



CAPISTRANO VALLEY CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

College Counseling Handbook

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Capistrano Valley Christian School's college counseling program works in tandem with the school's mission as a college preparatory school. We walk alongside students and their families for six years as we educate, counsel, and mentor them through exploring interests, careers and applying to colleges and universities throughout the country. The implementation of Naviance this year, a college and career planning tool, will assist the counselors in meeting those goals.

In an effort to assist students in this process, we provide a number of opportunities that will aid them in their journey. We will plan annual college trips around the country beginning in the 9th grade. In addition to our college trips and hosted college fairs, we will hold several grade-specific college information nights and/or college coffees for our parents and students designed to educate them on the college application, the application process, applying for financial assistance, and much more.

The college decision-making process is a major transition in life and ought to be carefully considered. Our goal is to equip each student with the necessary resources to make the most informed decision possible. By the end of the senior year, students are well prepared and have many excellent options as they launch into their futures.

The College Counseling Handbook provides guidance to assist you through the college application process. It will help equip you with the tools you need to make an informed decision.

While we consider the handbook to be an incredibly helpful and important resource to our students and parents, we do not view it as a substitute for individual conversations and counseling. The time we spend getting to know and individually guiding students is the hallmark of Capistrano Valley Christian Schools' college counseling program. We suggest that you utilize the handbook much as you would the reading for your courses. Your discussions with us will benefit greatly from your reading the provided materials, allowing us to focus on making them relevant to you and the particular colleges with which you are interacting.

We encourage you to take advantage of the opportunities presented. Be an active participant and enjoy the process!

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Section I: GRADUATION/COLLEGE ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

CAPISTRANO VALLEY CHRISTIAN GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

In order to qualify for a diploma from Capistrano Valley Christian Schools, a student must meet the following requirements:

- Complete a minimum of 250 semester credits of classroom or supervised activities in grades 9-12 with passing grades (D or better). Satisfactory attendance and good citizenship are reflected in academic grades and credits completed.
- Complete 20 community service hours each year enrolled in the school.
- Complete and pass the following subject matter requirements in grades 9-12.
- ***Cum Laude-** Complete a minimum of 270 semester credits, a 3.75 cumulative GPA, and a minimum of five (5) Honors or Advanced Placement Courses.
- ****Summa Cum Laude-** Complete a minimum of 280 credits, a 4.1 cumulative GPA, and a minimum of seven (7) Honors or Advanced Placement Courses.

English (four years/40 credits)

- Basic Literature and Composition (honors option): one year/10 credits
- Literature and Composition(honors option): one year/10 credits
- American Literature and Composition (AP option): one year/10 credits
- British Literature and Composition (AP option): one year/10 credits

History (four years/40 credits)

- Geography/World Cultures and/or AP Human Geography: one year/10 credits
- World History and/or AP European History: one year/10 credits
- United States History (AP option): one year/10 credits
- Economics: one semester/5 credits
- US Government: one semester/5 credits
- AP US Government : one year/10 credits

Science (three years/30 credits w/ at least one year life (Biology) and one year physical (Chemistry or Conceptual Physics or Physics) *3rd year in any of the following below:

- Biology (honors option): one year/10 credits
- Chemistry: one year/10 credits
- Ecology and Oceanography: one year/10 credits
- Physics: one year/10 credits
- Conceptual Physics: one year/10 credits
- AP Biology: one year/10 credits
- AP Chemistry: one year/10 credits
- Anatomy & Physiology: one year/10 credits

** Three years/30 credits*

***Four years/40 credits*

Mathematics (three years/30 credits)

- Algebra 1: one year/10 credits
- Geometry: one year/10 credits
- Algebra 2: one year/10 credits
- Pre-Calculus (honors option): one year/10 credits
- AP Calculus AB: one year/10 credits
- AP Statistics: one year/10 credits

** 30 credits (including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II)*

***40 credits (including PreCalculus or higher)*

Foreign Language (two years/20 credits)

- Spanish 1: one year/10 credits
- Spanish 2: one year/10 credits
- Spanish 3: one year/10 credits
- Spanish 4 (honors option): one year/10 credits

- French 1: one year/10 credits
- French 2: one year/10 credits
- French 3: one year/10 credits
- French 4 (honors option): one year/10 credits

- Mandarin 1: one year/10 credits
- Mandarin 2: one year/10 credits
- Mandarin 3: one year/10 credits

**(3 years/30 credits of the same foreign language)*

*** (3 years/30 credits of the same foreign language)*

Visual Performing Arts (one year/10 credits)

- 10 credits of dance, choir, theater, stagecraft, photography or fine art.

Bible (four years/40 credits)

- Bible 9 (honors option): one year/10 credits
- Bible 10 (honors option): one year/10 credits
- Bible 11 (honors option): one year/10 credits
- Bible 12 (honors option): one year/10 credits

Health (one semester/5 credits)

Course is offered through CVCS online program only

Physical Education and Athletics (two years/20 credits)

- Fall Sports: Girls Volleyball, Boys and Girls Cross Country, Boys Football
- Winter Sports: Boys and Girls Basketball, Boys and Girls Soccer
- Spring Sports: Boys Volleyball, Boys Golf, Baseball, Softball
- Cheer: year round

- Dance: year round

Each season of a sport counts as one semester/5 credits

Capistrano Valley Christian School's required coursework exceeds the minimum requirements for entrance into the University of California system, California State University system, and most private colleges and universities.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS BY SUBJECT

Although commonly referred to as the UC a-g requirements, both the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems require entering freshman to complete certain courses in high school. These subject requirements fulfill the minimum eligibility criteria for admission.

The “a-g” requirements can be summarized as follows:

- **History/social science (“a”)** – *Two years*, including one year of world history, cultures and historical geography and one year of U.S. history, or one-half year of U.S. history and one-half year of American government or civics.
- **English (“b”)** – *Four years* of college preparatory English that integrates reading of classic and modern literature, frequent and regular writing, and practice listening and speaking.
- **Mathematics (“c”)** – *Three years* of college-preparatory mathematics that include or integrate the topics covered in elementary and advanced algebra and two- and three-dimensional geometry.
- **Laboratory science (“d”)** – *Two years* of laboratory science providing fundamental knowledge in at least two of the three disciplines of biology, chemistry and physics.
- **Language other than English (“e”)** – *Two years* of the same language other than English or equivalent to the second level of high school instruction.
- **Visual and performing arts (“f”)** – *One year* chosen from dance, music, theater or the visual arts.
- **College-preparatory elective (“g”)** – *One year* chosen from the “a-f” courses beyond those used to satisfy the requirements above, or courses that have been approved solely in the elective area.

<http://www.ucop.edu/agguide>

Section II: CAPISTRANO VALLEY CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS COLLEGE COUNSELING ACTIVITIES OVERVIEW

9th grade

- Academic & College advising
- Introduction to Naviance
- Four year course plan
- Capistrano Valley Christian Schools hosts Christian College Fair
- Freshman College Night for parents
- College representatives on campus
- PSAT-review results with students

10th grade

- Academic & College advising
- Naviance classroom guidance activities with counselor
- Capistrano Valley Christian Schools hosts Christian College Fair
- Sophomore College Night and/or College Coffee for parents
- College representatives on campus
- PSAT-review results with students

11th grade

- Academic & College advising
- Naviance classroom guidance activities with counselor
- Capistrano Valley Christian Schools hosts Christian College Fair
- PSAT-review results with students
- College representatives on campus
- SAT prep options on/off campus or online
- Individual family meeting in winter/spring with the college counselor
- Application essay practice and feedback incorporated into junior English class
- College Coffee for parents

12th grade

- Academic & College Advising
- Advising and resources provided for letters of recommendation for applications and scholarships
- Secondary and Mid year school reports provided for students who applied to private universities
- Capistrano Valley Christian Schools hosts Christian College Fair
- Support and advising for all portions of the college application
- College representatives on campus

Year round: Counselor emails to parents and advertisements through eagle eye newsletter. College spotlights, college fairs in community, scholarships, overnights trips and preview days at colleges, etc.

Section III: EXPLORING EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS

9th/10th GRADE

The ninth and tenth grade years are focused on exploration and exposure – what is the best fit for me and why? Students will participate in college preparation activities with the College Counselor at various times throughout the year. The Naviance curriculum will take the students through self and career assessments.

Where to begin?

There are numerous factors involved in the college search. The ultimate goal is to find a college that is the best fit. Begin the exploration process early – ask questions, visit campuses, start to determine what is the best fit for you? Factors to include:

- Academics – major, learning environment
- Location – distance, surroundings, size of college
- Extracurricular

Start looking at the possibilities on the College Board website at:

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search>

Other valuable college search websites:

www.going2college.org

www.unigo.com

www.collegedata.com

www.campustours.com

www.collegeview.com

www.nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator

Work through the Soul Searching worksheet (Appendix C).

Good email habits are extremely important.

- *Address*

Use your email address to use for college information and applications. All students have been issued a @cvcs.info email address. Freshman and sophomore year this address can only be used to email back and forth with other users. Juniors and seniors can use this address for college correspondence and applications.

- *Checking email.*

Get into the habit of checking email (at least once a day). College applications ask for your email address and will send you a notice of confirmation that they have received your application. Colleges typically notify you of any items you are missing.

- *Usernames and passwords.*

Registering for collegeboard.com, commonapp.org and other sites requires a username and password. Get into the habit of using the same username and password for all college related sites. A great username is the beginning of your email address (i.e. jsmith15).

HIGHER EDUCATION OPTIONS

There are nearly 4,000 institutions of higher education across the county. Each is unique with its own mission. The task before you is to match your goals, your needs and your abilities with these many institutions.

Types of colleges and universities:

- Liberal Arts College – designed to provide students with a broad foundation in the arts and sciences.
- California Public State University System
 - University of California (UC), 10 campuses, www.universityofcalifornia.edu
 - California State University (CSU), 23 campuses, www.csumentor.edu
- Private/independent/religious
- Community college/city college – These two-year colleges offer certificate programs, associate's degrees and the transfer curriculum to transfer to a four-year college.
- United States Military Academies
- Specialty (i.e. nursing, business, technology)

COLLEGE FAIRS

Students yearly have the opportunity to attend local college fairs. Capistrano Valley Christian Schools hosts the Christian College Fair in the Fall. CVCS college counselors also advertise college fairs that occur in the surrounding area.

A college fair is a great opportunity to be exposed to multiple colleges at once. College and university admissions reps travel from all over the country to help you find out more about their school. Walk up to the table, greet the college representative looking him/her in the eye, shake his/her hand and introduce yourself. State your name and the school you attend. Be prepared to ask a few specific questions and gather information. Make a good impression - often the representative will be a key player for applications received by Capistrano Valley Christian Schools students.

See Appendix E for a handout with hints for what to do before and during the fair, and a list of questions to ask the reps.

COLLEGE CAMPUS VISITS

There is really nothing comparable to getting on a college campus. Visiting multiple college campuses during the high school years will be very beneficial when it comes down to making a final decision. In addition to the school-sponsored trips available, we recommend students make college visits whenever possible. Check out college websites for information, visit scholarships and preview days. CVCS college counselors advertise preview days and overnight visits to students to local colleges and universities.

See Appendix F for a guide on visiting a college campus.

REP VISITS

Throughout the year, mostly in the fall, representatives from various colleges will visit the Capistrano Valley Christian Schools campus. These visits are usually during lunch or break and give the student an opportunity to obtain college pamphlets and a time for questions and answers with the college rep.

Section IV: TESTING

COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS- SAT/ACT COMPARISON

(NOTE: INFORMATION UPDATED 2016 TO NEW SAT INFORMATION)

Nearly every college and university will accept either test score for admissions.

ACT w/ Writing	Test Program	SAT w/ Writing
English: 45 minutes, 75 questions Math: 60 minutes, 60 questions Reading: 35 minutes, 40 questions Science: 35 minutes, 50 questions Optional 40 min essay****see note below	Test Content	Reading: 52 questions, 65 minutes Writing and Language: 44 questions, 35 min Math: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No calculator- 25 mins, 20 questions ● With calculator: 55 mins, 38 questions Optional 50 minute essay***see note below
Score is out of a 36 for each of four sections, which are then averaged to give composite score Essay also scored out of 36 (not factored into composite score)	Scoring Details (Based on number of correct answers)	Score is out of 1600 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Writing/Reading combined 200-800 ● Math 200-800 ● Essay receives 3 scores (scale 2-8) for reading, analysis and writing
ACT composite: 1-36 (Average of four test areas, NOT essay)	Total Score Possible	SAT: 400-1600 (Sum of 2 scores-Writing/Reading + Math, NOT essay)
<u>Some</u> schools will form “super composite” score from the highest scores in each ACT section from different testing dates	Superscoring	<u>Most</u> schools will “superscore” by using the sum of the highest Writing/Reading score and highest Math score from different testing dates
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asked to analyze three perspectives on an issue ▪ Must argue for your own opinion ▪ Need to generate specific examples 	Essay Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Given a text and asked to analyze the author's argument ● They don't want your opinion. ● More similar to essays in English class and on AP tests
ACT www.actstudent.org	Additional Information and Registration	Educational Testing Service www.collegeboard.org

UC Schools want to see SAT with essay and/or ACT with essay, be sure to check other colleges of interest to determine whether they also want the essay portion

SAT SUBJECT TESTS

Subject tests are given concurrently with the SAT, except in March.

You may take multiple subject tests (up to 3) on the same day, but you may not take the SAT Reasoning Test (SAT I) and the SAT Subject Tests (SAT II) on the same day.

These tests are primarily used by highly selective colleges for both admissions and class placement.

Carefully check your admission information from prospective colleges and universities to verify which tests and score a particular college requires for admission.

Plan to complete all testing, SAT and ACT, during your junior year. Typically in the winter or spring. Plan ahead – check test dates and register early. You will have one more opportunity to test during fall of your senior year if need be.

PRE-TESTS

PSAT (Preliminary SAT)

The PSAT is given on a national test day in October. At Capistrano Valley Christian Schools the 9th, 10th, and 11th graders take the PSAT. The PSAT is also used as the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMQST) in the junior year. Colleges will not see PSAT scores.

Practice ACT

Taking a practice ACT will help students get a feel for the difference between the two tests, and which they prefer. Students may take a practice ACT on their own at any point during the year. Resources are available online.

AP EXAMS

All colleges use AP exam scores differently. If your score on the AP exam meets the college requirement, you may receive college credit and start college ahead in credits your freshman year. Every college likes to see that you are enrolled in AP or honors courses if possible to show you are challenging yourself academically.

Section V: THE APPLICATION PROCESS

FACTORS IN COMPETITIVE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS:

- Courses taken
- Grades received
- Standardized test scores

- Personal statements and essays
- Recommendations
- Extracurricular activities
- Interviews

Which factors most affect the admission decision?

Many small, selective colleges pay greater attention to personal statements and essays, teacher and counselor recommendations, leadership experiences and the individual talents of applicants. They typically offer the chance for a face-to-face interview.

Large, public state university systems often begin with a mathematical formula based on a student's grade point average (GPA) and scores on the SAT or ACT. In California will have the UC system and the CSU system. The UC does a "holistic review" or "comprehensive review" of each applicant, looking at a variety of factors. Each UC campus is different in their admission practices. For more information see <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/freshman/how-applications-reviewed/index.html>. The CSU looks more heavily at GPA, rigor of coursework, and test scores, while giving some consideration to other factors.

Regardless of the college's evaluation system, you should present a well-rounded picture of your skills, experience and personal traits. Highlight your ability to succeed at each particular institution and what you can contribute to student life on campus.

Courses and grades

Grades in college-preparatory classes remain the most significant factor in college admission decisions. Selective colleges look for students who:

- Complete core academic requirements.
- Take more challenging classes, even though they may have slightly lower grades than they would achieve in lower level courses.
- Enroll in honors or AP courses and perform well.
- Take a solid course load all four years.

Class rank

Although still reviewed by many colleges, [class rank](#) has declined in significance as many private and religious schools have eliminated student ranking. Capistrano Valley Christian Schools does not rank. However, when counselors submit recommendations many colleges ask what percentile the student falls into-top 1%, 10%, 15%, etc. of their senior class and how rigorous the senior course load is that the student is taking in comparison to other senior students.

Test scores

Standardized test scores remain important at many colleges. Examinations such as the [SAT](#) and SAT Subject Tests, or the ACT, allow colleges to compare students from across the country. While students may take both the SAT and ACT, it is only necessary to take one, as colleges will accept either exam.

Essays

Personal statements and essays are both a measure of writing ability and a window into each student's background. Admission officers want to hear an original voice in your own words. For a [successful essay](#), get to the point quickly and personalize your writing through specific examples.

Recommendations from counselors and teachers

[At selective and private colleges, strong school support in the form of recommendations from counselors and faculty members has become more important than ever. These recommendations should be highly specific, describing not just a love of learning, but the ways in which the students have demonstrated that they can:](#)

- Add to the classroom experience
- Challenge themselves
- Attempt original projects
- Contribute to the school community

Students will choose one teacher from the academic core courses to write a letter of recommendation to submit with college applications. The College Counselor will write an additional letter for each student that has provided their student resume and asked college counselor themselves to write a letter of recommendation for them. It is very important for the student to personally request these of the teacher and/or counselor, not the parent.

Extracurricular activities

Evidence of extracurricular activities is important to the admission process, and depth of involvement is more impressive than breadth. You can achieve this by:

- Focusing on a limited number of interests, showing passion for the activity
- Documenting long-term involvement with organizations
- Highlighting activities related to a major or career goal
- Showing leadership skills and ability

Additional factors to consider

Many colleges set aside spaces for students who may not meet traditional criteria but will add to the class diversity. Geographic location, racial or ethnic background, extenuating or unusual life circumstances and experience living or studying overseas may all be influential.

It is the student's responsibility to manage each of his or her college applications. The college counselor will:

- guide you through the entire process
- write a letter of recommendation for each senior when requested

- complete the School Profile so colleges have a complete view of Capistrano Valley Christian Schools and your graduating class
- complete the Secondary School Report requested by colleges and the Common Application
- send transcripts and supporting materials when requested
- Assist with Naviance Guidance activities

HOW MANY APPLICATIONS SHOULD I SUBMIT?

There is no one right answer to that question as it depends on the individual student's needs. As students at a college preparatory school, we want to make sure you have choices come spring. Thus, all Capistrano Valley Christian Schools seniors typically apply to 6-10 colleges.

Here are some things to consider as you decide what is the right number of college applications to submit:

It is a good idea to split your application list into three categories, including a few in each of the following areas:

Reach – Your top choices, the most academically challenging schools on your list. You should include a couple of long shots, you might be pleasantly surprised.

Target – Schools where you would be very happy and are likely to be admitted. These are your realistic choices.

Safety – Schools where you are almost certain to be admitted and where you think you would be happy and get a good education.

Other considerations come into play that may affect the number of colleges you should apply to. For example – Will you want to compare financial aid awards in the spring? Are you applying to programs with limited space such as performing arts or athletics? Mrs. Norgren is always happy to talk through these considerations and help you determine a manageable list.

Finally, a few basic application tips:

- Follow directions – be careful, read directions and pay attention to deadlines.
- Apply early – don't wait until the night before the deadline to submit an online application. A website could crash or an emergency could cause you to not submit on time. Also, your application is lumped in with many others. Would you rather have your application read on a day when the admissions officer is reading 25 other applications or on a day when the reader has 75 applications to read? Submit it a few weeks early and your application will be read as one of a smaller stack than if you wait until the deadline.
- Always hit 'SAVE' before moving on to the next page.
- Compose all essays in a word processor (i.e. Word, Pages), then copy and paste to the online application.

- Proofread, proofread, proofread. Look through everything one final time. Then have your parent look it over before hitting submit.

ADMISSIONS OPTIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Source: www.nacacnet.org

Non-Restrictive Application Plans: Students are not restricted from applying to other institutions and have until May 1 to consider their options and confirm enrollment.

Regular Decision

Definition: Students submit an application by a specified date and receive a decision in a clearly stated period of time.

Commitment: Non-binding

Rolling Admission

Definition: Institutions review applications as they are submitted and render admission decisions throughout the admission cycle.

Commitment: Non-binding

Early Action (EA)

Definition: Students apply early and receive a decision well in advance of the institution's regular response date.

Commitment: Non-binding

Restrictive Application Plans: Students are responsible for determining and following restrictions.

Early Decision (ED)

Definition: Students make a commitment to a first-choice institution where, if admitted, they will definitely enroll. The application deadline and decision deadline occur early

Commitment: **Binding**. *Early decision is a contract between the student and the college. The student agrees that if the college accepts them, they'll withdraw all other applications and attend the Early Decision college.

Restrictive Early Action (REA)

Definition: Students apply to an institution of preference and receive a decision early. They may be restricted from applying ED or EA or REA to other institutions. If offered enrollment, students have until May 1 to confirm.

Commitment: Non-binding

APPLICATION TYPES

Common Application

www.commonapp.org

The Common Application is a not-for-profit organization that serves students and member institutions by providing an online admission application that students may submit to any of the over 500 members. Sample of schools who use the Common Application: Westmont, Calvin, George Fox, Pepperdine, USC, Notre Dame, Stanford.

Supplemental Applications

Some schools that utilize the Common App have a supplemental application that is specific to that institution. It may contain additional essays or short answer questions. Please be sure to check for supplemental applications when applying to schools through the Common App.

University of California

www.universityofcalifornia.edu

California State University www.csumentor.edu

Institutional

A number of schools, such as Gordon College, Georgetown University, Grand Canyon University and Point Loma Nazarene University, choose to use their own application. Access the application through the school's website and follow directions.

TRANSCRIPT REQUEST

Most transcripts are now sent electronically, however sometimes a student will need a hard copy paper transcript for a college application or scholarship application. Transcript request forms are available from the college counselor. Make sure to give at least one week notice. Common Application transcripts will be uploaded without a transcript request form. Do not assume any other transcripts will be sent without a request.

APPLICATION ESSAY

The application essay is an opportunity to show the admission representatives another side of you. During spring of the junior year students will begin to focus on the essay.

Here are some tips to help you with the process.

- Be yourself. By all means, let your personality shine through and let the reader get a clear picture of your individuality and uniqueness. If you were to give your essay anonymously to a teacher, he or she should be able to say that only you could have written this essay.
- Try to give the reader a glimpse of yourself that he or she has not already seen on your transcript or resume/brag sheet. Don't reiterate things already readily apparent from your application.
- Follow the prompt instructions to the letter. Be mindful of the topic, word limit, directions, etc. Make an effort to eliminate unnecessary words.
- Make sure your grammar and punctuation are appropriate and proper.
- Do not recycle essays from one school to another due to laziness. This is not a "one size fits all" exercise. However, you may incorporate a few ideas from an essay already written to include in another.
- Complete as many drafts as necessary to ensure a "winning" essay.
- Make sure that your thesis is evident to the reader. Be concise and to the point of the message you want to convey. Develop the main idea with specific facts, quotations, examples, and reasons. Let the idea unfold in the details. Show, don't just tell. Ask a friend to read the essay and make sure he or she is able to reiterate your main idea.
- Be honest so that your essay will ring true. Write from the heart and your passion will shine through.
- Do not use "big" vocabulary words to try to convey your intelligence or impress the reader. Use the appropriate wording and language for your particular writing style. The essay should be "your voice," not someone else's. That voice should be young and fresh, not the voice of an adult.
- Never write a term paper. The reader wants to know about you, not the thoughts of others. Similarly, if the prompt asks you to talk about someone who has had a lasting influence on you, don't spend the entire essay describing that person. He or she isn't the applicant! Instead, talk about the effect this person had on you and why.
- Do not be afraid to be amusing if that fits your writing style and personality. But don't force humor into the essay if it's not appropriate.
- Give your topic choice much consideration and remember that the admissions office wants to learn as much about you as possible. This is your "blank sheet" and a great opportunity to discuss yourself apart from the limiting format of the application.
- Once you select your topic, stick to the subject matter at hand and do not let your thoughts wander. However, it is advisable to step beyond yourself and show an understanding of pertinent issues that relate to your topic.

- Do not seek input from too many people with differing opinions. Your essay will become convoluted and disjointed. Additionally, you may lose the important component of your voice.
- Make sure you proofread your essay again and again to check for any omissions, misspellings, errors, unnecessary information, redundancies, etc. Get parents or friends to also proofread the essay.
- Do not try to play it safe just to stay within your comfort zone. Think about the responses of the other numerous applicants and try to place your own personal stamp on your essay.
- Remember exactly who your audience will be. Most likely, it will be either professionals who have read hundreds of essays over the years, or recent graduates who are young.
- Never appear to feel sorry or pity yourself.
- Never come across as begging for admission.
- If there are any red flags you fear the admissions committee already knows, this may be a good place to explain events or occurrences. Remember, however, that the point of the essay is to reveal positive things about you.

Common App Essay

In 650 words or less, students will respond to one of the following **2016-2017 Essay Prompts**:

- 1. 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.**
- 2. The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**
- 3. Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?**
- 4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.**
- 5. Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.**

UC Personal Insight Questions

- Freshman applicants will choose **four** out of **eight** questions to answer.

- Each response is limited to a **maximum** of 350 words.
- All questions have **equal value** in the admissions selection process. For applicants, there is no advantage or disadvantage to choosing certain questions over others.

Questions:

1. Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes, or contributed to group efforts over time.

2. Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.

3. What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?

4. Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.

5. Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

6. Describe your favorite academic subject and explain how it has influenced you.

7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

8. What is the one thing that you think sets you apart from other candidates applying to the University of California?

For guidance in answering these questions:

<http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/personal-questions/freshman/index.html>

ACTIVITY RESUME (AKA BRAG SHEET)

Students should complete a resume by fall of the senior year. This document accompanies the request for a letter of recommendation and is used as a reference when filling out college applications. The activity resume should include: future goals; awards and honors; special interests, hobbies and talents; high school organizations and service; community organizations and service, athletic teams; and work experience. Also helpful to list any hardships you may have experienced and how you overcame them.

TEACHER/COUNSELOR RECOMMENDATION

Instructions for Requesting a Letter of Recommendation:

- Plan ahead to meet your deadline. Allow at least 2-3 weeks for the completion of your letter.
- Most references will be online. This will be either through Common App or through a school's website. Some schools, however, still take paper references. Sometimes they will have a form they will provide. The teacher can either fill out the form, or sign the form, write "see attached" and attach their letter.
- Choose wisely. Ask for a recommendation from someone who knows you well, will communicate effectively and can speak of you positively.
- Always waive your right to view the recommendation.
- For your top school(s), if you aren't using the Common App, have them personalize the letter specific to the school. This applies to scholarships as well.
- Provide a copy of your brag sheet.
- Follow the procedure for requesting a letter of recommendation:
 1. Make your request in person. DO NOT drop the request in the teacher or counselor's mailbox or send an online request without speaking to them first.
 2. Within a few days, provide them with:
- Letter of recommendation request form (Appendix I)
- Recommendation request from college/agency (if applicable)
- Copy of your resume (brag sheet)
- Thank-you note
- Clear instructions regarding delivery - online recommendation? Common App? Hard copy? Deliver to college counselor or mail (you must provide addresses, stamped envelope)?

INTERVIEWS

The best college interviews are easy, engaging, and natural conversations where you can express your personality, intellectual curiosity and interests. Most interviewers are not out to “judge” you. They just want to get to know you beyond the four corners of your application. Just be the most confident and most mature version of your authentic self, and you’ll have a successful interview.

Not all colleges require an interview. Large public universities (i.e. UC, CSU) do not require interviews. Some private universities with large and active alumni communities (i.e. Dartmouth, Harvard and Tufts) make the interview an important part of the application process. Many small schools also strongly recommend interviews for applicants, in part to ensure that the student is well suited to their unique perspectives and programs. Students who cannot visit the college for an on-campus interview should request an off-campus interview from the admissions office. **Sometimes the interview is officially “optional”. However, if an interview is offered to you, it is a very good idea to accept.**

The bottom line is that colleges handle the interview process in many different ways. It is important for you to familiarize yourself with the individual policies of the schools on your college list.

Potential questions that the interviewer may ask include:

- What good books have you read lately?
- What plans do you have for the summer?
- What majors interest you?
- What did you like best/least about high school?
- What classes did you like the best/least?
- What are your passions?
- How would your friends describe you?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- What are some significant experiences in your life that have affected your educational journey?
- What extracurricular activity was your favorite?
- What are your hobbies and outside interests?
- Why this college?
- Do you have any questions for me?

The little things that mean a lot:

- Arrive 5 minutes early
- Don’t bring your parents to the interview.
- Dress neatly and modestly.
- Every interview should begin and end with: eye contact, firm handshake, smile, thank you.
- A handwritten thank you note conveys your gratitude and your interest.

For questions from actual college interviews, see Appendix E

Section VI: FINANCING A COLLEGE EDUCATION

HOW FINANCIAL AID WORKS

Financial aid is intended to make up the difference between what your family can afford to pay and what college costs. Use the Federal Financial Aid website (www.fafsa.ed.gov) as a resource. The financial aid system is based on the goal of equal access – that anyone should be able to attend college, regardless of financial circumstances.

Here's how it works: Students and their families are expected to contribute to the cost of college to the extent that they're able. If a family is unable to contribute the entire cost, financial aid is available to bridge the gap.

Who decides how much my family is able to contribute?

The determination of what a family is expected to contribute is called the Expected Family Contribution or EFC and is calculated based on financial information that the student and parents submit through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid or FAFSA. This is a government program that uses “needs formulas” to analyze a family's financial circumstances (using things like income, assets, and family size) and compare them with other families' financial circumstances. The FAFSA is completed online at www.fafsa.gov (NOT fafsa.com) and is available in October of senior year. The form will use tax return information from the prior prior year (meaning students applying for college entry in Fall 2017 will use 2015 tax returns). The online FAFSA also utilizes an IRS data retrieval tool that can automatically transfer tax information to the FAFSA form. See StudentAid.gov/irs-drt for more information on the IRS Data Retrieval Tool. FAFSA must be submitted by March 1 of senior year.

For families that would like an estimate of their EFC prior to October of senior year, they may access the FAFSA4caster <https://fafsa.ed.gov/FAFSA/app/f4cForm> .

What the EFC figure means for most families

First, most families can't just pay the EFC out of current income alone. The formulas assume that families will meet their contribution through a combination of savings, current income, and borrowing. Second, financial aid is limited. The formula therefore measures a particular family's ability to pay against other families' ability to pay.

TYPES OF FINANCIAL AID

Financial aid is any type of assistance used to pay college cost that is based on financial need.

1. Grants and Scholarships – Also called gift aid, grants don't have to be repaid and you do not need to work to earn them. Grant aid comes from federal and state governments and from individual colleges. Scholarships are usually awarded based on merit. **Do not ever pay to access scholarships. If it is legitimate, it is FREE.**

2. Loans – Most financial aid comes in the forms of loans, aid that must be repaid. Most loans that are awarded based on financial need are low-interest loans sponsored by the federal government. The government subsidizes some loans so no interest accrues until you begin repayment after you graduate.

3. Work – Student employment and work-study aid helps pay for education costs such as books, supplies, and personal expenses. Work-study is a federal program, which provides students with part-time employment to help meet their financial needs and gives them work experience while serving their campuses and surrounding communities.

Don't rule out colleges with high costs

Say your EFC is \$5,000. At a college with a total cost of \$8,000, you would be eligible for up to \$3,000 in financial aid. At a college with a total cost of \$25,000, you would be eligible for up to \$20,000 in aid. In other words, you would be asked to contribute the same amount at both colleges. Also, with the recent trends in our economy, some colleges are being more generous with their tuition assistance because they would rather have a student on campus paying \$5,000, than no student at all.

Net Price Calculator

Net price calculators are available on a college's or university's website and allow prospective students to enter information about themselves to find out what students like them paid to attend the institution in the previous year, after taking grants and scholarship aid into account.

HOW TO APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID

Go to www.fafsa.gov or studentaid.ed.gov/fafsa to complete the FAFSA. Remember, the submitting the FAFSA is free, use fafsa.gov, NOT fafsa.com

Financial Aid comes in several forms:

Federal:

Pell Grant
Supplemental Grant
Work-study
Perkins Loan
Stafford Loan
Plus Loans for Parents

State:

Cal Grant

When do I file the FAFSA?

Apply after October 1st of your senior year. You will need to file the FAFSA by early to mid-February. Deadline for Cal Grants is first of March.

CSS Profile

The PROFILE is an online application that collects information used by certain colleges and scholarship programs to award institutional. There is a filing fee for each college you ask to receive the CSS Profile.

For additional information: www.profileonline.collegeboard.com

College Comparison Worksheet

COLLEGE NAME			
Location			
—distance from home			
Size			
—enrollment			
—physical size of campus			
Environment			
—type of school (2- or 4-year)			
—school setting (urban, rural)			
—location & size of nearest city			
—co-ed, male, female			
—religious affiliation			
Admission Requirements			
—deadline			
—tests required			
—average test scores, GPA, rank			
—notification			
Academics			
—your major offered			
—special requirements			
—accreditation			
—student-faculty ratio			
—typical class size			
College Expenses			
—tuition, room and board			
—estimated total budget			
—application fee, deposits			
Financial Aid			
—deadline			
—required forms			
—percentage receiving aid			
—scholarships			
Housing			
—residence hall requirement			
—food plan			
Facilities			
—academic			
—recreational			
—other			
Activities			
—clubs, organizations			
—Greek life			
—athletics, intramurals			
—other			
Campus Visits			
—when			
—special opportunities			

Source: www.act.org

Soul Searching: How do I go about selecting the right college?

<http://www.westmont.edu/admissions/Soul-Searching.html>

Before you begin to make a list of colleges, it is best to spend some quality time thinking truthfully about yourself. Rather than make a list of colleges you think you can get into or that will be acceptable to your friends, you need to ask yourself a few important questions. What are your needs? What type of environment brings out the best in you? Once you have a good feel for the type of college environment you are looking for, narrowing down your options and making a great match is much easier. If you skip this process, your odds of picking a good match are slim. Think for yourself and know that what is right for your friends or siblings may not be what is right for you. What follows are just a few things you need to think about:

1. What kind of person do you want the college you select to help you become?
2. Which of your gifts and talents would you like to develop?
3. What kind of relationships do students have with the faculty?
4. Smaller classes will offer more opportunities to work closely with professors, perhaps allow opportunities to conduct important research alongside of them. How academically competitive are you?
5. Do you thrive under pressure?
6. Do you choke? Are you self-motivated or do you need close personal attention? (Your response here can mean the difference between a large or small college.)
7. Would you be happier as part of a larger college community with larger classes and, most likely, teaching assistants versus full-time professors in introductory classes?
8. Do you function best in a place where everyone is "like you" or would you enjoy greater diversity in a student body? Diversity should be defined as a community who celebrates all cultures equally. (A Christian college will offer this!)
9. Some colleges will require the selection of a major right away. Others, like Westmont, will not require the selection of a major until the end of your sophomore year. This is a big decision. It requires time, advice and prayer.
10. If your faith is important to you and you are interested in learning how to be a more serious follower of Jesus Christ while growing intellectually, then you would want to consider a Christian college. In a Christian college you will learn to witness God's hand in all subjects – from accounting to dance! Major employers are welcoming graduates from Christian colleges because they are competent and possess strong values.
11. What would you most like to change about yourself? Why? Can the college you select help you with that? (It can in small colleges where you have easy access to professors and programs.)
12. What values are truly important to you (spiritual character, political, financial)? How will your college environment affect these values? Will they offer equal and unbiased information?
13. Do you learn best in classes with lots of discussion and where all classes are taught by full time professors? Where your thoughts and opinions are important?
14. In which part of the country do you want to live? Close to home? On the opposite coast? Are you adventuresome? Remember, if you have grown up in sunny southern California, the winters in Massachusetts can either be very dreary or very exciting. Which are you?

15. Do you prefer a large, rural city? Or a suburban environment? Most small colleges are always within 50-100 miles of a larger city, so you have the "best of both worlds".
16. Do you want to have lots of travel opportunities to other countries? (Westmont offers over 15 travel abroad programs.) Would you like to be involved in short and long-term mission outreach? (This summer Westmont students traveled to India, Israel, Guatemala, etc. for outreach.)

COLLEGE PLANNING TIMELINE**Freshman Year**

- Plan challenging high school courses.
- Become familiar with college entrance requirements.
- Join/continue extracurricular activities (both school- and non-school- sponsored).
- Attend college fairs.
- Take the PSAT in October.
- Research college costs and continue/start saving for college.
- Make certain you have a Social Security number. All applications and financial aid forms will require this number and your name as it appears on this card will be the name you must use on all forms.
- Get a college-appropriate email address, if you don't have one already.
- Keep up with your studies. Your grades from your freshman year and through the first term of your senior year are extremely important. Become vocabulary conscious. Read...Read...READ!
- Build on the basic skills of reading, writing, thinking, listening, speaking, studying, and managing your time.
- Take part in extracurricular or service activities that relate to your interests.
- Visit a college campus or two. Make note of what you like and don't like.
- Get a summer job or plan something significant to do during the summer.

Sophomore Year

- Attend meetings with the college representatives who visit your school when possible.
- Read colleges' viewbooks and visit their web sites.
- Talk with your college counselor, teachers, college students, and/or recent graduates from your high school. Get on college mailing lists- show them you are interested.
- Begin keeping a journal. Develop a list of items important to you.
- Take the PSAT in October as practice.
- Begin thinking about taking the SAT and/or the ACT – take a practice test.
- Attend college fairs, parent nights, and financial aid workshops.
- Review your high school course of studies. Be challenged!
- Keep track of your extracurricular activities. These will go on your college application.
- Begin researching scholarship and financial aid programs. A good web site is: www.fastweb.com.
- Get a summer job or plan something significant to do during the summer.

Junior Year**September**

- Develop a filing system for college materials.
- Continue to take challenging courses.
- Think about the qualities you feel best fit you, i.e. location, size, public, private, or Christian college. Soul-search; compile lists.
- Use a college search program on the Web, such as CollegeSearch.com or CollegeBoard.com.
- Talk with valuable college resources at your school, such as your counselor, your teachers, and/or coaches and recent graduates from your high school.
- Meet with college admission representatives who visit your campus. Read college catalogs and viewbooks.
- Attend college nights, local college fairs, and the Christian college fair.

October

- Visit and tour college campuses.
- Develop a list of your interests, educational priorities, special talents and abilities, needs, preferences and personal qualities. Use these to match to colleges.
- Take the PSAT/NMSQT (National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test).
- Pay attention to what this year's seniors are doing...especially the scholarships they are applying for.

December

- Carefully go over your PSAT/NMSQT scores and use the information in the score report to interpret and understand your scores and to prepare for the SAT - see your counselor if you have questions or concerns.

January/February

- Participate in an SAT review course.
- Register for a spring SAT, SAT Subject Test and/or ACT.
- Begin to make specific lists of colleges according to the research you have already concluded.
- Review applications for colleges in which you are interested. Know what they will require from you.
- Explore financial aid options. A helpful website is: www.finaid.org.

March

- Meet with your counselor and parents to discuss the college selection process, classes & GPA.
- You should take either the SAT or ACT at least once this spring. If possible, take the SAT or ACT twice.
- Register to take any SAT Subject Tests necessary while course materials are still fresh in your mind.
- Request viewbooks, catalogs, and application forms from the colleges you've selected on your list. These can also be accessed online.
- Start your plan for a financial aid package or how you will pay for college.
- Visit colleges- take a tour, speak with an admission counselor, meet professors, etc.
- Plan a strong senior year both semesters. A poor second semester in your senior year may be harmful!

April/May

- Get a summer job. Consider doing an internship in something that interests you.
- If your ACT/SAT scores are low, summer is a good time to strengthen your skills.
- Consider attending a college preparatory summer program offered by many colleges.
- Continue to visit colleges.
- Read!! Practice essay writing, be creative, use your own words and style!
- Decide which application process you want for each college: Early Decision, Early Action, or Regular Decision (be sure you understand the responsibilities of each)

Summary

- Continue working and be involved in activities that are impressive.
- Have frank discussions with your parents about college possibilities and limitations.
- Ideally, by the end of the year you will be close to having a list of the colleges where you will apply. Over summer gather information for applications, practice essays, let a teacher/counselor/pastor know you will be requesting a recommendation.

Senior Year

August

- Register immediately for the fall SAT and/or ACT examinations if you are planning to retake either.

September

- Narrow your list of college choices to a manageable number where you will submit applications.
- Write practice essays.
- Review application instructions to see what information is required and make note of all due dates (e.g., SAT/ACT test scores, application deadlines, essays, recommendations, housing and financial aid deadlines, etc).
- Schedule an appointment with your counselor to discuss current plans and progress.
- Give your teachers or counselor sufficient time to complete any letters of recommendation (two weeks minimum).
- If you will need to request an application fee waiver before filing your college applications, see your high school counselor.
- Attend college fairs and touch base with reps.

October

- FAFSA becomes available. Review the financial aid/FAFSA process at www.fafsa.gov.
- Complete and submit the FAFSA as soon as possible.

November

- Continue to visit colleges and submit applications.

January

- Avoid senioritis!

February

- Men who are 18 years old or over must register with Selective Service in order to receive Federal financial aid.
- Before you make your final college choice, spend a night in the dorm and attend classes for a day.

March

- March 2 - Deadline for Cal Grant!!! Must have FAFSA submitted before this date. Absolutely no exceptions. (Remember GPA Verification from your counselor.)
- Application process should be completed. Make sure you keep copies of everything.

April

- If a college has requested a non-refundable deposit before you have heard from other colleges, ask your counselor for advice.
- Write a polite note declining admission to colleges where you have been accepted but will not attend. Colleges appreciate this.
- If you have been "waitlisted", consult your college counselor to come up with a strategy to move forward.

May-June

- May 1 - Candidates National Reply Date.
- Graduation - Attend and enjoy all your graduation activities. This should be a wonderful, well-deserved rite of passage.

Tips for Attending a College Fair

Before the fair...

- Review the list of college fair participants.
- Locate the schools you want to interview.
- Check out the schedule of info sessions.

During the fair...

- Talk to the college admissions representatives- introduce yourself, ask questions, if you know you want to attend a particular school, begin to establish a relationship.
- Print address labels to paste on the College Information cards. Include your name, address, email, phone, high school, year of graduation, intended major(s), and extracurricular activities.
- Create an email address for your college correspondence. Make sure that your email address is professional and appropriate- colleges will make judgments about you based upon this. Most colleges will communicate with you through email- make sure to check it regularly.
- When you arrive at the college fair, go over the floor plan so you will know where the college reps you want to speak with are located. Mapping out your route will give you time to talk with the college representatives from your top colleges first. If there's still time left after that, browse around other tables that catch your eye.
- Get business cards. Ask the college representatives for their business cards. You may want to get in contact with them again if you have further questions.
- Attend information sessions. Many college fairs offer information seminars on topics such as financial aid, the search process, applications, etc. These sessions will give you the opportunity to ask questions about the college planning and admission process.

Example Questions

Check off questions you would like to ask school reps:

Admissions

- What are the admission requirements?
- What qualities should prospective students have?
- Which standardized test scores do you require?
- What majors are offered? What's the most popular?
- What are the application deadlines for admission?
- Are interviews required? Are there group or individual interviews?
- How can I arrange a campus visit?
- How long should I expect to wait for an answer once I submit my application?

Financial aid

- How much will it cost?
- What financial aid options are offered?
- When is your financial aid deadline?
- Estimate the percentage of work study, loans, grants, and scholarships awarded in your financial aid packages.

Classroom

- What is the average class size?
- How accessible are professors outside of class?
- Will professors or graduate students teach my courses?
- When must I choose a major?
- Do I need a computer?

- What student services are offered (tutoring, career counseling, study workshops)?
- How are the libraries, computer labs?

Housing

- What type of housing is available?
- Is student housing guaranteed for four years?
- Would I have a roommate or live alone?
- How are roommates selected?

Student life

- What special interest groups, activities, fraternities/sororities are available?
- What's it like on campus on the weekends?
- Are any programs offered to help students adjust to college life?
- Are intramural, club, and varsity sports offered?
- How are the sports facilities?
- What types of meal plans are available?

Just the facts

- What is the school known for?
- What are recent graduates doing now?
- How many freshmen return for their sophomore year?
- How safe is the campus and the surrounding area?

Tips for a Successful College Admission Interview

Source: www.collegeboard.com

Appendix E

Before the Interview

- **Practice.** Ask parents, counselors, or fellow students to interview you and give feedback. This is the very best way to increase your confidence and improve the way you present yourself.
- **Record yourself** giving a mock interview. Watch it to see what impression you give. Look for these pitfalls:
 - Overusing “like,” “you know,” and slang
 - Avoiding eye contact, mumbling, and slouching
 - Giving yes or no answers, or rambling on with no focus
 - Talking too fast or loud, or using way too much (or too little) body language
- **Think about how you would answer some common interview questions.** Don’t memorize a speech, but have some idea of how you would answer questions like these:
 - Why do you want to attend this university?
 - What is your strongest/weakest point?
 - What have you done to prepare for college?
 - What has been your best experience in high school? Your biggest challenge?
 - What are your future plans?
 - Tell me about yourself. (To answer this, students should focus on about three things.)
 - Tell me about your interests.
 - Tell me about your family.
 - What do you think about such and such current event?
 - What is your favorite book or author?
 - What are you the most proud of?

During the Interview

- **Conduct yourself appropriately.** Be clean, neat, and respectful. Don’t use offensive language or make off-color jokes. Use “Mr.” or “Ms.” when you address adults, unless you are invited to use a first name. Make eye contact, smile, stand or sit up straight, and give a firm handshake. Be on time!
- **Try to make it a two-way conversation.** Express an interest in the interviewer and the school. Don’t recite a monologue about yourself. Take pauses to allow the interviewer to respond.

- **Ask questions** about the institution. This really is your chance to get the inside scoop on the school, especially if the interviewer is an alumnus. And ask about the things you most care about, for example: What's the town like? How about dorm life? The academic load? Are the professors accessible and friendly? What is the best thing about the school? Is there a club or activity the interviewer recommends?
- **Focus on a few key points** (interests, achievements, or personal strengths) that you feel comfortable talking about. Avoid speaking in vague generalizations or giving your complete autobiography.
- **Be positive.** Be upbeat about your accomplishments and your future. Don't dwell on insecurities, problems, or complaints. If you do describe a bad time in your life, for example, to help explain a drop in grades, put it in perspective. The interviewer is not your therapist.
- **Be yourself.** Tell the truth and be sincere rather than trying to guess what the interviewer wants to hear. Teenagers aren't expected to have all the answers. For example, if you're asked about your planned major but don't have a specific one in mind, a good response is, "I'm really not sure at this point. But what I've enjoyed most in high school is . . ."

After the Interview

- **Send a thank-you note** to the interviewer. Say that it was a pleasure to meet him, thank him for his time, and reiterate your interest in his institution.
- **Don't worry.** You're probably your own worst critic. No need to obsessively relive your performance. Remember that interviewers remember your overall impression. They are looking for students with the background and self-possession to do well at their school.

Why Visit Colleges?

You Can't Judge a College by Its Brochure

A campus visit is your opportunity to get a firsthand view of a college. A college catalog, viewbook, or website can only show you so much. To really get a feel for the school, you need to walk around the quad, sit in on a class, and visit the dorms.

Get Answers to Your Questions

A visit gives you a chance to talk to students, faculty, and financial aid and admissions folks.

Get Valuable Information

Pick up any official school material you see, such as brochures and financial aid forms. Don't forget to get business cards, too, so you'll have a real, live contact if you have a question about admissions or financial aid.

Student-produced material will give you a sense of what campus life is really like. Look around for newspapers and activity calendars. Check out bulletin boards, too, to see what activities are happening on campus, internships are posted, and generally what the day-to-day energy of the place is.

Is This College Right for You?

Ultimately, it's your decision. Listen to your gut. Do you feel comfortable walking around campus? Do you click with the students and faculty? Spending time on a campus allows you to determine if a school is a good match.

A campus visit is the ideal way to see first hand where you may want to spend your college years. It will enable you to get a feel for the general ambiance of the campus as well as have your questions answered by the admissions staff, faculty, and students. Prior to visiting, go to the college website for assistance in planning your tour.

Before You Go

Scheduling Your Trip

Pick a time that's convenient to you, but try to go when classes are in session. That way, you can sit in on a lecture or stay in a dorm overnight. You'll only get a true feel for the campus if you're there on a day when classes are in full swing. Try not to go when the campus is on break or during an exam week.

Research the College

It's important to know something about the college before you arrive on its campus, especially if you have an interview scheduled.

- Review the viewbooks, course catalogs, and any other materials the college sends to prospective students.

- Spend some time surfing their website.
- Talk to currently enrolled students or alumni about their college. Some college websites let you contact them online, or you can get their contact information from the admissions office.

Schedule your time on campus to make sure you have time for everything you want to do:

- Find out how often college tours run, and if you have to sign up in advance.
- Be sure to get a map of the school. You don't want to spend half your day trying to park or find the admissions office.
- If an interview is suggested, make an appointment. Also, consider meeting with the financial aid officer.
- If you're curious about a club, program, or a sport, arrange to attend a practice, rehearsal, or meeting.

Pack a Camera and Notebook

Was it X College or Y University that had that excellent exercise equipment in the gym? Where did I talk to that cool psychology professor? You think you'll remember everything, but you'll be surprised how colleges start to merge after you've seen a few.

Campus Visit Checklist

Make the Most of Your Trip

Here are things you shouldn't miss while visiting a college. Take a look at this list before planning campus trips to make sure that you allow enough time on each campus to get a sense of what the school—and the life of its students—is really like.

- Take a campus tour.
- Have an interview with an admissions officer.
- Get business cards and names of people you meet for future contacts.
- Pick up financial aid forms.
- Participate in a group information session at the admissions office.
- Sit in on a class of a subject that interests you.
- Talk to a professor in your chosen major or in a subject that interests you.
- Talk to coaches of sports in which you might participate.
- Talk to a student or counselor in the career center.
- Spend the night in a dorm.
- Read the student newspaper.
- Try to find other student publications—department newsletters, alternative newspapers, literary reviews.
- Scan bulletin boards to see what day-to-day student life is like.
- Eat in the dining commons.
- Attend a concert, theater or sporting event to get a feel for campus life.
- Ask students why they chose the college.
- Wander around the campus by yourself.
- Browse in the library.

- Ask students what they dislike about the college.
- Ask students what they love about the college.
- Browse in the college bookstore.
- Walk or drive around the community surrounding the campus.
- Ask students what they do on weekends.
- Listen to the college's radio station.
- Try to see a dorm that you didn't see on the tour.
- Imagine yourself attending this college for four years.

Source: <http://www.collegeboard.com/parents/csearch/explore-colleges/21183.html>

Websites:

RESEARCHING COLLEGES

The College Board <http://www.collegeboard.com>

Register & prepare for the SAT and SAT II. Answer the SAT question of the day. Search for colleges. This is a comprehensive site and is useful to students and parents in the college selection process. Use “Big Future” at <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org> to search for colleges in a certain area, with particular majors, appropriate matches with your SAT scores, and lots of other criteria.

Princeton Review <http://www.princetonreview.com>

Similar to CollegeBoard.com. Research colleges. Familiarize yourself with the Word of the Day. Prepare for SAT & ACT. Make sure you register so you can save your results.

Campus Tours <http://www.campustours.com/> (must have Flash)

- Search for colleges & universities by name or state
- Take virtual tours of hundreds of colleges and universities

APPLYING TO COLLEGE

The Common Application <http://www.commonapp.org/>

- Students complete one Common Application form, and submit the form to any of the 300+ participating colleges online. The procedure simplifies the college application process and eliminates duplication of effort. Deadlines vary.

The UC Application

<https://admissions.universityofcalifornia.edu/>

- For applying to all UC campuses. Applications open August 1. Deadline is November 30.

The CSU Application <http://csumentor.edu/>

- For applying to all CSU campuses. Application open October 1. Deadline is November 30.

PAYING FOR COLLEGE

Free Application for Federal Student Aid <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>

- The United States Department of Education Free Application for Federal Student Aid can be filed online after October 1. This is the one form that must be filed if you are looking for financial aid, and must be filed by end of February..

The Profile <http://profileonline.collegeboard.com/>

- Many private colleges, universities, graduate and professional schools, and scholarship programs use the information collected on PROFILE to help them award **nonfederal** student aid funds. If you apply to a private school like Northeastern University, they require you to file the FAFSA and the PROFILE. It is not free.

Fastweb <http://www.fastweb.com/>

- Very popular website for locating local and national scholarships.

Finaid <http://www.finaid.com>

- The most comprehensive “how to” site for getting financial assistance, including an Expected Family Contribution Calculator.

Financial Aid Letter <http://www.financialaidletter.com>

- This site assists in making sense out of financial aid packages which colleges provide.

Cal Grants <http://www.csac.ca.gov>

- This is the official California website outlining the Cal Grant Programs available free of charge to you.

STUDENT ATHLETES

NCAA <http://www.eligibilitycenter.org>

Want to play sports in college? Prospective student-athletes are able to access information needed to understand the Division I and Division II eligibility requirements, register with the NCAA Clearinghouse and access individual NCAA Clearinghouse records. ***You should register early in the fall of junior year.***

NAIA <http://www.playnaia.org/eligibility-center>

Register early with the NAIA Eligibility Center. It's required for any student who plans to attend an NAIA school. By registering, you also have the chance to let NAIA coaches know you're interested in playing in college.

CAPISTRANO VALLEY CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS TEACHER/COUNSELOR LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION REQUEST

I hereby request _____ to write a letter of recommendation for me to be sent to colleges and/or scholarship agencies to which I apply. I am requesting this letter/evaluation/form be turned in by _____.

I understand that teacher and counselor recommendations are confidential documents and hereby waive access to them.

Student name: _____ Date: _____

Recommendation type (circle one):

Hard copy

Online

Form included? yes/no

Common App? yes/no

Special instructions

Delivery (If teacher/counselor is to mail directly you **must include an addressed, stamped envelope**):

List Colleges Applying to:

Deadline:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.

10.

Other:

I have included:

_____ Recommendation request form

_____ Addressed, stamped envelope (include only if teacher/counselor will mail)

_____ Resume, Brag sheet

_____ Thank you note

_____ Other: _____