



# The College Handbook

Everything You  
Want to Know About  
the College  
Acceptance Process

## Table of Contents

Introduction	3
College Counseling at The Denver Waldorf School	3
Independent Counselors	4
Standardized Testing	5
<i>PSAT/PLAN</i>	5
<i>SAT Reasoning Test</i>	6
<i>SAT Subject Tests</i>	6
<i>ACT</i>	6
<i>Test Preparation</i>	7
College Selection, Visits, and Interviews	8
<i>Size Does Matter ~ Large vs. Small</i>	9
<i>Cost</i>	9
<i>Geography</i>	9
<i>How Many Schools Should I Apply To?</i>	9
<i>Visits</i>	10
<i>Interviews</i>	10
<i>Last Tips</i>	10
Other Points of Contact	10
Athletics and the College Selection Process	10
Breaking Down the Application Process	15
<i>Early Decision</i>	15
<i>Early Action</i>	15
<i>Early Application Decisions</i>	15
<i>Regular Decision</i>	16
<i>Rolling Admission</i>	16
<i>Wait Lists</i>	16
<i>Filling Out Applications</i>	16
<i>The Common Application</i>	17
<i>Activities List</i>	17
<i>Writing the College Essay</i>	17
<i>Details</i>	18
<i>Teacher Recommendations</i>	20
<i>FERPA and the Access Waiver</i>	21
<i>Sending Scores</i>	21
<i>Financial Assistance</i>	21
<i>Tales from the Front</i>	23
Colorado Public Colleges and Universities	25
Alternatives to College ~ Gap Year	26
Resources	28

## **Introduction**

The Denver Waldorf School College Handbook is intended to start you down the road of college selection. It is very important to find a school that is a good match for you, and with over 2,400 schools to choose from, the task can seem overwhelming. Hopefully, your process will be guided by the information in this book and you find the path easier to navigate because of it.

It is important to remember Waldorf students are well prepared for the intellectual rigors of college. Along with the curriculum's diverse menu of academics, art and athletics our students are able to develop their interests, talents and passions.

For those interested in moving on to college, remember you are not just a collection of numbers and grades. You are the sum total of all you have experienced and done throughout your life. Be sure to stay true to your "inner guide" as you select your college choices and be authentic in your pursuits.

## **College Counseling at The Denver Waldorf School**

The traditional path for college counseling begins in January of the student's junior year; however, it is important to remember all students in middle school and high school should seek challenges, work hard at their studies and pursue their interests.

In January, parents and students will meet about the college selection and application process. This is a time to ask questions and gather further information. While some students have a good idea about the type of college they are interested in, others may have just begun the process. It is normal and okay for there to be a wide range of interest and activity at this time.

The staff at The Denver Waldorf School (DWS) is happy to assist in all stages of the selection process—most importantly—identifying schools that would be good matches for your interests, abilities, and preferences. There are many options available to the graduating senior. Taking time to assess individual needs and future goals will help guide both student and parents through the sometimes stormy waters of what to do next!

There are a wide variety of books available that discuss creative careers; schools that cater to creative students; and, “cool” colleges that may fly under the radar, but offer a wide variety of intellectual and vocational options.

## **Independent Counselors**

The staff at DWS provides information and guidance during the college selection process. Many families, however, opt for outside counseling to help during this time. Independent counseling is a great way to manage the process and it can alleviate stress between student and parent(s)! If you decide to search for an independent counselor, there are a few things to keep in mind.

While we want students to put their best foot forward and have the picture perfect application (I’s dotted and T’s crossed), it is not always in the best interest of the student to be highly managed through the application process. It is important for the student to remain authentic to the admission’s staff, and sometimes, an imperfectly written essay offers insight about the student applicant.

In a recent *New York Times* article (September 21, 2011), “more than half the admissions officers from four-year institutions said that coaching by parents or college counselors was making it harder to really learn about applicants.” Another article from *The Wall Street Journal* (April 13, 2006) entitled *Who Got Into College*, cautions that admissions officers are increasingly adept at identifying applicants who have been professionally groomed. “Questions of credibility arise because in the current pressure-filled environment, some parents pay thousands of dollars for extra attention from private advisers.” Admissions officers “warn that the voices of many of the groomed applicants sound similar.”

It is entirely up to each individual family to choose the best way to manage the college application process and DWS respects the family’s prerogative to make that decision. However, it is good to be mindful of the pitfalls of an overly prepared application. Be careful to choose a counselor, if you choose this option, who understands you and Waldorf education. The bottom line: It is critical for the “authentic” voice of the student to shine through. A thoughtful counselor can be an asset to you and your parent(s) during this time.

## **Standardized Testing**

The most important part of a student's application to college is not his or her standardized test scores. The high school transcript along with the student's individual contributions are the most telling pieces of the college application.

Waldorf students should not worry; it is not imperative you become a champion at filling in bubbles and deciphering what Educational Testing Services (ETS) are trying to get out of you. However, it is still a component of the application to be taken seriously. If you absolutely cannot handle the idea of taking these tests, submitting scores is optional at many schools.

It is good to keep in mind, however, that many will ask to see scores after they have accepted you. They cannot take back their acceptance based on your test scores. Taking the SAT (originally *Scholastic Aptitude Test*) and ACT (originally *American College Testing*) is a good experience and the more you take them, the better you are likely to score. To see a complete list of schools where test scores are optional visit [www.fairtest.org/optinit.htm](http://www.fairtest.org/optinit.htm).

### ***PSAT/NMSQT and PLAN Tests***

PSAT/NMSQT is the official title of this standard test and stands for the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test and National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. PLAN stands for Preliminary Learning Assessment Network. It is also recommended that Waldorf students take as many of the PSAT and PLAN tests to gain experience. It only serves to benefit the student in the long run. Both these tests are designed to help the student navigate the new world of standardized testing. It cannot be emphasized enough: students from sophomore year on up should take advantage of these tests.

The PLAN is designed for tenth graders and is the ACT practice test. The ACT is now accepted in place of the SAT by all colleges and universities that require standardized test scores and the ACT has become increasingly popular. Junior's taking the PSAT in the fall can use their results to identify weak areas and prepare accordingly for the SAT in January. Junior PSAT results are used by the National Merit Corporation to select students who qualify to apply for National Merit Scholarships.

### ***The SAT Reasoning Test***

The SAT (Standardized Aptitude Test) is taken by most juniors in January, with the option to repeat it again in the spring and fall of the senior year. Students can register for both the SAT and SAT Subject Tests at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com). Practice questions are also available. The SAT is administered at public high schools throughout Denver.

When a student first registers for the SAT, a score bank is created in which his or her scores are deposited every time the test is taken. In the past, if a student took the test three times, all three results would be sent to the colleges to which the student applied. But in March 2009, students were given the option to choose which scores to send. If one set of scores is stronger than another, you can choose to send the higher scores. If you do not opt for this feature, all the scores in your bank will be submitted when you send your SAT scores.

### ***SAT Subject Tests***

The SAT Subject Tests are required by some of the most competitive colleges and universities and are recommended by many others. Most juniors take the tests in June. You can register at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com). These tests consist of up to three, hour-long tests designed to evaluate a student's content knowledge in subjects selected by the student. Common sense dictates that when students take the tests in an area or areas of strength, they are more likely to achieve higher scores.

### ***ACT***

The ACT is an alternate national standardized test accepted by colleges in place of the SAT test. The ACT is considered a more curriculum-based test since it tests your readiness for college and includes four sections: Verbal, Reading, Math and Science Reasoning. Sub-scores are given for each section with a composite score awarded on a scale of 11-36.

While all the test options may seem daunting and confusing, it is good to keep a level head around the whole process. Each test has its positives and negatives and addresses different learning styles. As characterized by an article in the *New York Times*, the SAT is "more nuanced, puzzle like, trickier." "The bright underachievers who get through high school using one quarter of their brains will do better on the SAT, because you just need good reasoning skills for that." Students "who get the highest grades in the toughest classes

because they work really hard” are more likely to do better on the ACT. The following chart comparing the two tests may help to decide which suits you best.

SAT	ACT
Questions arranged by order of difficulty	No order of difficulty
Highest Math level-Algebra/Basic Geometry/Some Algebra II concepts	Highest Math level - Trigonometry (only 2-4 questions)
Scoring: 200-800 for each subject added together for final score	Scoring: 0-36 for each subject averaged for final score
Sections: Math, Critical Reading, Writing	Sections: Math, English, Reading, Science Reasoning, Writing (optional)
Guessing penalty	No guessing penalty
Writing section required	Writing section optional
Tend to be tricky with many distracters	Tends to be more straightforward

### ***Test Preparation***

The unique and distinctive education received by students at DWS does not include the practice of taking standardized tests. It can be an intimidating and sometimes frightening component of the college application process. Take heart; this is not the measure of your intelligence, artistic ability or talents. It is merely another tool for admissions officers to look at during the selection process.

That being said, there are measures you can take to improve test scores. The first level of defense would be the SAT/ACT test prep books available in book stores or online. Websites such as [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) and [www.act.org](http://www.act.org) provide practice questions and tests for the PSAT, SAT, PLAN and ACT tests. These are free and easy to access. The second level of defense would be the SAT or ACT prep courses. They are available in the Denver Metro area all through the year. There are also independent tutors throughout the city who can provide one-on-one preparation.

It is important to remember to keep these tests in perspective. Students are encouraged to spend their time wisely and not become stressed by focusing too heavily on improving their standardized test scores. High scores do not guarantee entry to competitive colleges. The unrelenting pursuit of test scores can detract from the very qualities colleges wish to see in their applicants; namely, intellectual curiosity; a willingness to take risks; a passion for interests beyond the academic setting; and, a zest for life.

## College Selection, Visits, and Interviews

The most obvious goal of selecting a college is to find “the Match”—the school that offers the ideal combination of challenge and support, the optimum offerings of programs and activities, and a desirable setting. It is good to keep in mind that a “brand name” school may seem like the ticket to the big time, but the reality is employers and graduate schools are looking for experience and outstanding skills. Knowing this, the options are tremendous. The perfect college may be one you have never heard of before.

There are many catalogs and books available to you as well as websites that can help you navigate the vast amount of schools (see Resources). One in particular, [www.YOUniversitytv.com](http://www.YOUniversitytv.com), provides video of campuses to see what they look like as well as other tips for the college search. The College Prowler is also a useful tool in comparing schools. This is a site created by students for students, however, it now has a component for parents and counselors that allows for interaction, feedback and critical information. You can find this at [www.collegeprowler.com](http://www.collegeprowler.com).

Deciding where to apply is probably one of the most difficult parts of the application process. To help with the decision-making process, a self-assessment is always a good place to start. Some things to think about might be:

- Which subjects in school are your favorites? What are the special talents used in these classes?
- What are the three achievements you are most proud of? What special abilities led to these achievements?
- What are your hobbies and interests outside of school? What skills are used in them?
- What kind of person are you? What is important to you?

Other questions to ask yourself are:

- What words would I use to describe myself and how would my closest friends describe me?

- Do I want to attend a college where the students are mostly like me? Or, am I stimulated by an environment where people look different and have different backgrounds and belief systems?
- What are some of my dreams? What are some of the things I really want to experience in life?

By taking the time to do the work, you will start unearthing who you are, what you value and where your priorities lie.

### ***Size Does Matter - Large vs. Small***

Colleges can range in size from 30,000 to a few hundred students. Think about what you want from your classroom experience. Do you want to have dinner with your professors and have working relationships with them? Or would you prefer the anonymity of a class that has several hundred students? It is all a matter of personal preference. There are pros and cons to either choice; remember, there is no right or wrong answers -- just what works for you as an individual.

### ***Cost***

This is always an issue when looking at schools. Be careful not to talk yourself out of a small, private school due to fears about tuition. Many schools are well funded by endowments and offer a great deal of financial aid in an effort to balance out their student body. Some colleges, through alumni donations, have been very generous in giving financial aid. Make sure you look at all possibilities. The section on Financial Aid has a list of websites to help with the question of cost.

### ***Geography***

Often a deal breaker is the location of the school. It might be great in every way, but it is located in the middle of nowhere, or it is smack dab in the middle of Manhattan. Where do you want to live? Do you want mountains, ocean, warm weather or cold, close to home or as far away as possible? These are all questions to ask yourself as you browse through catalogs and websites.

### ***How Many Schools Should I Apply To?***

There is no magic number, but it is good to have a list that will ensure students have choices when the time comes. A good rule of thumb is to categorize your choices.

1. Good bet Schools ~ Colleges for which a student is clearly qualified and little doubt of acceptance (at least two colleges in this category).
2. Target Schools ~ Colleges student would like to attend and to which he or she is a strong candidate and is likely to be accepted (two to four colleges).
3. Long Shot Schools ~ Schools students would like to attend but might have highly competitive admissions processes or admissions the student may not fully meet (perhaps one or two in this category).

### ***Visits***

A college visit can make or break how you feel about a school. A school that was, at first, your top choice may float to the middle or bottom after a visit, or your last choice could move to the top. The “feel” of the campus may be completely different than what the literature conveys to you. Most often students can tell right away what feels right and what does not. Trips are best started in the spring of junior year. Often families will attach college visits to vacations; especially in junior year when a student’s search process is beginning in earnest. Visits help the student in the selection process to discern what is and is not important.

Another good idea is to keep a record of visits to schools and listing the pros and cons of each institution. This helps students later on in the process, when the selection begins to narrow down to serious choices. If the cost of travel is an issue, wait until all your acceptances are in then plan your trip(s) accordingly. Some schools will offer to pay some of the cost of visiting, so make sure to ask.

### ***College visit suggestions:***

- Research each school before visiting. Go to the website, take a “virtual tour” and read through any information you can get your hands on.
- Check out residence halls, classrooms (sit in on a class if you can) labs, dining halls, athletic and art facilities and check out the student union. Keep an eye out for bulletin boards and newspapers; anything that will give you an idea of the culture and flavor of the school.
- Is the campus easy to navigate and is the city/town livable? How are the dorms and bathrooms?

- Eat in the dining room; talk with other students and find out what they like and/or dislike about the school.
- Can you see yourself here? Does it feel stimulating?
- If financial aid is a question for you, make an appointment to talk with the financial aid specialists. They can answer questions and give you more information regarding grants, scholarships and loans.
- Write down your impressions right away—this will help you in your decision making process.

### ***Interviews***

Not every college conducts interviews; many of the larger state schools and universities do not require interviews. It is completely dependent on the school in question. Stanford has never conducted interviews while Denver University considers it a key part of the application process.

While interviews can sometimes be difficult due to distance, there are many ways to get an interview without spending lots of money. When checking out the school, make sure you find out about the interview process. If there is no way you can visit the school for an interview, the student (not parent) should call the school to find out what else can be done. Often, local alumni will conduct interviews or college representatives may conduct interviews during visits to Denver. Phone interviews are also common.

It is crucial to do your homework in order to find out about the importance of the interview to your potential school(s). Keep in mind, however, that if someone is an average candidate and is very interested in a particular school, the interview can be a critical element in the decision-making process. In a *Denver Post* article (November 7, 2008), Denver University's Director of Admissions said, "If they're a borderline student...the interview could be 90 percent of why they get in or do not."

The interview should not be a scary or intimidating process; it should be along the lines of a friendly conversation. If you are prepared, the most important piece of advice is to be yourself. This is the best time to become more than your grades, test scores, and other paperwork associated with admissions. Waldorf students typically stand out in interviews.

Remember, your first impression is your best. Be on time and dress in neat and clean attire. Give your interviewer a good, firm handshake and make eye contact. Have a list of questions ready; ask questions that pertain to you personally. Ask about the qualities they are looking for in students, for example, what kind of students do well or do not do well here? Here are a few other samples:

- What is special and distinctive about this college?
- I am interested in \_\_\_\_\_, how popular is that department, how many students major in that subject and what opportunities are there for conducting research or participating in new programs?
- How accessible is the faculty? Do students and faculty develop close relationships?
- What do the students do for fun? Do sororities and fraternities play a large role in student life? Do students leave for weekends, or do they stay on campus?
- What are the class sizes? What can I expect my first year classes to look like?
- If I qualify for work-study, what kinds of jobs are there?

Here are a few questions an admission's officer may ask you.

- Tell me about The Denver Waldorf School. What do you like about it most? What would you change if you could?
- What subject or subjects do you like the most and why? What are your strengths and weaknesses as a student? (As an aside, try to think of your weaknesses as strengths that just need "taming" – remember there is a "light" side to every "dark" quality).
- What activities are important to you? What do you enjoy doing outside of school? What have you done over the past few summers? Tell me about your family.
- What books have you read recently that you enjoyed?
- Describe yourself in three to five words.
- What do you have to offer our college? What in particular draws you to our college? What other schools are you considering applying to? (A word of caution, this can be a loaded question. They may want to determine your level of interest – if this is your first choice, say so!)
- Why should we admit you to our school?

### ***Last Tips***

- Review the information on the website the night before the interview. You will make a better impression if you are knowledgeable of the college.
- Be sure to get a business card from the interviewer.
- Have thank you notes on hand – it is very important to write a sincere note to the interviewer thanking them for their time and the opportunity. It will make more of a difference than you think; you will be a standout among many!

### **Other Points of Contact**

While we talk on and on about the interview, there are other ways to make contact with your school(s) of interest. Admissions directors will often look up a candidate's contact history; this is a signal to the school that you are particularly interested in them. Making contact with others within the school can give you a powerful advocate when decision-making time comes.

- Coaches and staff are important if college athletics are in your future (see the next section for more detail).
- What is your department of interest? Are you interested in music, anthropology, math, theater? By visiting/contacting these departments and expressing your interest in their specialty, you are creating a powerful ally.
- Of course, your admissions representative is an important figure in your process. It takes a total of three times for an impression to be made so keep the conversation going over time. Follow up is important as is a quick email detailing a new accomplishment or honor.

In a *USA Today* article (November 9, 2006), a Vice President for Enrollment Management at Dickenson College advises, “Do not be afraid to update admissions offices with your activities or awards, or to establish relationships with a professor, coach or choir director. It is totally appropriate for a student to be in contact with people at the college on a regular basis—probably not every day, not even every week, but maybe once a month.”

### **Athletics and the College Selection Process**

Athletics can play an important part of the lives of many students and many hope to continue their participation in college. For many students, athletics will simply be a part of

the larger application profile. While some students are good enough to be recruited by coaches, it is critical to keep in mind that coaches do not make admissions decisions and have varying degrees of influence with the admissions office.

Keeping these cautionary tales in mind is a good idea as you navigate the waters of college athletics. Relying on the word of a coach can set the student up for disappointment, so prepare accordingly. One student was told by the Dartmouth coach he was a shoe-in for a crew scholarship, only to receive a letter saying “do not call us, we’ll call you.” Imagine the letdown he experienced! Princeton, for instance, has a guideline or cap, for coaches. Once the athletic admissions pool is assembled, each coach is given three picks for his or her discipline. Students, who want to compete in college athletics, should investigate schools through the individual college’s website or [www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org). The most competitive divisions, I and II, require student-athletes to be certified by the NCAA Eligibility Center.

Once a student has determined, with the help of his or her coaches, that athletics will play a prominent role in the application process, contact with colleges should begin. Students should write to the coaches at the colleges they are considering and include an athletics resume and any relevant newspaper clippings or videos of themselves in action. All coaches at home should be informed of college coaches so they can contact college coaches directly. Also, as stated above, contact with the college coach is critical; students should make contact during the investigative process and appointments should be set up with coaches before a visit.

*It is good to keep in mind a few things when pursuing athletic scholarships:*

- The average NCAA athletics scholarship is nowhere near a full ride. Often coaches will take scholarship money and divide it among many players. It is all dependent on the school in question. The budget the coach has to work with, the Division the school plays in, and the particular sport are all factors in the decision-making process.
- The demands of college athletics can be overwhelming and exhausting. Practices can be twice a day, courses available to athletes can be limited, travel may be required, and restrictions on life outside of the team can lead students to feel disenfranchised from the rest of the student body.

- Remember, intramurals and club sports can be a great way to stay in shape and meet new people without the huge commitment of varsity sports.

*Recommended reading on College Athletics and the Admissions Process:*

- *The Athletic Recruiting and Scholarship Guide* (Mazzoni)
- *Put Me In, Coach: A Parent's Guide to Winning the Game of College Recruiting* (Richter)

## **Breaking Down the Application Process**

### ***Early Decision***

If a student is dead set on a specific college or university, that student will want to apply *early decision*. If this school is absolutely the first choice, being accepted *early decision* will bind the student to attend that college and all other applications must be withdrawn. Some schools offer two early decisions—one in November and a second in December or early January.

### ***Early Action***

Early action plans are non-binding: students applying may do so to more than one college and have until the May 1 deadline to commit to attending any college to which they are accepted. If you apply *early action*, your application will be the first admissions counselors read. You find out about acceptances and scholarships earlier, which give you more time to make your final decision.

### ***Early Application Decisions: Accepted, Denied, Deferred***

In any early application scenario, an early acceptance is the desired outcome. If a student is qualified, but does not stand out enough in the early pool, the student may be deferred. This means their application will be resubmitted with the regular applicants. Nothing changes and the student will be treated like any other regular applicant.

The most difficult is the denial of the early application. This basically means the application will not be considered again, and the candidate is not qualified for the particular school in question.

For the student who is deferred, there is no action needed on the part of the student or counselor. If something outstanding happens (such as an honor or award) in the time between the deferral and reconsideration under regular admission, by all means, submit an update to the file.

### ***Regular Decision***

Under regular decision plans, applications are due between January 1 and February 15. Decisions are mailed in the spring, usually late March/early April, with May 1 being the deadline for putting down the deposit.

### ***Rolling Admission***

Typically, large universities use rolling admission. Students may apply as early as they wish in their senior year. Admission's offices usually begin reading applications in early October and inform the applicant after the file is complete—about four-six weeks. Decisions are non-binding and accepted applicants can wait until May 1 to decide.

### ***Wait Lists***

Colleges often will place qualified students on wait lists. In days past, this meant being patient, but it has become increasingly difficult to get in from a wait list. If you are not interested and decide to go elsewhere, let the school know. If you are bound and determined to attend, there are a few things that can be done to help the process:

- Let the admissions office know of your continued interest. Let them know their school is your first choice. Be sure to email—phone calls are not acceptable.
- Have a college counselor, coach, teacher or employer contact the school.
- Send any noteworthy accomplishments since the application was made.

### ***Filling Out Applications***

Applications are generally available during the summer, including the Common Application, which is available online starting August 1. If a college does not accept the Common Application, students should phone the college's admissions office or download an application from the college's website. Students who are planning to apply for merit scholarships or need-based financial aid should request financial aid materials at the same time. Paper applications should be typed or filled out neatly in black ink. A good rule of thumb is to practice on a blank application before committing to the final application. Applying online is fast becoming the preferred method.

Remember to proofread applications carefully; sometimes applications completed online are completed more casually. Students should also check their email frequently; schools are increasingly using email to communicate.

### ***The Common Application***

The Common Application allows students to fill out one application online and send it electronically to several colleges. This saves a lot of time and redundancy on the part of the student. Many schools accept the Common Application. Often a supplement to Common Application is required, typically asking students to write a short essay about why they are interested in a particular institution. Be thorough and thoughtful with the supplement, and expect to write a different supplement for all schools that require it. Answers may vary according to the school in question; responses should be reflective and tailored to the school in question.

### ***The Activities List***

Waldorf students have the enviable position of having what many schools consider “elected” classes as part of the core curriculum. Make sure to put any of these on the activities list that may not show up on your transcript, especially something that stands out in your high school history. For instance, Early Music Ensemble is an interesting activity outside the normal Waldorf curriculum.

Remember, schools are looking for genuine interest and commitment in your pursuits during high school; over-loading your activities list with “fillers” will be apparent. Also, a student who has pursued one meaningful community service activity will demonstrate sincerity and dedication as opposed to fulfilling a requirement. Be honest and real about what you have done.

Do not forget any activities outside of school, including sports, theater, music, art and any college-level coursework. As an aside, it is important to find out whether outside coursework will transfer to the school(s) of interest. Contacting the school where the coursework was completed is necessary to get credits accepted to the college of your choice.

### ***Writing the College Essay***

The college application essay is the best opportunity to stand out from other applicants. It can be a deciding factor in the admissions process, as it presents the applicant as a person rather than a set of number grades. A good essay brings the candidate to life, revealing the way she or he thinks,

and conveys passion, curiosity and a sense of humor. This is your chance to show the admissions committee who you are and what makes you tick. It provides insight into what is special about you. Whatever you decide to write about, it should be personal. Your transcript tells them about you as a student. Now they want to see something new that does not come across anywhere else in the application.

A word of caution—each essay should be tailored to the school in question. It is too easy to make a mistake and send the application off with “I want to go to Amazing College because” when you are actually applying to “Super Great College”—not a good thing. Keep in mind, admissions officers read thousands of essays a year; be honest and genuine while conveying insight into who you are.

In 2009, *The Wall Street Journal* challenged a group of college presidents to write a 500-word essay on topics from their school’s application. The resulting article, *Holding College Chiefs to their Words* (May 6, 2009), has some words of wisdom on the essay process:

- Do not worry about coming up with the perfect topic; write about something personally meaningful.
- Do not force drama when it is not there.
- A good story from your own life is often the best place to start.

In the fall, Mr. Reinhardt will have a block specifically designed to help seniors with the essay writing process. Take advantage of this opportunity to perfect and wordsmith your essays. It cannot be emphasized enough that parents must resist the temptation to rewrite an essay. Admissions officers have developed very keen radar for overly polished essays. In a *Newsweek* article entitled, *Do Not Be Bland* (August 28, 2006), the Pomona College Admissions Dean advises, “Perfection is not required. Pomona is not looking for perfection in 17 and 18 year olds. We are looking for the human being behind the roster of activities and grades. A brilliantly written essay may compel me to look beyond superficial shortcomings in an application. But if no recommendation or grade or test score hints at such writing talent, I may succumb to cynicism and assume the writer had help – maybe too much.” The book, *How to Be Irresistible to Colleges*, by Eric Dawson has a wonderful chapter on the essay and how best to manage this challenge.

### ***Details***

There are many parts to this process and organization is critical to making it all happen. Along with the parts to be completed by the student, the school, the college counselor and classroom

teachers all have a role in the making of a successful application. It is challenging to juggle all the balls necessary; making sure additional forms get into the right hands well before the application deadlines can seem overwhelming. Staying organized is the key! Please use the following application checklist as a guideline.

*Checklist for Steps in the College Application Process:*

\_\_\_\_\_ Ask teachers to write Teacher Recommendations. Provide stamped, addressed envelopes.

\_\_\_\_\_ Finalize list of colleges to which you will apply and make sure that your list is balanced (good bets, targets, and long shots).

\_\_\_\_\_ Get going on the Common Application and take care to complete all supplements.

\_\_\_\_\_ Call or go online to request application forms or to access online forms from non-Common Application colleges.

\_\_\_\_\_ Note due dates for applications—regular and early decision—as they pertain to you.

\_\_\_\_\_ Fill out transcript request form. Allow time for school paperwork to be finished.

*Read application forms carefully and take care of the following:*

\_\_\_\_\_ Teacher Recommendations: Touch base with the teachers writing your recommendations and make sure they are on track. Also, make a hard copy list of colleges and deadlines for your teachers.

\_\_\_\_\_ School Report Forms: Authorize the school to send your school papers electronically by completing the FERPA privacy waiver. (You'll need to use your Common Application user name & password).

\_\_\_\_\_ Applications: Fill out applications online. For those rare colleges that still require paper applications, Xerox a copy of each application to complete as a first draft. Complete original form (typed or neat ink). Complete any application supplements carefully. Consult advisor with questions.

\_\_\_\_\_ Essays: Write essay(s) and review with advisor or teacher.

Finances: Pay application fees online whenever possible or send checks by mail. If you qualify for SAT/ACT fee waivers, you may request a NACAC fee waiver from the Common Application or pick up application fee waivers from the College Counseling Office for non-Common Application schools. Have parent(s) complete college financial aid forms (FAFSA), if appropriate.

Send Applications: Proofread carefully and submit online applications. If mailing applications, be sure to affix sufficient postage, and be sure to send applications well before the deadline. Things go wrong from time-to-time. Do not cut it close!!

Go online to send SAT scores ([www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)) and/or ACT scores ([www.act.org](http://www.act.org)).

Remind teachers to send recommendations. (Write thank you notes!)

Double check to make sure all parts of the application process are complete for each college.

Celebrate, cross your fingers and toes, and keep working hard!

### ***Teacher Recommendations***

Most colleges require recommendations from two of the applicant's teachers. It is wise for students to request recommendations from two junior- or senior-year teachers at the end of junior year. The best recommendations come from a teacher who knows a student well and has seen a student grow intellectually, regardless of the grade received in the teacher's course. Students should communicate with their teachers about what they liked about their class, what challenged them, and how they perceive themselves in the classroom. Students should provide teachers with a stamped, addressed envelope as a courtesy. Allow a minimum of four weeks before the deadline and check back with teachers two weeks before the due date.

Students often want to send additional letters either from other teachers, coaches or someone outside the school. Keep in mind there are mountains of applications for admissions offices to get through; they may not have the time to read through extra material. Additional letters may be warranted only from someone who knows the student well and can include information and observations about the student that would not be revealed in teacher or counselor recommendations.

### ***FERPA and the Access Waiver***

Many college applications, including the Common Application, request that students indicate willingness to waive their legal right to have access to teacher or counselor recommendations, under the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). It is advised that students agree to waive their rights as doing so gives their recommendations much more credibility. It is also assumed that teachers will be more candid in their evaluations if they know that applicants will not be reading them at a later date.

### ***Sending Scores***

Most colleges that require test scores insist that the scores be sent directly from the testing agencies. Students who indicate in the test registration process which schools should receive their scores (up to four free reports) do not need to take further action, but most students need to contact SAT or ACT to have their scores sent. This can be done at <http://sat.collegeboard.com/scores> and [www.actstudent.org/scores/send/index.html](http://www.actstudent.org/scores/send/index.html). Advanced Placement (AP) scores are typically not requested from colleges as part of the application process. Once a student has enrolled at a college or university, she or he is responsible for sending official AP scores to receive college credit.

### ***Financial Assistance***

With the rising cost of college each year, it is safe to assume most students will be receiving some kind of aid, whether in the form of loans, scholarships, work-study, or a combination of the above. Colleges expect students and their parents to contribute what they can, but applying for assistance is important if all these costs cannot be met. A surprising number of small, liberal arts colleges are well equipped to help students with their education.

One parent told the story of how University of Colorado would have been more expensive than the small, liberal arts school their daughter ended up attending. Do not assume anything until all the paperwork is filed and letters mailed. That is the time to compare packages and determine what will work best for each individual family. While state institutions clearly charge less than private colleges and universities, private institutions generally have more funds available for merit scholarships and need-based financial aid.

Those hoping for merit scholarship need to keep in mind that more colleges are likely to offer merit incentives to applicants who are strong in the application pool than to those who are marginal. An MSN.com “Monday Central” column advises, “If you’re the student, look for a college that wants you. Your financial aid package will be much more attractive at a school that’s trying to recruit you than at one where you’re fighting to get in.” (MSN.com, 4/7/10).

Pay close attention to schools that are both good matches and fall into a student’s “good bet” category. This can pay off in financial rewards. Though Ivy League colleges give excellent need-based awards, they do not give merit aid. At some private colleges, though, a majority of students receive aid, either need-based, or a combination.

*Typical types of financial aid are as follows:*

- Grants and Scholarships ~ These are gifts of money. They are usually based on need, but they also can be conferred based on academic achievement and potential or special talents.
- Loans ~ These can constitute a large proportion of aid packages. They do need to be repaid, but usually is not required until after graduation. To learn more about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), visit [www.FAFSA.ed.gov](http://www.FAFSA.ed.gov) for details.
- Work-study ~ Students are paid by the hour for work performed on campus through a work-study program.
- Institutional Scholarships ~ These are merit awards given on the basis of exceptional ability. These monies are not dispensed on financial need and do not have to be repaid. Colleges seeking to enroll particularly desirable applicants sometimes offer “merit scholarships” as incentives for students to attend their institutions. Other college-based scholarships should be researched on the website of each school and applied for accordingly.
- Outside scholarships ~ These are awarded to students by private businesses, organizations and foundations. The gift money ranges from the very small to full four-year scholarships. Large scholarships of this type are extremely difficult to acquire. The number of scholarships awarded is typically very small and the pool of applicants is often national. It is also important to note that all scholarships must be reported to the school and can result in the school reducing its financial aid package to the student.

*A few suggestions:*

- Contact each individual school regarding financial aid as each one is different. It will seem like a lot of hoops to jump through, but it will be worth it. Make sure to ask what forms they require and what loans are available above and beyond the FAFSA.
- You can get an idea of need-based eligibility by going to [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) and working with the College Board's Expected Family contribution (EFC) calculator.
- Make sure to compare aid packages from all the schools that admit you. Look at all the information about each school's offer side-by-side. Break down each package: how much is grant (free) money; how much is loan; and, how much is work-study? Look closely to see what the real cost to you and your family will be. It is not unusual for a private school that really wants you to make an offer that is less expensive than attending the local state university.
- State schools will have lower tuitions, but some of the small liberal arts colleges will have more money to offer.
- If wait listed at "Have to Attend U" which you can attend only with significant financial aid, it is probably best to forget about that school. Most aid will be gone by the time an acceptance is approved.
- Beware of scams—if it seems too good to be true, it probably is. Needy families are often targeted for these dishonest offers—if it requires money to access the information, it is most likely fraudulent.

*Tales from the Front*

It is not unusual to hear of students going to a lesser-known college rather than "Big Name U" because the smaller institution has the money to build their student body with diverse and interesting candidates. Not that a bigger, more prestigious university does not have the same standards for their student body; but often "prestige" will trump the amount of money dispensed as a trade-off and many students are willing to make that trade. Smaller schools welcome bright students who are willing to commit to a school with less "cachet", and many times students will see this in the form of more aid offered.

If a family's financial circumstances take a downturn, it is possible to appeal to the financial aid committee for additional aid. Financial aid departments will take a look at each individual appeal and decide based upon the particular circumstances of the student. Often a well-written letter

from the student and/or parent(s) as to the situation and condition requiring additional aid will have a very positive affect.

For those whose initial financial aid offers do not go far enough, the following should act as a guide for getting through the process:

- Determine the official financial aid appeal process for the college. It may be available on the website, or you may need to call the financial aid office.
- Be prepared to document any recent changes to your family finances that negatively affect your ability to pay.
- If you are comparing financial aid offers from colleges, scrutinize them thoroughly to determine how they compare in terms of the percentage of funding offered in the form of grants (do not need to be repaid), and loans (need to be repaid). Include better financial aid offers from other colleges, if any, with your appeal.
- Be sure your approach to the appeal is courteous and respectful. Start by saying “thank you” for the aid that has already been offered before requesting additional funding. If a financial aid officer sympathizes with you and wants to help you, you are much more likely to have a good outcome.

Some other guiding principles to appealing a financial aid decision: According to an article from the *New York Times* (April 11, 2011), there are some pretty clear “do and don’ts” for writing an appeal letter. These include:

- Write the letter to the person who will be reviewing your case; do not address it “Dear Financial Aid Officer.”
- Make sure your information is correct; basing a request off of flawed calculations and misinformation will not serve you well.
- Do not come off as rude; no one owes you anything and to assume so will only make them sorry they accepted you in the first place.
- Remember they want to make this work for you, and do not wish to place more hardship upon families. Be sincere, genuine and honest.

Each college has a financial aid section on their website, so make sure to look at each school’s carefully. Check deadlines and requirements as they will differ from school-to-school and it will be necessary to track the timeliness of outgoing information. The FAFSA needs to be completed to

apply for federal grants and loans. The website is [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) and should be filed as soon after January 1 as possible. “Federal Student Aid, an office of the U.S. Department of Education, ensures that all eligible individuals can benefit from federally funded financial assistance for education beyond high school. We consistently champion the promise of postsecondary education to all Americans —and its value to our society,” (Dawson and Herring, 2009).

*The following websites provide more insight into what is available:*

- [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org) ~ This website explains many types of financial aid and assists in calculating college cost and financial aid.
- [www.ed.gov/prog](http://www.ed.gov/prog) ~ This is part of the U.S. Dept. of education website that includes links to FAFSA information.
- [www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/agencies.html](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/agencies.html) ~ This website will link you to the web sites of state higher education agencies.
- [www.nasfas.org](http://www.nasfas.org) ~ This is the website of the National Association of Students Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA). It contains a section with information about financial aid.
- [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com) ~ Financial Aid Search through the web is a database of more than 400,000 scholarships, grants and internships.
- [www.scholarships.com](http://www.scholarships.com) ~ Another source of information on scholarships.
- [www.CollegeInColorado.org](http://www.CollegeInColorado.org) – provides comparisons of tuition rates in Colorado’s public colleges and universities.
- [www.meritaid.com](http://www.meritaid.com) – a comprehensive directory of merit scholarships and academic scholarships from colleges across the country.
- [www.scholarshipexperts.com](http://www.scholarshipexperts.com) – uses scholarship data and sophisticated profile matching technology to provide completely accurate, up to date information.
- [www.schoolshoup.com](http://www.schoolshoup.com) – similar site as Scholarship Experts
- [www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college](http://www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college) - provides basic information about financial aid the College Scholarship Service PROFILE forms. Also connects student profiles to a database containing over 2,200 scholarships, internships and loans.

## Colorado Public Colleges and Universities

### *Colorado State University (CSU) System*

The Colorado State system has three campuses, each with very distinct roles and missions: 1) Colorado State University in Fort Collins; 2) Colorado State University in Pueblo; and, 3) Colorado State University Global Campus. Each school offers unique and balanced programs covering all basic areas of study. As the states' land-grant institution, CSU has four unique statewide service entities: Colorado State Forest Service, CSU Extension, Agricultural Experimental Centers, and the Colorado Water Institute. Fort Collins is also home to a top-ranked veterinary medicine program. Go to [www.csusystem.edu](http://www.csusystem.edu) for admission information and requirements.

### *University of Colorado (CU) System*

There is a network of four campuses:

- University of Colorado – Boulder
- University of Colorado – Denver
- University of Colorado – Colorado Springs
- University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus

With a combined student body of 57,000, CU offers a wide variety of majors and opportunities. At CU-Boulder offers degrees from six colleges:

- College of Architecture and Planning
- College of Arts and Sciences
- Leeds School of Business
- School of Education
- College of Engineering and Applied Science
- College of Music

When you apply, you will be asked to choose a major in one of the colleges or schools. You will be considered on an individual basis relative to a prediction of academic success in the college to which you apply. Some of the colleges typically have more qualified freshman applicants than openings. If you apply and are not selected for admission to architecture and planning, business, or engineering, you will be considered for admission to the College of Arts and Sciences. The Colorado Commission of Higher Education, [www.highered.colorado.gov](http://www.highered.colorado.gov), provides an admission index for Colorado public schools. This will help you determine your eligibility.

### *Other Colleges and Universities in Colorado*

The CU and CSU systems are not the only Colorado public colleges and universities. For more information, go to [www.highered.colorado.gov](http://www.highered.colorado.gov). Here you can calculate your eligibility for the following schools:

- Adam's State College
- Colorado School of Mines
- Fort Lewis College
- Mesa State College
- Metropolitan State College
- Western State College

### **Alternatives to College ~ Gap Year**

College may not be for everyone right out of high school. Often gap years are used to pursue other adventures and experiences before settling down to a four-year college commitment, with the possibility of graduate school after that! The opportunity to explore new areas of interest can be an eye-opening and life-changing experience. The gap year can lend itself to real world knowledge and a maturity that only comes with being outside the hallowed halls of a school setting.

Many colleges have deferral policies that allow students to put off enrollment for a year or a January/February entrance option. In *College Spotlight* magazine (January/February 2009), “Many colleges approve of students taking a gap year, with top schools such as Harvard and MIT encouraging it for their students. In fact, Princeton University recently announced a new ‘bridge year’ program, which allows newly admitted students to perform community service abroad before the start of their freshman year ... Regardless of the type of service program, students who participate in a gap year find that they begin college with renewed energy, focus, and maturity.”

The following is from the Center for Interim Programs, Princeton, NJ, published in *USA Today* online (*‘Gap Year’ Before College Gives Grads Valuable Life Experience*):

*For a Productive Year between High School and College:*

- **Secure a place in college first.** Then, defer enrollment for a year. This is less hectic than spending the gap year doing applications.
- **Have a plan.** Set goals and create structure to prevent depressing downtime at home.
- Research programs. If an organization cannot recommend at least two alumni to discuss their experiences, do not sign up.
- **Respect your social needs.** The year represents a break with the crowd, so it is important to plan strategies for making new friends and staying in touch with old ones.
- **Plan ahead for health insurance.** Some policies won't cover adult-age dependents if they cease to be full-time students. Check your policy several months in advance, and then explore temporary insurance if necessary.

### *Gap Year Options*

Free Gap Year Opportunities: The best way to afford a gap year is to choose one that is free. Americorps is a federal program that is similar in tone the Peace Corp, only domestic. It is free, with health insurance and students that participate are given a \$4,750 education grant. There are no financial aid forms or income level requirements. Through the many programs offered, young people gain training, benefits and an opportunity to gain real time experience. Some of the programs included under the Americorps umbrella are as follows:

- Vista – designed to specifically to fight poverty in the US
- American Red Cross
- Boys & Girls Clubs of American
- Habitat for Humanity
- City Year – a new program that emphasizes community and education, students in City Year work in urban areas working to transform communities in need while impacting the lives of children. After a participating in a Basic Training Academy, the members are broken up into teams of six to twelve. They are sent to one of seventeen cities where they work as tutors and mentors. They lead after-school programs, direct youth leadership programs and do physical work to revitalize the neighborhood.

- National Civilian Conservation Corps – NCCC is a team-based residential program with campuses in Denver, CO Sacramento, CA, Perry Point, MD and Vinton, Iowa. Here students are taught first aid, public safety, disaster relief, firefighting and other skills before going on their first “mission.” NCCC participants are used in many different scenarios, offering young people travel, adventure and “extreme service.” They are sent to where there is need and work with the local humanitarian groups in fulfilling the mission of the moment. From building homes to disaster relief, this program gives a wide variety of opportunities to serve local communities in need.

### **Frequently Misinformed Comments**

An article, written by Shaun McElroy for the NACAC website entitled *Taking a Gap*, dispels some myths around taking a gap year:

- “But everyone goes directly to university.” Not true, every year we have students who defer entry for six months or a year to develop themselves.
- “But universities do not like you taking a year off from studies.” Absolutely false. United Kingdom has a long-standing tradition of students doing a gap year and it is gaining popularity in the States.
- “Well, since I am not planning on going to college next year, I should not apply now (as a senior).” Bad idea. Applying to colleges takes time, access to resources and help. Just think, you are backpacking in Nepal and you have to get your transcripts and recommendations sent. Or trying to write your essay on a boat rocking in 5 meter swells. Follow the same program as all the seniors and apply to college.
- “But will my college let me defer?” Yes, yes, yes. It is generally in their interest to let students defer. They have already admitted you. They know you are interested and they know that you are doing something cool.
- “What about financial aid or scholarships?” Generally you will need to reapply for both financial aid and scholarships as most universities will not let you defer these.
- “But my parents will never let me...” Really? Call a family meeting and have a serious conversation about where you are at in your life and what you hope to achieve. Be prepared.

The bottom line is the gap year can be an amazing personal growth opportunity.

## Resources

The following resources can help you navigate the waters as there are many choices and options available outside of just staying at home and working. Again, be mindful that many of these will offer financial aid and grants/scholarships.

- [www.studyabroad.com](http://www.studyabroad.com)
- CIEE (Council on International Educational Exchange) [www.ciee.org](http://www.ciee.org)
- [www.interimprograms.com](http://www.interimprograms.com)
- Lots of gap year advice and testimonials at [www.planetgapyear.com](http://www.planetgapyear.com)
- A good site for working abroad is [www.transitionsabroad.com](http://www.transitionsabroad.com)
- AFS Intercultural Programs ([www.afs.org](http://www.afs.org))
- Languages Abroad ([www.languagesabroad.com](http://www.languagesabroad.com))
- Volunteer opportunities with AmeriCorps ([www.americorps.gov](http://www.americorps.gov)) can provide students with a living stipend and college stipend
- [www.serve.gov](http://www.serve.gov) has information regarding volunteer opportunities with the American Red Cross and United We Serve.
- [www.gapyear.com](http://www.gapyear.com) provides information about getting started and choosing programs
- [www.dynamy.org](http://www.dynamy.org) is a nonprofit based in Worcester, MA that offers Outward Bound experiences and community involvement activities.
- [www.sojournsabroad.org](http://www.sojournsabroad.org) offers European cultural immersion programs in Siena, Barcelona and Paris
- [www.brownledgegapyear.org](http://www.brownledgegapyear.org) ~ offers aspiring filmmakers the opportunity to explore documentary film production
- Thinking Beyond Borders, [www.thinkingbeyondborders.org](http://www.thinkingbeyondborders.org), “is a program designed for gap year students to explore international development through global service learning and academic study.”
- Where There Be Dragons, [www.wheretherebydragons.com](http://www.wheretherebydragons.com) offers semester-long programs in China, India, Nepal, West Africa, South America, Central America, Southeast Asia, and Indonesia.

### *Further Reading (Alphabetical by title)*

- *Admission Matters: What Students and Parents Need to Know About Getting into College* (S. Springer, J. Reider, and M.R. Franck, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Jossey-Bass)

- *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges* (Barron's Educational Series)
- *The Best 311 Colleges* (The Princeton Review)
- *The Best Buys in College Education* (Edward B. Fiske)
- *The Best of the Top Colleges* (Joyce Slaton Mitchell)
- *The Black Student's Guide to Colleges* (Barry Beckham, Madison Books)
- *Cass and Birnbaum's Guide to American Colleges* (Julie Cass-Liepmann, Harper Perennial, New York)
- *Choosing a College* (The College Board)
- *The College Admissions Mystique* (Bill Mayher, Noonday Press)
- *College Financial Aid Made Easy* (Patrick Bellantoni, Ten Speed Press)
- *The College Finder (3rd Ed.)* (Steven R. Antonoff, Ph.D., Wintergreen Orchard House)
- *The College Handbook* (The College Board)
- *Colleges that Change Lives – 40 schools You Should Know About if You're Not A Straight A Student* (Penguin Books)
- *Cool Colleges for the Hyper-Intelligent, Self-Directed, Late Blooming and Just Plain Different* (Donald Asher, Ten Speed Press)
- *College Survival* (Greg Gottesman and Friends)
- *A Comparative Guide to American Colleges* (James Cass and Max Birnbaum)
- *The Fiske Guide to Colleges* (Edward Fiske, Time Books)
- *The Fiske Guide to Getting Into the Right College* (Edward Fiske Books)
- *Guide to Performing Arts Programs: Profiles of over 600 Colleges, High Schools and Summer Programs* (Carole Everett and Muriel Topaz, Princeton Review, Division of Random House)
- *How to Be Irresistible to Colleges* (Eric Dawson and Lynda Herring, SuperCollege, LLC, Belmont, CA)
- *Looking Beyond the Ivy League: Finding the College that's Right for You* (Loren Pope, Penguin Books)
- *Lovejoy's College Guide* (Charles T. Straughn II and Barbara Sue Straughn)
- *Lovejoy's Guide to Colleges for the Learning Disabled* (Charles T. Straughn II)
- *The Multicultural Student's Guide to Colleges* (Robert Mitchell, Noonday Press)

- *Peterson's Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities* (Peterson's, Princeton, New Jersey)
- *Peterson's Competitive Colleges* (Peterson's, Princeton, New Jersey)
- *Peterson's Guide to Two Year Colleges* (Peterson's, New York)
- *Peterson's Professional Degree Programs in the Visual and Performing Arts* (Peterson's, Princeton, New Jersey)
- *Playing the Private College Admission Game* (Richard Moll)
- *Princeton Review Student Access Guide – The Big Book of Colleges* (Random House, New York)
- *The Public Ivys* (Richard Moll)