

Helping your junior with college research

Beginning now, your HS junior needs to actively engage in the college search process – taking interest surveys to decide what college characteristics are important; looking critically at academic and extracurricular accomplishments to date and where room for improvement exists; deciding on a testing calendar and committing to an appropriate test preparation schedule; signing up for college mailing lists and being open to learning about colleges beyond those on bumper stickers and at the top of rankings. Your child’s goal, and yours, should be to identify a list of colleges that are “good fits” based on his or her abilities, interests, and potential, as well as your family’s ability and willingness to pay.

Researching Colleges – before you start

1. Be clear about your child’s academic and personal profile from the start.

Your child’s academic profile

Review the high school transcript:

- Look at the number and difficulty of the courses completed year-by-year
Colleges focus on *academic* courses and *prefer* that students include the five core academic solids (English, math, science, social studies, and foreign languages) *each year*.
- Based on the higher level courses available at your HS, is your child sampling some of the more rigorous offerings appropriate to his/her achievement to date?
- Look for any trends in academic performance. If your child stumbled gradewise during HS, what happened subsequently?
- Check the GPA (while your HS may list both weighted and unweighted GPAs, most colleges will use unweighted GPAs in their review). Many recalculate the GPA rather than use what the HS submits.

Know your student’s test results (SAT and/or ACT, or at least PSAT)

Your child’s personal profile

Does your child have a clear idea (or any idea) about a college major? Career plans?

How involved is your child in extracurricular activities? Does your child hope to continue with any of those activities (sports, music, debate, ROTC, journalism, etc., in a significant way in college?)

Are there any special circumstances or limitations (learning differences, disabilities, religious practices, etc. that need to be considered when evaluating a college’s fit?)

How mature is your child? How ready is your child to leave home, make decisions, handle money, and manage time? Is your child well-organized, self-directed, resilient, self-confident, resourceful?

2. Unless you are comfortable paying the full cost of college attendance, determine your Expected Family Contribution (EFC) before starting the research and explain it to your child.

Paying for College – Know your Expected Family Contribution

Your child may or may not qualify for assistance paying for college, but unless you apply for need-based financial aid, you won't really know. All parents should go through the federal financial aid application process when each of their children starts college; it is an annual process, and eligibility rules change, so do not assume you have to pay the full sticker price yourself.

EFC Calculator: Parents, you should want to assess the “financial fit” of each college your child is seriously considering. Use the College Board’s free on-line Expected Family Contribution (EFC) calculator to get an estimate of what your family will be expected to contribute toward the cost of attendance. Go to

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/paying-your-share/expected-family-contribution-calculator>

This estimate is a great reference point. Keep it in mind as you look at the Cost of Attendance (COA) figures for colleges your child is considering. Cost of Attendance typically includes tuition and fees, room and board, and allowances for books and supplies, transportation, and personal expenses. All colleges are required to provide a Net Price Calculator on their websites to give families a more specific estimate of what they are likely to pay at that particular institution. Colleges subtract the Estimated Family Contribution from the college’s Cost of Attendance to determine a student’s Demonstrated Financial Need. Keep in mind, however, that these are estimates.

Your child’s final college list should include at least several colleges that are not only good financial fits, but are also schools that your child would gladly attend.

Your research should include looking for “financially friendly” colleges as well – those who meet full demonstrated need and those that provide ample merit scholarship opportunities.

- 3. If there are any absolute rules that you as parents/guardians need to lay down about going to or paying for college, make sure they are discussed with your child early on.**
- 4. All students applying to college and taking college tests (SAT, ACT, AP) should have a “professional” email and also use the formal version of their name that appears on their HS transcript, their test registrations, and their Social Security card.**
- 5. Accept that this is a process, and there are likely to be many factors, some unexpected, that may cause you to change direction along the way. For starters, you are dealing with a teenager!**

Researching Colleges – tools

1. Online

Use the internet to research specific colleges, the college admission process, financial aid and scholarships. There are lots of college search engines out there....the best of them are FREE. We see no reason for you to pay for this advice, so think twice if you find yourself at an Internet site that asks for credit card information in order to continue.

General Information (Some ask you to complete interest surveys to get a list of colleges to research)

College Board Big Future	www.bigfuturecollegeboard.com
ACT	www.actstudent.org
College Navigator	www.nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator
College Data	www.collegedata.com
College View	www.collegeview.com
Unigo	www.unigo.com
U.S. News	www.usnews.com/education
California Colleges (+more)	www.californiacolleges.edu
<i>And only in moderation...</i>	
Niche/College Prowler	
College Confidential	

College websites

In California:	University of California (UC)	www.universityofcalifornia.edu/admissions
	California State University (CSU)	www.csumentor.edu
	California Community Colleges	www.cccco.edu
	California's independent colleges and universities	www.aiccu.edu

What to look at? On the home page, look for "Admission" or "Prospective students" or "New students" or "Apply." The undergraduate admissions section will be loaded with information and links to more:

- Academic programs, schools, departments, and major
- Applying to the college (admission criteria, application process, forms, deadlines, interviews, financial aid, scholarships, etc.)
- The campus (setting, location, campus maps, a "virtual" tour)
- Visiting (tours, directions and parking, overnight visits, accommodations, off-campus programs)
- Student life on campus (activities, athletics, campus housing, campus safety, student services, clubs and organizations, study abroad internships; etc.)

Find the course catalog – usually in the "Academics" section. It lays out the requirements for each major, short descriptions of all courses, and an explanation of the path students follow year-by-year in their studies. For students who have an intended major, comparing course catalogs is invaluable to understand the differences among different types of colleges.

Click on an academic department or a specific major to learn more about who is teaching, honors and other special programs, including study abroad opportunities and internships, as well as student organizations.

Don't stop with the "prospective" student pages. Check out what's available for "current" students. The college newspaper can often be found online; this can be an eye-opener in understanding pressing campus issues that may not be mentioned in admissions publications. The housing section has much more detail about housing options on and off-campus beyond freshman year. Check up on student health services as well as academic support available for undergraduates.

2. Guidebooks

Spend time periodically at Barnes & Noble or another bookstore – and perhaps your local public library – browsing the college guidebooks section.

The Fiske Guide to Colleges

Yale Insider's Guide to Colleges

The Best 380 Colleges (Princeton Review)

For information about college majors:
College Board's *Index of College Majors*

3. Visiting colleges / Attending regional admissions information sessions, college fairs, and college open houses

All juniors should do some comparison college visiting this year.

By size - research university (e.g., UCSD, UC Irvine, USC); comprehensive university (e.g., SDSU, University of San Diego, Chapman University, Pepperdine, Point Loma University); liberal arts college (e.g., Pitzer College, Occidental College, etc.)

By type - public (e.g., UCs, Cal States, Arizona State University, Oregon, etc.); private (e.g., Loyola Marymount University, SMU, Boston University)

If you are traveling out of town for a family event, find out what colleges are in the area and make plans to visit one or two. For HS juniors, visiting means making an appointment to take the campus tour and, if you have time, to attend the information session that proceeds or follows the tour; it does not mean a "drive-by."

SMHS publicizes information about college representatives visiting the high school, along with those hosting information programs in San Diego, along with college fairs, college open houses, and other college news.

4. College publications

As soon as you provide colleges with your name, address, and HS graduation year, your household will be deluged with publications. *Viewbooks* are the glossy publications that provide a brief glimpse of campus, majors, student life, and the admission process. Note to parents: Viewbooks also provide information (or links) to their financial aid and scholarship programs, but most students don't read that far.

PSAT, SAT AND ACT takers who check Yes to the Student Search question (*May we share your contact information with colleges?*) will get lots of mail. Colleges buy names and addresses of test takers. Students who sign up for college mailing lists (online or by filling out cards at college fairs or school visits) will also get invitations to events colleges may be hosting in Southern California or announcements about special visit programs, scholarships, etc.

5. Talking to current students and college alumni

Alumni of your high school, who have attended or have graduated from colleges you are considering, are an excellent source of information. Talk to people working in careers you are thinking about. Many professional associations provide resources to students preparing for specific careers.

TAKE NOTES about what you learn and what you like/don't like. Keep track of people you talk to; you may need to get back to them later if you decide to apply. Create a college binder or folder system to collect information; you will need it when you start developing your college list.