

September, 2006

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

See your counselor if you need special test accommodations

Seniors - Finalize your college list

Seniors - Work on application essays and applications

Seniors - review your transcript for accuracy

Seniors - request letters of recommendation from teachers, high school counselor, and employers

Meet with visiting college reps

16th - ACT and ACT plus Writing - in selected states only

October, 2006

Review test materials & take PSAT either 10/18 or 10/21

14th - SAT and Subject Tests

28th - ACT and ACT plus Writing

Check for area college fairs and meetings

Meet with college reps visiting high school

Seniors - Continue work on applications

Seniors - Complete Early Decision/Early Action Applications

Seniors - Complete "Profile" if required

Seniors - Submit "rolling" admissions applications ASAP

Preparing for a Selective College

Your mission during your high school years is to learn as much as you can. Students grow through both academic endeavors and extracurricular activities; don't sacrifice one for the other. Your academic program needs to be rigorous enough to provide intellectual challenge, and varied enough to give you opportunities to develop competency in many areas. Although you can get a high school diploma with a minimum number of academic units, selective colleges are looking for much more.

For selective colleges, success in a challenging academic program is the most important factor in the admissions decision. Your high school program should include at least four years of English with additional courses in expository writing being a plus. Applicants need to have taken a minimum of three years of mathematics (through algebra II) but many selective colleges expect four or more years including advanced math courses like calculus. While two years of foreign language study may be acceptable, you'll be a more competitive applicant with three or more years

of study of the same foreign language. Most selective colleges expect three or more years of science—most prefer that you have taken the basic courses including biology, chemistry, and physics before going on to more advanced classes. Two or more years of social sciences such as U.S. history and world history are expected, supplemented by at least three or more additional courses from the five course areas described above. Advanced Placement, honors level classes, and International Baccalaureate courses are desirable. Complete your program with selections chosen from the fine and performing arts, computers, and other electives.

Remember, learning doesn't end when the school day is over. You'll learn and grow from community service activities, an after-school job, volunteer programs, and participation in clubs and sports. The qualities that you gain by taking part in these activities are the ones that often make the difference in admission to a selective college. More importantly, the experiences you'll have will shape the person you become.

Your Final College List

September's the time to revisit your college list. Think again about what is most important to you in choosing a college—location, majors, size, diversity of student body, finances, etc. Do the colleges on your list accurately reflect the qualities that you value? Adjust your list so that all of your prospective colleges are ones you'd be happy to attend.

Now check that you've included institutions from all three tiers. Your list ideally resembles a pyramid. At the apex, a couple of *reach* schools, then, several *possibles*, and finally a larger group of *probables*. *Reach* schools include those at which most accepted students have higher GPAs and/or test scores than you. A college that accepts less than 20% of applicants also should be considered a "reach" for nearly all students.

Possibles are those colleges which regularly ac-

cept students with grades and test scores similar to yours. *Probable* colleges are those at which your test scores and GPA would place you in the top quarter of the entering class. Students often concentrate their effort on their *reach* schools, but would be better served by truly researching their *possibles* and *probables* since these are the institutions that they are most likely to attend.

While finalizing your list, you'll also want to consider the option of early decision (ED) or early action (EA). While ED applicants generally have a better chance of admission to a particular school, you must remember that the decision is binding. Apply early decision only if you have visited a campus, and are sure that it is your first choice. Early action is for students with strong records and test scores and does not usually improve the chances of admission.



Majoring In: The Biosciences

“Individuals with undergraduate degrees in the biosciences are now working at the very frontiers of knowledge, making advances in medicine, genetics, biotechnology, biochemistry, and molecular biology.”

Biology majors concentrate their efforts on the study of life. People with undergraduate degrees in the biosciences are now working at the very frontiers of knowledge, making advances in medicine, genetics, biotechnology, biochemistry, and molecular biology. The biosciences may be ideal for you if you have a need to discover how things work, love puzzles and mysteries, enjoy research and analysis, are creative, good at problem-solving, enjoy science, math and critical reading, and like to work as part of a team.

Biology majors are found at nearly all colleges, often as part of a liberal arts education, or as an offering in the College of Arts and Sciences, College of Health Sciences, or possibly in a division such as natural science and mathematics, or ap-

A Look at Possible Bioscience Majors

Biology majors are generalists. They study the structure and function of living organisms, and learn about both genetics and evolution. Typical courses include molecular biology, microbiology, genetics, comparative anatomy, plant and animal physiology, ecology, parasitology, botany and zoology. Biology majors spend a good deal of their time in the lab or in the field. There is so much information to be covered that bio majors might take two or three different lab courses in the same semester. Biology graduates often go on to become teachers, lab technicians, pharmaceutical or biotech marketing representatives, or, with graduate study, health care professionals, university professors or corporate researchers.

Biochemistry majors study the chemistry of living organisms, seeking to discover how chemistry contributes to function. In addition to the core biology courses, biochem majors also take many of the classes that would be needed for a chemistry degree. Additional classes may be in areas such as DNA replication or animal metabolism. Majoring in biochemistry is a logical choice for those students planning on careers in the health sciences. Biochem graduates are also employed by biotechnology, pharmaceutical, and medical technology or testing companies. Many go on to graduate work in biochemistry, or advanced study in such areas as biomedical engineering or biotechnology.

Marine biologists learn about life in underwater

applied science and technology. There are different advantages to studying biology at either smaller colleges or larger research institutions. The small college approach tends to provide students with a strong foundation in the core biology courses, but newer specialty majors such as biotechnology may only be available at larger universities. The quality of research differs too, as do the opportunities to engage in undergraduate research with a professor. When comparing biology programs at different schools, ask about availability of undergraduate research, and inquire about the number of biology graduates who go on to graduate programs in that field. Examine the course catalog carefully to learn about the breadth and depth of classes offered at the colleges you're considering.

environments. They study marine organisms ranging from single-celled microorganisms to huge marine mammals. Marine biology majors need to learn about the different marine environments and ecosystems. Typical classes beyond core biology and chemistry courses include plankton biology, chemical oceanography, ichthyology, marine botany, and marine mammals. Fieldwork (as well as lab work) is often a large component of marine biology programs. Graduates are employed in environmental programs, as lab researchers, as fishery biologists, or work at museums or aquariums. Graduate degrees are needed for research and academic positions.

Molecular biologists focus on the molecular components that make up cells. Through chemical analysis, they examine gene function and regulation, learn about how cells differentiate and replicate, and study the role of proteins in cellular processes. Courses required for this major include core biology and chemistry classes with additional study in cellular biology, molecular biology, endocrinology, biostatistics, and biochemistry. Graduates may go on to careers as genetic counselors or forensic scientists, or study for advanced degrees if they wish to pursue a career in research.

Others interested in the biosciences may choose to major in genetics, zoology, microbiology, entomology, botany, biotechnology, or cell biology. You can learn more about these majors in [The College Board Book of Majors](#).

Focus on Finances: Financial Aid at Private Colleges



Most private colleges have higher costs for tuition than in-state public colleges, however, they also usually have more money available to lower the cost of college. Although a relatively few private colleges only

award aid based on need, most provide both need and merit-based financial aid. If you plan to apply for financial aid at any college, you'll need to file the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) as soon after January 1st of senior year as you can. The best way to file the FAFSA is online at www.FAFSA.ed.gov. Many private colleges, a few public institutions, and a number of scholarship organizations require students to complete the CSS *Profile* in addition to the FAFSA. The *Profile* allows the college's financial aid office to take a closer look at family finances in order to better estimate the amount of aid an applicant would need to attend their college and to help the college award their non-federal student aid funds. Go to the College Board's web

site to see a list of colleges and programs that require the CSS *Profile* as part of the financial aid application..

The CSS *Profile* is available on-line any time after October 1st. Register at www.collegeboard.com. First download and complete the pre-application worksheet and instructions. Then go online to complete the registration questions and to identify those institutions that should receive copies of your *Profile* report. Be sure to check the "priority filing date" for each of your colleges, and begin the application at least two weeks before the earliest date. It takes about a week to compile the report, so you'll need to have submitted all information a week before the priority deadline. You'll also need to check each college's supplemental requirements, and answer these institution-specific questions after completing the general application.

Unlike the FAFSA, there is a fee for the *Profile*. Students are charged \$5 to register, and \$18 for each school or scholarship program that need to receive a copy of the report.

The Role of the Essay or Personal Statement

Students are often advised to begin the application process by completing the essay. This is a good way to insure that the essay gets the attention that it warrants. Often, it is the essay that tips the admissions decision to admit. Some of you, however, might find choosing a topic easier if you answer the general application questions first. Give a printout of the application form to a trusted adult to read, and ask what questions they would have for you after reviewing the application. Are there inconsistencies in your record that need to be addressed? Do they wonder why your grades rise steadily each year after a relatively slow start or why your record showed a drop in performance during sophomore year? Is it evident that you're passionate about science or film-making? Do your answers show how you've grown and matured? Does your application demonstrate leadership or character?

The most successful college essays reveal things about the applicants that are not clearly seen in the rest of their college application. Ideally, the essay answers those questions that the college admissions officer will have when reviewing your completed application. By addressing these implied questions in your essay, you provide your reader with a true picture of the person you really are.

Look at the suggested essay topics and outline possible responses to several of the questions. Seek out ways to incorporate answers to the questions that will be raised

by your application. For example, you may not have taken many computer classes in high school, but may be planning to major in computer science in college. The implied question—why didn't you take these classes? In answering an essay topic about "an achievement of which you are proud", you can discuss your passion for computers. Provide descriptions about the programs that you've written, the computer-related jobs that you've held, and the fact that computer classes available at your high school were not challenging enough. Emphasize that you received a score of 5 on the AP Computer Science exam despite never having had the AP computer class.

The first draft of your essay should focus on content. Be concise and clearly answer the question posed. Use specific examples to illustrate your points. Set this draft aside for a couple of days, reread and reorganize it, looking now to grammar, spelling, and tone. Once you believe you've done a good job of communicating your thoughts, give it to several teachers or an advisor to review. Ask for their feedback; using your readers comments as a starting point, revise your essay for greater clarity and meaning. Proofread carefully, and ask others to also proofread it for you.

A thoughtful, well-written essay can affect the admissions decision in a very positive way. Rather than dreading the essay, look at it as an opportunity to highlight your achievements and accomplishments, allowing the admissions committee to get a clearer picture of the unique you.

The College Advisor

3123 W. Sierra Drive
Westlake Village, CA
91362

Phone / FAX:
(805) 496-3949

E-Mail:
gailgrand@
thecollegeadvisor.net

The Advantages of Taking the PSAT or PLAN

Although no one enjoys taking standardized tests, there are a number of good reasons for tenth and eleventh grade students to experience the PSAT or PLAN exams before taking college admissions tests. The reports generated by the PSAT or PLAN give you feedback on your strengths and weaknesses on those skills necessary for college study. By taking these practice tests well in advance of the SAT or ACT, you will be able to focus your preparation on those areas that could most benefit from additional study or practice. There's no penalty to these exams—your scores remain just between you and your school.

Each report will also compare your skills with a national college-bound peer group, thus permitting you to realistically assess your own performance. This will help you as you begin to

consider college options.

The types of questions and the directions given on the PSAT are very similar to those on the SAT. The PLAN questions and directions mirror that of the ACT. Students gain a practice advantage by taking these preliminary tests before the “real” thing.

The PSAT's Student Search feature and the PLAN's Educational Opportunity Service provide students with opportunities to hear from colleges that have the characteristics or programs they seek. The PLAN also incorporates a career inventory that may help you as you look toward possible future fields of employment.

Another difference between these tests—the PSAT also serves as the qualifying exam for 11th grade students for the National Merit Scholarship Competition.

Website of the Month: www.TheU.com

Originally conceived by a group of college students, TheU.com provides prospective students with an insiders view of college. A DVD collection of 50 specially-made college videos (hosted by stars of the WB) is available for sale, but there's no cost to view clips of each school video or to access their database.

More than 100,000 students at over 2,000 colleges have posted insider reviews of their school; potential applicants can learn about life at each college as seen through the eyes of a current student. College student blogs focus on quality of life, academics, and the campus social scene.

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