Dorms** (Are they updated? Do you have to live on campus each year?)
- ___ **Food** (Is the dining hall food good? Can I use my meal plan off-campus?)
- ___ **People** (Were the people I encountered today friendly, helpful, and open?)
- ___ **Student life** (Are the students engaged and involved? Do they have something for me?)
- ___ **Surrounding area** (Is the surrounding area safe? Does it offer good amenities?)
- ___ **Career services** (How well can they help you gain an internship or job after graduation?)
- ___ **Comfort and vibe** (Do I get warm and fuzzies? Can I close my eyes and envision myself here?)

Now, determine the average from the above factors to find the overall score.

_____ **Final Score**

Quick Guide to Applications

Most schools have a variety of types of applications that are offered to prospective students. The type of plan you select will impact the timing of submission, so it is very important to understand the deadlines and any/all restrictions associated with it. This quick guide serves as a generalization for each of the terms you may encounter, but please always be sure to check the actual deadlines/restrictions related to each plan at the school(s) you intend to apply to.

ROLLING ADMISSIONS

When a school uses a Rolling Admission plan, they generally begin accepting applications almost as soon as they open the application window and continue to make decisions on an on-going or “rolling” basis. While these schools will accept applications as late as spring of the senior year, it is important to submit your applications as soon as possible to maximize your admission potential. Because these schools fill their incoming class over time and continue until seats are filled, the longer you wait to submit an application will result in fewer seats available, thus making the standard for admission more difficult.

REGULAR DECISION or DEADLINE BASED ADMISSIONS

Many schools have a deadline that they set for which an application must be submitted in order to be considered for the incoming class. The deadline is USUALLY in January or February, but some schools may set a different date. With a school that has a deadline date, all application materials must be present in the admissions office before the date they set. NO decisions will be made on any applications until AFTER the deadline has passed and the admissions office has had an opportunity to review all the submitted applications. In this case, WHEN you submit your application is of no consequence to your admission potential (assuming you had all materials in by the deadline). For this reason, when prioritizing your applications, you should focus on any schools with a Rolling or Early plan BEFORE your deadline-based schools, being certain that you leave yourself enough time to meet the deadline. Generally speaking, these schools will send admission decisions out in the early spring (March or April).

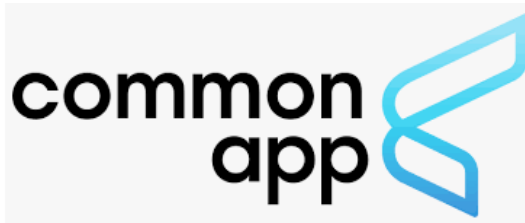
EARLY DECISION (ED)

When a college or university offers an Early Decision option, the Deadlines are usually early, November 1st or 15th. Some schools will have two rounds of Early Decision (ED I and ED II with deadlines typically in November for I and December for II). The benefit of applying ED is that decisions are usually made early, in Mid-December or January. It is important to note that Early Decision acceptances are BINDING. This means that you are agreeing that if you are accepted, you will withdraw any other applications and ATTEND the school you were accepted to. As part of the ED agreement, applicants must submit an Early Decision agreement form that is signed by the applicant, his/her parents, and their guidance counselor and serves as a contract to this effect. For this reason, it is very important that you only apply ED if you are certain that this is the best school for you and that financial aid won't be a problem (you typically won't have a financial aid package yet). You should only submit ONE Early Decision application. Note: ED applications generally see a 10% or greater acceptance rate vs. other application types at the same school.

EARLY ACTION (EA)

Many schools offer Early Action as an admission option, which provides the same timelines and benefits of an ED application without the binding contract. Students are not required to attend the school if they are accepted and may submit multiple applications under the plan. Some schools offer a Restricted Early Action (REA) plan, which is a non-binding agreement that prohibits the student from applying to other colleges during the early rounds. It is very important to carefully read all the restrictions that a particular school may put on this plan if they offer it before deciding whether or not it is appropriate for you.

THE COMMON APPLICATION



Many students will be able to take advantage of the Common Application to apply to schools on their list. The Common Application is an online college application consortium used by over 900 colleges and universities. Instead of filling out the same general information—like your address, GPA, and extracurriculars— a dozen times, you only have to do it once. The Common App dashboard also helps you track necessary application documents (like your letters of recommendation) and important deadlines. Many of the schools on your shortlist likely accept applications through Common App, but some may only utilize an application on their respective website. Many colleges offer both options but they do not prefer one over the other.

STEPS TO COMPLETING YOUR COMMON APPLICATION

1. **Gather materials-** while you can always stop, save, and come back to your application, it helps to have all the necessary information before you begin the process. Useful items may include:
 - A copy of your HS transcript
 - A list of your activities, work, and family responsibilities
 - Test scores and dates from your college entrance exams (SAT/ACT)
 - Parent/Legal guardian information
 - Academic honors and achievements
2. **Create an account-** you can create a Common App account even if you don't plan on applying for another few months or another few years. You can answer questions in the Common App tab and build a college list at any time.
 - Create your account and choose your student type
 - If you haven't yet attended college, select "first-year student"
 - If you have college credits from dual enrollment high school courses, you should still select "first-year student"
 - If you have already attended 1 or more colleges after graduating high school, select "transfer student". We also have a separate transfer student guide to help you out.
 - Create new login credentials. Colleges may need to get in touch with you during the application process, so be mindful of which email address you choose. Sometimes your high school address may filter out these emails, so consider using a personal email address. When choosing an email address, be sure to use one that:
 - You check regularly
 - Does not use inappropriate language
 - You will have access to after you graduate from high school
 - Complete your registration information- we will need some basic information about you like your name, home address, phone number, and date of birth. Be sure to use your legal name as it appears on official

school documents and standardized tests. This will make sure colleges can match documents to the correct person. At the end, you will adjust your communication preferences and accept the Common App privacy policy.

- Select "create account" and you're done!

3. **Add Colleges**- Once you've created your account and explored the colleges that accept the Common App, you're ready to start adding colleges. The College Search tab is where you will search for and add the colleges you want to apply to. If you have a school in mind you can search by name. If you want to keep exploring, you can use the more filters button. Some filters include:

- State or country
- Distance from a zip code
- Enrollment term
- Application deadline
- Application fees*
- Writing requirements
- Standardized testing policy
- Recommendation requirement

Adding a college is easy! You may add a college using the add button in the search results list. You can also select a college and add them using the "Add to My Colleges" button from their info screen.

Once you've added colleges, you can see them on your Dashboard and in your My Colleges tab. Keep in mind you may only add up to 20 colleges. You may adjust your list of colleges at any time. Once you've submitted, you will not be able to remove those schools from your My Colleges list.

** While some colleges may charge an application fee, others have no fee to apply. And, many will offer fee waivers under certain circumstances, including financial need, veteran status, and more.*

4. **Engage Supporters**- All colleges need things like official school forms. Many colleges will also ask for letters of recommendation. Counselors, teachers, and recommenders will submit these kinds of forms on your behalf. Here are the types of recommenders you can invite in the Common App.

- Counselors
- Parents (only if you are applying Early Decision)
- Teachers
- Other Recommenders (coaches, employers, community members, etc)
- Advisors (they do not submit any forms but can track progress)

If you're planning to apply this school year, you can start inviting recommenders. If you don't plan on applying until next school year or later, skip this step for now.

How to invite and assign recommenders:

-From the My Colleges tab select a college and open their "Recommenders and FERPA" section.

-If you have not done so already, you will need to complete the FERPA Release Authorization.

-Invite recommenders using the invite button from each section. You may also use the "Invite Recommenders" button at the top.

-Select the type of invitation you would like to send. For each invitation you will need information like their name and email address.

-After you add a recommender, you can view their info using the Manage Recommenders button.

-Note that teachers, parents, and other recommenders will not receive an email invitation until you assign them to a college. To assign these recommenders, go to their section within this screen. Select their name from the dropdown and use the assign button.

In general, each college has their own recommendation requirements. For example, one college may need two teacher recommendations. Some colleges may not want any teacher recommendations. Colleges can also determine what kinds of other recommenders they want. Some may allow for any recommender type, whereas others only allow an employer recommendation.

5. **Understanding requirements**- Keep track of each college's unique application requirements. It's important to stay organized as you work on your applications. Each college needs you to complete common questions and add counselor. Beyond that their applications vary. Each college can determine their unique requirements for:

- Deadlines
- Application Fees
- Personal Essay
- Courses & Grades
- Test Policy
- Portfolio
- Writing Supplements
- Recommendations

6. **Plan essays**- Organize and plan for your writing prompts. Sometimes writings essays can feel like the biggest part of your application. With a little bit of planning, organizing, and drafting, you can make this task more manageable. There may be three areas where you need to provide an essay:
- Common App Personal Essay (Colleges can either make the personal essay optional or required. In the writing section of your Common App tab, you will see a table that lists each college's requirements.)
 - College-specific questions (Many colleges include short answer questions or essay prompts within this section.)
 - Writing Supplements (Some colleges use a separate writing supplement. Not all colleges have a writing supplement. Some colleges only request this supplement based on how you answer other questions.)

Below is the full set of Common App essay prompts for 2025-2026

- Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

- Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
- Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
- Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
- Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
- Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

7. **Submit your application**- Review all sections and submit your application. Submission is a three-step process:
- 1) Reviewing your application.
 - 2) Paying the application fee (if applicable).
 - 3) Submitting your application.

If you have any questions, you can always watch informative video guides and see FAQs at <https://www.commonapp.org/apply/first-year-students>

The College Essay

The college essay is the part of the application process that provides you with an opportunity to share information about your special abilities, interests, qualities, or any other significant things unique to you that may not have had a chance to shine in any other part of the application and may set you apart from the large pool of applicants. There will always be another prospect who looks very similar to you on paper: same GPA, same test scores, same activities.....the essay is where you tell the admissions personnel WHO you are! What makes you different? What makes you special? While a well-crafted essay will not cancel out a poor high school transcript, a strong essay can make you stand out from the other applicants. Additionally, if a student's admission is in jeopardy, a great essay can tip the balance in the student's favor.

If a college asks applicants for an essay, they really do want to know the person - the who, what, where, when and why of what makes you YOU. The essay helps the admissions officer know and understand you in a way that four years of statistics and grades will not. A good essay can present you as an interesting and valuable person, one who is worth knowing, who is genuine, thoughtful, engaging, and capable. This is your most powerful tool to tell them why they want YOU on their campus.

CRITERIA used by the Admissions Officers when reviewing your essay:

1. Your ability to use standard written English that is correctly written, punctuated, and contains correct grammar and syntax.
2. The content, substance, and depth of insight reflecting your ability to think about yourself and to convey authentic feelings or opinions about a topic.
3. Creativity and originality demonstrating an individual who would bring qualities such as intellect, initiative, energy, and a fresh viewpoint to their college community.

QUICK TIPS for writing your essay

- Show rather than tell! Make the admissions committee feel as though they were there by giving examples and illustrating an idea.
- Write in your own voice.
- Be natural.
- Use humor judiciously and creativity freely.
- Write about something you know well.
- The easiest topic to write about is yourself-- Nobody knows you better than you! Self-revelation is the most important issue.
- Use complete sentences and good command of grammar.
- Proofread!! Always read your work aloud to yourself and to others.

ADVICE from the experts on writing a memorable essay!

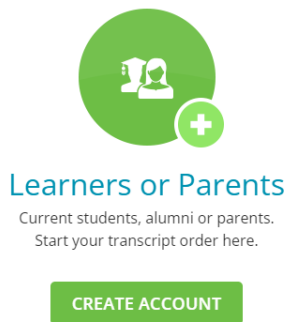
- “A thoughtful, well written essay can affect, in a very positive way, the final decision - especially for those borderline students.”
- “It’s a rare opportunity - it’s the chance to speak directly to the admissions committee to help them see you as a thinking, feeling person rather than a set of statistics.”
- “The college essay can make or break your chance for admission.”
- “This is your opportunity to convey your maturity and outlook on life.”
- “It is the piece that creates the individual.”
- “This is another important piece, which is added to the puzzle that can set you apart from dozens of other applicants
- “When choosing to write about something objective, like literature, avoid focusing on theme and style. I assume you have read the piece if you chose to write about it. Rather than focusing on knowledge of the piece, share what effect the work had on you and why. Help me understand your intellectual, political, and social views.”

REQUESTING TRANSCRIPTS



Our Lady of Providence utilizes Parchment to send transcripts to colleges. At the beginning of your senior year, you will be given a folder of important information with college admissions resources. Within this folder, you will find your specific code that will be used to set up your account on Parchment.

1. Visit <https://www.parchment.com/create-account/>
2. Click on “Create Account” under Learners or Parents



3. Click “Have a registration code?” at bottom of page

- 10 Character minimum
- At least one upper-case, lower-case, and number

Sign Up

By signing up you agree to the Parchment [terms of use](#) and [privacy policy](#).

Have a Registration Code?

[Already have an account?](#)



4. Enter your code to proceed with transcript orders. Once you have selected the colleges/universities, we will send the transcript on your behalf. Please give us at least 10 school days to process the transcript(s) before a college's deadline!

REQUESTING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Who Should I Ask to Write My College Recommendation Letter?

As published online by Prep Scholar Authored by: Rebecca Safier

I usually tell my students, remember when you were in class, and be honest with yourself about what you did in that class. Look over the comments that you had on your report card and let that guide your decision about which teacher to ask. You want to pick someone who has known you for a significant amount of time. You want to pick someone who can talk about how you are as a student inside and outside the classroom. This should be someone with whom you've had a really good relationship. Maybe they have been a mentor to you, taught you something new, or taught you something about yourself and how to expand your own knowledge. The one key thing is to pick someone who will say both good things and maybe the areas where you could improve. Always choose somebody who knows you well and will be honest about what they think about you. Students should be honest with themselves about what kind of student they were for that teacher before asking them. Also, make sure to let teachers know at least 2-3 weeks in advance about writing a recommendation - don't spring it on them at the last minute.

Other Important Notes:

Many college and scholarship applications will require one to three letters of recommendation. These letters can come from teachers, counselors, coaches, pastors, workplace bosses, etc. There is a proper etiquette to follow when requesting letters of recommendation. Consider the following:

1. Read all your applications carefully to determine how many and what kind of recommendations are needed. MORE IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER! Many times, application readers see repetition in these letters and it could appear that you are not following instructions if you send more than what is being requested.
2. Consider who to ask: teachers from sophomore and junior year in core subject areas (math, science, English, social studies, etc) are typically most appropriate. Which teacher(s) can best speak to your academic readiness and strength of character?
3. Meet face-to-face with the teacher you intend to ask and say, "I'm applying to college XYZ and I was wondering if you would be willing to write me a letter of recommendation? It would really mean a lot to me." If they agree, provide them with details of the recommendation: what is it for (admission or scholarship or both), what is required to be in the letter, and provide them with your brag sheet. The Brag sheet will be completed in your Google Classroom page during your senior year.
4. Never send a recommendation request to a teacher prior to asking them in person (or worst case scenario, through email) and receiving confirmation they are willing to write the letter.
5. Let your recommender know your first deadline date and make sure you give them at least four weeks to complete the letter. A great letter takes time and attention to detail so giving them ample time ensures you will receive a better letter. And remember, you probably aren't the only student they are writing a letter for!
6. Send a brief thank you note or e-email to the recommender after the application process is complete. Also, be sure to keep them updated on your applications and where you ultimately decide to attend. They are invested in this process as well.

Quick Guide to the College Admission Interview

Relax, prepare and get ready to enter a great conversation with your interviewer! Take advantage of the opportunity to help your prospective college's admission team know YOU a little better! BE PREPARED!!!

- Know the School! Learn as much about the institution as possible before you go in. Learn as much as you can through news articles and/or the school's website.
- Practice some generic and specific questions. There are a few basic questions you can probably count on hearing: Why do you want to go to this college? What do you expect to gain from the college experience? What do you plan to major in and why? You don't need to memorize your answers, but think through the issues ahead of time so you'll have some ideas to discuss. You'll also want to prepare for questions that ask you to identify key topics or experiences that are important to you. Think in advance about some of your favorite experiences, activities or plans. If you've identified your own "hit list," you'll find them easier to recall when asked.
- Prepare some questions to ask. This is really important! Show your interest in the school by asking specific questions, such as, how would you describe the student body? What are the most popular majors (and why)? What are the school's strengths? Where does the school need to improve?
- Review your application materials (if you have already applied). If you have already applied to the school, it is likely that the interviewers may use your application materials to strike up a conversation with you. Review your application essay so it's fresh in your mind when you interview.

DAY OF YOUR INTERVIEW

- Dress appropriately and sharply.
- Plan to arrive early. The extra time may come in handy if you encounter delays, and arriving early will let you take a few moments to relax and prepare yourself mentally. Call in advance and ask for directions if you're unsure, and schedule enough time get there.
- Introduce yourself and greet the interviewers with a solid handshake, smile, and positive attitude.
- Remember that this is a conversation, and that the interview wants to know about you. Be yourself and be honest in your answers.
- Elaborate on questions, provide more than a "yes" or "no" answer to keep your answers as conversational and personal as possible. Try to find specifics that naturally support the answers.
- Be spontaneous. Though you should practice answering some basic questions, answer honestly, naturally and spontaneously in the interview.
- Be positive. Highlight the good things from your academic past and put a positive "spin" on your background.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW IS OVER

- Send a thank-you note or thank-you email shortly after the interview. Showing interest and appreciation goes a long way.

Financial Aid 101

About 85% of first-time, full-time, undergraduate students are awarded financial aid at 4-year degree-granting institutions. How does one receive such aid?

I. Know Your Terms!

- a. Scholarship- money awarded based on merit (do not have to pay back)
- b. Grant- money awarded based on demonstrated need (do not have to pay back)
- c. Loan- money awarded to cover expenses (must be paid back)

II. Where Aid Comes From

- a. College/University
 - i. Merit: based on GPA, test scores, transcript
 - ii. Extracurriculars: athletics, fine arts, religious
 - iii. Endowments: usually need-based
 - iv. Specialty (Legacy, 1st Gen, diversity, Catholic HS, visit credit)
- b. Government (Federal and State)
 - i. Federal Pell- up to \$7,395 for high-need students
 - ii. SEOG: \$100-\$4,000 for high-need students
 - iii. State Aid
 - 1. Frank O'Bannon Grant- up to \$12,400
 - 2. 21st Century Scholars- covers tuition and mandatory fees
 - iv. Military (ROTC): covers most fees, required service upon graduation
 - v. Work-study: can earn up to ~\$3,000 with on-campus job
- c. Private/Outside Scholarships
 - i. Local, regional, nation-wide options
 - ii. Parents' employers
 - iii. Students' employers
 - iv. Churches
 - v. Non-Profit Organizations (Community Foundation of Southern Indiana)

Postsecondary students received a total of \$123.8 billion in scholarships and grants in 2014-15.

About 37% of this free money comes from the federal government and, to qualify, you need to fill out the FAFSA. Here's a breakdown of where this money comes from:

- 41% College/university
- 37% Federal
- 14% Private
- 8% State

III. Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

- a. Complete ASAP after October 1, filed annually
- b. FAFSA is necessary to receive almost all aid outside of merit awards
- c. Estimated Family Contribution (EFC)= how much \$ the government believes your family can contribute to next year's education
- d. Loans- Undergrad students can borrow between \$5,500 and \$12,500 per year
 - i. **Subsidized Stafford**- loans made to eligible undergraduate students who demonstrate financial need to help cover the costs of higher education at a college or career school. (does not accrue interest while enrolled in school)
 - ii. **Unsubsidized Stafford**- loans made to eligible undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, but eligibility is not based on financial need. (also accrues interest while in school)
 - iii. **Parent PLUS**- Parents can take out a federal loan to fulfill any remaining cost after all other aid (credit check required)
 - iv. **Private**- students can take out loans through private lenders and/or banks

IV. Appeals (Spring)

- a. Some institutions (mostly private) will do a review of your financial aid package, especially if your family's financial situation has changed since the last tax filing OR if you receive more competitive aid from a similar institution. You may be asked to send in your other packages so keep those handy!

V. Providence Scholarship Spreadsheet: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ak3nNOufKvh7hYyBUro3-QHHJXwo6vgN1MKldGzYYgo/edit#gid=0>

Financial Aid Checklist

12th Grade Financial Aid Checklist

If you plan to apply for financial aid, keep this checklist handy as a guideline to keep you on track throughout your senior year. In summary, there are three places where financial aid will come from:

- 1- The college or university to which you are applying (this is usually the largest source of aid)
- 2- The national or state government (attained through FAFSA)
- 3- Nationwide, state, local scholarship opportunities (usually requires an application + essay)

There are many online scholarship resources in addition to what the PHS Counseling Office sends out on a regular basis. Be sure to visit the guidance office and check your school email regularly during senior year to keep informed of scholarship opportunities!

September

- ☐ Research scholarship opportunities and deadlines, and request application materials, if needed. Refer to websites like www.fastweb.com, <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/bigfuture-scholarships>, <https://www.goingmerry.com/>
- ☐ Visit <https://cssprofile.collegeboard.org/> to check whether the colleges to which you are applying require the CSS profile (Marian and Notre Dame are the only IN schools that current require this). Complete this profile, if necessary.
- ☐ Apply for a Federal Student Aid ID (FSA ID) at www.fafsa.gov. Keep your ID in a safe place where you can refer to it often.

October through March

- ☐ Work with your parents or guardians to gather the financial documents and materials necessary for filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) which OPENS OCTOBER 1
- ☐ Complete and submit the FAFSA form (www.fafsa.ed.gov or www.studentaid.ed.gov/PDFfafsa or 1-800-4-FED-AID) to apply for state, federal, and institutional grants and loans.
- ☐ After you have submitted your FAFSA, you will receive your Student Aid Report (SAR). Check it for any errors. Return the SAR only if you need to make corrections.
- ☐ Continue to complete and submit scholarship applications.

April

- ☐ Review and compare the financial aid packages offered in the financial aid award letters sent by the colleges that accepted you.
- ☐ Identify a financial aid contact at each college where you have been accepted. Check in with that person about the status of your financial aid package.
- ☐ Check to see if any colleges have an “appeal process.” You can sometimes use your financial aid packages as leverage for additional aid.
- ☐ Organize all correspondence that you receive regarding financial aid in a safe place.

May/June

- ☐ Work with your parents or guardians to apply for Federal Direct PLUS Loans (Parent Loans for Undergraduate Students) and other private loans, if necessary. If your Federal Direct PLUS application is denied, inform your college's financial aid office.
- ☐ Visit www.studentloans.gov to complete your Loan Entrance Counseling and Master Promissory Note for any federal loans noted on your financial aid letter.
- ☐ Review all bills for tuition, room and board as well as other correspondence from your school's financial aid office. Follow all directions carefully and meet all deadlines.

How Do I Know If a College is Right For Me?

As published online by The Common Application Authored by: By Gil Villanueva <http://www.commonapp.org/virtual-counselor/how-do-i-know-if-college-right-me>

I get this question quite a bit because I recruit all over the United States. It is all about the fit and the match. Students need to understand that attending college is quite an investment in time and effort, and they need to account for their academic fit as well as their social fit. By academic fit, you need to figure out if a college or university has all of the academic programs that you might be interested in – and will that be available to you. Given the fact that perhaps you might have many areas of interest, such as athletics, it is very critical to account for your academic fit. Students need to ask: who will teach you and how will they teach you? As far as social fit, we expect young people to have a great time. We want students to understand what is available from a student development standpoint, from an activities co-curricular standpoint, and determine if all the activities they might want to engage in are available to them as well. This is very critical. There are also some practical things I want young people to think about. There are no guarantees. College is at least four years, so you want to be happy wherever you go. Account for the retention rate. Account for the graduation rate. And account for student outcomes. When looking at retention rate, students need to ask, "Are students returning as sophomores, as juniors, as seniors?" Because if they are, I would argue that they are satisfied and happy with their experiences. When I think about graduation rate, there are no guarantees – in most cases, nationally, we actually track a six-year graduation rate. You want to know the answer to the question, what is the graduation rate in four years? Four years. Lastly, what are the outcomes? Ask what students are doing after graduation, within six months, and within a year. If you answer all of those things, then you're accounting for your fit.

About the Author Gil Villanueva serves as University of Richmond's Associate Vice President and Dean of Admission. He is also Chair of the Board of Directors for The Common Application. Mr. Villanueva has more than 20 years of experience in admissions, working at Bucknell University, Harvey Mudd College, and Brandeis University before coming to Richmond in 2009.

FINAL POINTS

Even though several elements of your college application packets will be submitted by others, you are still the person who is ultimately responsible for making sure that all parts of the application arrive on-time. It is imperative that YOU take the lead in this entire process. Please be mindful of your deadlines and be sure to allow ample time for teachers and counselors to submit their items. Be sure to check in with both your guidance counselor and recommending teachers – the earlier the better – to ensure they are prepared to submit their portions of your college application package. After you have submitted your applications, you should receive information from the schools providing you with instructions on how to check the online portal for each of the colleges where you are applying to make sure that they have received all materials in a timely manner. When in doubt, reach out to the admissions counselor assigned to you.

Take a deep breath and relax! This process is a marathon, not a sprint! Do not give yourself anxiety by comparing your journey to anyone else's. Each student is on a unique path and no two are alike. Please reach out to us when you have questions or need guidance. We want to stay informed of your application process so please keep us in the loop! The guidance department at Providence will be collecting all admissions decision data. We also track scholarship awards and ask that you bring copies of those letters to the guidance office to help us determine the total amount of scholarship monies our students have been awarded.

Enjoy this experience as much as possible and know that God has a special plan for each of you. Work hard, be gracious and ask for help when you need it!

-Providence High School Guidance Office