Research, Preparing to Apply and Applying

RESEARCHING:
Selecting the right college takes time, and it’s important that parents and students discuss their preferences as a family. Dialogue and active listening about these decisions is important. Students should take ownership of the college search process; however, it’s important for parents/guardians to play a supportive role.

Here’s how to begin:

STUDENTS:
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Prioritize in importance to help target your research and applications

• Location? Near home or far away?
• Major?
• Financial aid options?
• Athletics?
• Social activities?

RESEARCH POSSIBLE COLLEGES
There are many sites that allow students to search for colleges based on the factors they determined were most important. Start by checking out www.CollegeBoard.org and www.CFNC.org.

CONTACT THE COLLEGE
Found a college that might be a match? Go online and subscribe to their mailing list or email the admissions office with specific questions.

COLLEGE FAIRS
College Fairs are held at high schools, in the community, or online. They provide the opportunity to speak with an admissions officer and pick up materials from many different schools. Attend as many college fairs as possible.

VISIT
Visiting the college (either on a visitation day/open house or for a campus tour) provides opportunities for students and families to speak directly with admissions and financial aid officers, and current students. Many colleges also offer summer programs for high school students that may be tied to an academic interest or leadership program. Some programs allow students to stay overnight on campus, which helps them get a feel for the college.
What is your student looking for in a college?

- Academics – Does the college have their major or area of interest? If they are undecided on a major, does it have a variety of programs?
- Location – Is it close to you or far away? Is it urban, suburban or rural?
- Programs – Do they want to study abroad? Interested in student government, Greek life or athletics? Is community service important, or participating in the arts, or both?
- Size – Large university vs. small liberal arts college?

What are colleges looking for in your student?

- Have they met the general admission requirements?
- What extracurricular activities are they involved in?
- How have they demonstrated they are ready to attend a 4-year college?
- Keep in mind that when considering activities and involvement colleges want to see quality not quantity.
- Students should consider involvement in two or three activities that would be considered quality in the eyes of an admissions office.

**PREPARING TO APPLY: APPLICATION & DECISION DEADLINES GLOSSARY**

**Early Decision (ED)** – Colleges offer an early deadline (usually in the fall or early winter) that allows students to receive the school’s admission decision earlier than applicants who apply as Regular Decision. ED is “binding,” which means if accepted, the applicant is required to withdraw applications from other colleges and sign a contract that states they will attend in the fall.

**Early Action (EA)** – Early Action is similar to ED, but is “non-binding.” This means a student is not required to withdraw other college applications or sign a contract, but they do receive the school’s admission decision earlier than applicants who apply as Regular Decision.

**Regular Decision** – Decision deadlines will vary by college, but students have until May 1st to decide which college they will attend. Colleges with “Rolling Admissions” will send out admissions decisions within a few weeks to a month of receiving the completed application.
MINIMUM COURSE REQUIREMENTS FOR APPLICATION

As a rule of thumb, always check the individual requirements of each college. The private and public colleges, for the most part, have similar minimum requirements for core classes considered for admission.

Minimum Course Requirements for the UNC System and several NCICU colleges
- English – 4 units
- Foreign Language – 2 units of the same language
- Math – 4 units (Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, and one course where Algebra II is a pre-requisite)
- Science – 3 units (1 biological science, 1 physical science, 1 laboratory science)
- Social Science/History – 3 units (1 must be US History)

With careful planning, students may meet these qualifications before their senior year. To be competitive, take a full course load senior year – making sure to take both English and Math.

HONORS/AP/IB

If your school offers these classes, ask your guidance counselor which of these courses would be right for you! Taking AP and IB exams can help you earn college credit and save money on college courses in the long run.

DUAL ENROLLMENT

If your school offers Dual Enrollment courses at the local community college, take advantage of these. These courses may be transferable to the college of your choice, giving you a head start!

ACADEMIC CLASSES AND GPA

- Classes in core subject areas: English, Math, Science, History/Social Sciences, and Foreign Language.
- Weighted GPA – Grades are averaged with the additional weights from Honors, AP and IB courses.
- Unweighted GPA – Grades are averaged without the additional weights from Honors, AP and IB courses.
- Academic GPA – GPA based only on your grades from the "Academic Classes" listed above. This GPA can be weighted or unweighted.
APPLYING:
THE APPLICATION PACKET

Now that you’ve decided as a family where to apply, it’s time to get the application in order! An application for admission is broken into two general parts: the application itself and the additional information. The Application consists of information that most colleges require, and the additional materials vary from college to college.

1. APPLICATION

The Application is where colleges seek personal information, extracurricular activities, and a character statement if the college requires one.

Paper Applications vs. Online Applications

If applying on a paper application, make sure that it is the current and correct application. Many colleges will not accept an old application. New applications will typically be available in late summer before the senior year.

To apply online, visit the college’s website. For colleges in North Carolina, visit College Foundation of North Carolina, www.cfnc.org, where you can fill out one basic application and submit it to many North Carolina colleges at once. Saves time and money!

For colleges both inside and outside of North Carolina, visit the college’s website or visit the Common Application, www.commonapp.org, which allows you to submit one application to many member colleges. Remember: when applying online, make sure to send in any additional materials by mail (called “supplements” on the Common Application, additional files or materials on CFNC applications). Your application for admission will not be considered complete without these additional materials.

2. APPLICATION FEE OR WAIVERS

College application fees are usually non-refundable and can range from $0 - $100, and sometimes more. But don’t panic! There are a few ways that application fees are waived…

- SAT Fee Waivers – If you qualified for an SAT Fee Waiver, you can send in an Application fee waiver with your application. You can get the Application fee waiver from your high school guidance counselor.

- NACAC Fee Waivers – A form is available from the National Association for College Admissions Counseling. The form can be downloaded from their website (www.nacacnet.org) and must be signed by a guidance counselor.

- Alumni Vouchers – Some colleges offer alumni and college employees the chance to send in a voucher to waive the application fee of an interested student. Contact the college for details.

- CFNC Week – The College Foundation of North Carolina sponsors a college application week in November. Many North Carolina schools will waive the application fee for students who apply online during this week. Check with your guidance counselor for details.

- Campus Visits – Some colleges waive the application fee if you have visited the college. Ask the Admissions Office for details.
3. TRANSCRIPTS, TEST RESULTS AND CHARACTER STATEMENT

Official Transcripts/Test Results
Colleges will only accept transcripts and test results that are “official.” Transcripts should be sent in sealed envelopes directly from the high school office. Transcripts that have been opened are no longer considered “official” and will not be accepted by colleges for your application. Test scores should be sent directly from the testing agency (ex. College Board or ACT) unless otherwise stated by the college.

Standardized Tests
Most colleges and universities require standardized test scores as part of the application package. You will need to take one of two tests before you apply to college. Be sure to sign up early!

- SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) - www.sat.org
  The SAT involves three sections (Critical Reading, Math, and Writing) and is scored out of 2400 total points. Many colleges base their SAT averages on only two sections (Critical Reading and Math), so be aware of which sections colleges count when looking at their averages.

- ACT (American College Testing) - www.act.org
  The ACT involves four sections (English, Math, Reading, Science) and is scored out of a possible 36. Most colleges require you to take the optional writing test for your ACT scores to count, so make sure to sign up for “ACT plus Writing.”

Test Fee Waivers
Standardized tests can be expensive — between $40 to $50 each time you take the test – and it’s not uncommon for students to take these tests more than once. The good news is test fee waivers are available for eligible students for both the SAT and ACT. All test fee waivers are available through your high school guidance counselor. They do not cover late registration fees, so be proactive: ask for the waiver and sign up for the test early!

Test scores can be automatically sent to colleges students are applying to by filling out the School Code (a four digit code unique to each College/University) in the appropriate box on the test. School codes are entered at the end of each test. If the college of choice is unknown, scores can be sent after testing, but additional fees may apply.

Example: Meredith College SAT Code: 5410
Meredith College ACT Code: 3126

Studying for the Tests
There are many free ways to study and take practice tests to get familiar with the SAT and ACT. High school guidance offices and local libraries have guidebooks available that offer practice tests free of charge. For free online practice tests, check out www.number2.com and the College Board website.

Character Statement
The character statement is the student’s promise that there is no false information on the application. Make sure it is signed and know that colleges with character statements look at lying on your application like classes look at plagiarism. Honesty is important.
4. SECONDARY SCHOOL REPORT

Also known as the “Guidance Counselor Recommendation.” This informs colleges of the high school’s grading scale, the student’s class rank, and lets the Admissions Staff know the applicant is in good standing and intends to graduate on time. Many colleges require materials in addition to the application. Each college has different requirements, so make sure to send exactly what that college asks for.

Possible Additional Materials/Supplements Colleges May Ask For:

**Teacher Recommendations** – Many colleges ask for 1-2 teacher recommendations. These recommendations should be from teachers who taught the student in 11th or 12th grade, and taught an academic core subject.

**Essay/Personal Statement** – An Essay is a writing sample on a specified topic. A Personal Statement is usually on any topic chosen by the applicant. For example, applicants will use it to explain a challenge they faced in a subject area and how they overcame it. At some colleges, these are required; at others they are “highly encouraged.”

**Interview** – Some colleges require an interview with either an Admissions Officer or Alumni as part of the application review process. If required, schedule this interview as soon as possible because interview timeslots can fill up quickly. This can be taken care of by a simple call to the Admissions Office.

**SAT/ACT Scores**

**SAT Subject Tests** – Required by some highly selective colleges. They are administered by the College Board, just like the SAT. Speak with your guidance counselor to sign up for these tests early – they are not administered as often as the SAT.

**Portfolio/Audition** – If you are applying for an arts, theatre, or music program, some colleges require a portfolio or an audition submission at the time of application. Contact the college to inquire about setting up an audition time, or for specifics on portfolio submissions.

For more information about Meredith College, visit www.meredith.edu/admissions or call us at 1-800-MEREDITH.
TEACHER RECOMMENDATION

When asking a teacher to write a recommendation, ask them early in the fall semester of your senior year so they have time to write a thoughtful letter and are not swamped with other requests. You want the teacher to be able to shine the best possible light on your application!

If English is not your first language, and you took ESL classes in 9th or 10th grade, have one of your teacher recommendations be from your 11th or 12th grade English teacher – this proves to the college that you’ve worked hard at mastering the language and succeeded.

ESSAY/PERSONAL STATEMENT

When writing an essay on an assigned topic, make sure that you answer the question that is asked! If time allows, ask your English teacher to look over your essay for grammar and punctuation. Make sure to give them enough time in advance, just as you would a teacher recommendation.

When choosing a topic for a Personal Statement, don’t write about information you already listed in the application (such as a list of activities you’re involved in). Colleges already have a handle on your day-to-day activities from the application. Instead, write about something that they wouldn’t know about you by just reading the transcript. Were you sick with pneumonia and your grades suffered one semester? Why do you want to attend this college or major in a certain field? What is an interesting fact about you or an experience that you’ve had that the admissions office would find interesting or unique?