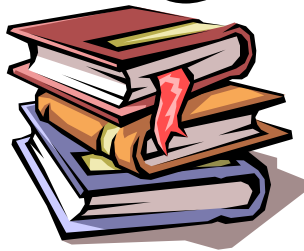


College Planning Guide



For
Oxford Area High School
Students

College Planning

Prior to Senior Year

- Listen for announcements about college “open-houses” and college representatives visiting school. (More information and sign-up forms for the college visits are available in the guidance office)
- Perform searches on the internet and from books in the guidance office for universities or programs of interest.
- Attend a college fair to gather college information. There is information published in guidance and on the guidance website. You can also research college fairs at www.nationalcollegefairs.org
-
- Sign up for standardized admissions tests (SAT, ACT) as appropriate. Registration information is in the guidance office or online at www.collegeboard.com or www.actstudent.org
- Make an appointment with your counselor to review a list of possible colleges
- Write, call, or e-mail all colleges on your list and ask for:
 - An application
 - A view book
 - Financial Aid Information
 - Athletic or other extracurricular information (if appropriate)
- After you receive all the materials from the schools, review them with your parents. Choose approximately six to focus on. The schools should include: One long shot (Reach); one “shoe-in” (Safety); and several competitive schools (Target).
- Visit colleges. Meet with admissions officer (you could have your unofficial transcript with you).
- Plan your senior schedule carefully. Plan to continue academic rigorous course load. Take the toughest courses you can handle.

SUMMER BEFORE SENIOR YEAR

- Visit the campuses over the summer with your parents. It is important that you visit the ones that are being seriously considered. Write thank you letters to those admission officers you meet.
- Talk to financial aid representatives from each school to get an idea of what to expect financially.
- Talk to students and professors while visiting.
- Choose approximately four schools to apply to and do a rough copy of the applications.
- Work on college essays.
- Make a note of application deadlines and specific admission requirements for each school.
- Register for NCAA if you plan to play a Division I or II sport. (www.ncaaclearinghouse.org)

FALL OF YOUR SENIOR YEAR

- Work hard to maintain good grades throughout the whole year. **DON'T SLACK OFF.**
- If you are still undecided on a school, visit College Board's website and complete comparison of the schools. www.collegeboard.com
- Request letters of recommendation at least a month before the college needs to receive them. Remember some teachers have been requested to write many letters, so please ask them in advance.
- Your counselor will be happy to write a letter of recommendation; however, you must submit a senior information sheet. Supply resumes and additional information to help your counselor build a better letter of recommendation. Please allow two weeks for completion.
- Check the guidance office for any pertinent opportunities.
- Check the *Scholarship Update* for any opportunities available for you. *Scholarship Update* is posted in 12th grade English classes, on the bulletin board in guidance, and on the school guidance website. Please check for monthly updates.
- In September, ask your English teacher, counselor, or another person (with quality writing skills) to double-check your application essays.
- Do the "good" copy of your application.
- Take the SAT Reasoning test or SAT Subject tests and/or ACT, if necessary.
- Request transcripts in the guidance office for college and scholarship applications. There is a TRANSCRIPT REQUEST form to fill out in the guidance office and on the guidance website. Official transcripts are placed in sealed envelopes with the school address stamp or official signature placed over the envelope. Breaking the seal invalidates the transcript. To review your transcript, see your counselor. Please allow at least two weeks before the application deadline.
- Fill out financial aid forms required for each college. Most cannot be filed before January 1. However, do double-check all dates.
- All students who wish to apply for financial assistance need to complete the FAFSA form (*FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID*) as soon as possible after January 1st. If you do not receive the worksheet in the mail, you may pick a copy of the worksheet in the guidance office or complete the application online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. You may request a pin prior to January 1 at www.pin.ed.gov.

SPRING OF YOUR SENIOR YEAR

- Continue to **do well** in your classes. Colleges maintain the right to retract an offer of admission if you do not do well in your coursework.
- Contact schools you have applied to and ensure that your application is complete.
- Check the Scholarship Update periodically for any opportunities available. Most scholarships take a short time to complete and provide funding that does not need to be paid back.

- Some schools require mid-year reports, and it is the student's responsibility to request the grades be sent to the colleges. (Allow the guidance office two weeks to mail these reports to the appropriate school).
- Most colleges will give you an admission answer by April 15th.
- When the acceptance letters come, discuss with your parents and counselor which school would be best for you. Notify your counselor of all admissions decisions you receive by bringing in a copy of your acceptance letters.
- Write letters accepting or declining all admission offers.
- FAFSA needs to be submitted by May 1st if the student is enrolling in a four-year program and by August 1st if the student is enrolling in a Business, Trade, and Technical School, as well as two-year programs. However many schools have deadlines prior to May 1st. Check your colleges website.

Standardized Admissions Test

Usually, colleges are most interested in what courses a student has taken and what grades have been earned; your SAT or ACT score help college admission officers evaluate how well prepared you are to do college-level work. Because courses and grading standards vary widely from school to school, scores on standardized tests help colleges compare the ability of students from different schools.

It is critical for students to take the SAT during their junior year. If you must take one during your senior year, please complete it prior to the end of the first semester to provide colleges with scores in a timely manner. ACT is usually taken in Spring of the Junior year. Scores generally take at least three weeks to process, so register early to take the exam in the fall. Students are encouraged to register online for college entrance exams...

SAT: www.collegeboard.com

Focuses on writing, critical reading and mathematics. The SAT assesses reasoning and critical thinking skills in ways that reflect curriculum and classroom practices. The SAT is used as a college admissions test that predicts college success using a 200-800 scale for each section. Many colleges accept the SAT as the college admissions test.

ACT: www.act.org

Most colleges or universities accept the ACT. The ACT is a multiple choice, curriculum-based test that measures college readiness with a score of 0 to 36. ACT has English, Math, Reading, and Science sections. Many colleges accept the ACT with writing in lieu of the SAT I and subject tests. Please verify with the university of your choice which test they prefer.

BE SURE TO CHECK THE COLLEGE CATALOGS FOR TEST AND TEST DATES REQUIRED.

Releasing test scores

Students are responsible to have test scores sent directly from the testing organizations (College board/ACT) to the colleges. This is usually done at the time of registration. Additional score reports may be requested at the testing organizations websites.

NCAA Eligibility

All student athletes should register with the Initial Eligibility Clearinghouse after completing their junior year. To register, students must complete registration on-line at www.ncca.org. Do not forget to hand in a transcript request form to guidance after filling out the application. **No student will be permitted to play or practice any Division I or II sport on the collegiate level unless the NCAA has certified them as eligible.**

- If you are speaking with a coach, athletic director, or recruiter ensure that you have direct contact with the admissions office. Most admissions offices have an athletic liaison. Also, please let your counselor know.

Letters of Recommendation

Teachers, coaches, and counselors make excellent references for college applications. Consider who knows you best...the whole picture about your academic record and potential, your activities, your interests, your skills, etc. You must ask the person to write you a recommendation- do not assume that they will automatically do it for you. Remember, a tepid recommendation can doom you, and a negative comment can cause rejection by an admission committee. So, ask for your letters from people who will be enthusiastic about you. Supply the person with the necessary forms, envelopes, and postage for each recommendation if it is to be sent directly to the college. Also, you may want to provide the person with a list of your accomplishments, goals, etc. For counselor recommendations, please request a recommendation from you counselor and verify that the student information sheet has been filled out and handed in. Please allow two weeks for your recommendation letter to be completed.

The College Application

Research and be aware of admission criteria. Watch deadlines.

If you complete an application online, be sure to inform your counselor that you have submitted an application online by filling out a **TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM**. When you apply online, it is your responsibility to inform the guidance office and fill out a request for a copy of your transcript to be mailed to the appropriate institution. You may also need to mail supplemental materials, such as letters of recommendation and/or application fees, essays, etc. **Coordinating and Communicating** with the guidance office is essential!

A **TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM** must be filled out for every application that comes to the guidance office. Copies are available in the guidance office. Also, your application may include a school report form for your counselor to complete, please be sure to include this with the transcript release form. Please allow two weeks for transcripts and school reports (if applicable) to be mailed

The ESSAY

The essay is an opportunity to represent yourself. Shape your essays to fit the subject requested. Admissions officers can spot generic essays. Start early and allow time to produce the best essay. Be sure to have carefully proofread. It would be quite embarrassing to have the incorrect school listed in your essay. Read and follow the directions carefully. Think the question through before responding. Stress your individuality by focusing on your assets, talents, and achievements. Be honest and positive. Type all essays unless a handwriting sample is requested. Have someone proofread your essay, preferably an English teacher. If you have difficulty writing the college application essays often required by schools, explore the resources available to assist you in writing the essays, such as books, on-line assistance, and/or a teacher.

Campus Visits

- Conduct some research about the university or college before you go.
- Visit the campuses with your parents. It is important that you visit the ones that you are seriously considering. Write thank you letters to those admission officers you meet.
- Talk to financial aid representatives from each school to get an idea of what to expect financially.
- Talk to students and professors while visiting.
- Taking photos may help you remember details about the campus, especially if you are visiting and comparing schools.

Get your feel of the campus by answering some of these questions:

Is it peaceful or rushed, involved or isolated?

How do the students look, act, and dress?

How comfortable are you with this environment?

Visit some classes, dormitories, eating places, student unions, libraries, classrooms, fraternity and sorority houses, recreational facilities, athletic facilities, the immediate surroundings, local popular spots, and nearby towns.

Speak with college personnel in the department of your intended major.

Ask about safety procedures and security systems on campus.

Questions for admissions officers:

What high school courses are required for admission?

What is the average GPA of the entering freshmen and SAT/ACT scores for the previous year?

What are the deadlines for admissions and financial aid?

What factors are important in the decision: essay, high school transcript, recommendations, activities or something else?

What are the graduation rates?

What are the job placement rates for certain majors you are interested in?

What kinds of scholarship opportunities are available?

How many students receive financial aid?

What is the average financial aid package at the school?

How much does it cost to attend the school for a year (tuition, room and board, and fees)?

What housing options are available?

How many years of housing are guaranteed?

How safe is the campus?

What types of work-study are available?

What special programs are available (athletics, fitness center, study abroad, internships, learning centers, clubs, etc.)?

CHOOSING A COLLEGE OF INTEREST

Before you jump into completing a stack of applications, there are many colleges and universities in the United States. Give careful consideration to the characteristics and qualities that you desire in an institution of higher education.

TYPE:

Would you prefer a same-sex or co-ed college?

What kind or program are you seeking? Liberal arts, business, engineering, trade, or technical programs?

Are you interested in pursuing a four-year, two-year, or certificate program?

What type of academic calendar do you prefer (trimester, semester, quarterly)?

Do you want a large campus or small campus?

Do you prefer to know most of the people on campus or have a lecture with 500 students?

LOCATION:

Do you want to commute or live on campus?

Do you want to visit home on the weekends?

Do you want to attend a college in a small town, large city, or somewhere in-between?

In what region of the country do you want to attend college?

If you plan to live on campus, what type of dorm would you prefer?

ACADEMIC SELECTIVITY:

Do you want a challenging and rigorous academic environment?

Do you need a highly structured academic framework or will you thrive with a curriculum that offers independent study opportunities?

Are there general education courses required by the school?

Do your career goals and/or personal interests require specialized facilities?

What internship and/or work-study options are available?

Does the school have a graduate department in your field of interest?

What percentages of professors hold a Ph.D. in their fields?

ACTIVITIES:

Does the college have activities, sports, clubs, etc. that interest you?

What cultural and/or ethnic activities/programs are sponsored by the school and its community?

FINANCIAL CONCERNS:

What are the costs associated with attending the college?

Does the college offer any scholarships?

Is there work-study or part-time employment available?

Private schools often have large endowments and will offset their cost by offering students generous financial aid packages.

DECIDING HOW MANY SCHOOLS TO APPLY TO...

In general, counselors suggest that students divide their college applications into three categories: *reach* schools, *target* schools, and *safety* schools. The difference between the categories is the school's *selectivity* rating, which indicates how difficult it is to be accepted to the school.

Reach schools are the most selective of the student's choices and typically represent the student's "top picks". Colleges in this category typically have an acceptance rate of less than 30%. Reach schools should offer virtually all the qualities and characteristics that a student seeks in a college. Remember, the schools that are categorized as reach school for one student may not be categorized the same for another student.

Target schools represent institutions whose average selectivity rating corresponds to the student's academic profile. Students should have approximately a 30-60% chance of gaining acceptance to their target schools. It is probable that the school the student chooses to attend will be from this category.

Safety schools are institutions to which the student has a significant chance of being accepted, typically, ranging from a 60-90% chance of gaining admission. The student's academic profile should be significantly stronger than the profile of a "typical freshman" that is admitted to the school. Students should select their safety schools as carefully as they considered their reach and target schools. Safety schools should offer the student similar opportunities and services as their reach and target schools, just at a lower selectivity rating.

THE INTERVIEW

Colleges may recommend, require, or not require interviews. If available, interviews are recommended because they demonstrate your seriousness about the school. Call or write the admissions office 3-4 weeks in advance to arrange an interview. The interview is the time to show yourself in a positive, personal way. Be prepared for the interview by having an unofficial copy of your transcript and a copy of your resume. Be on time! Dress neatly and conservatively. Be honest, be yourself. Use good posture, composure, and eye contact, while avoiding nervous habits. Be ready to discuss your interests and accomplishments.

ADMISSIONS TERMS

Each college establishes its own admissions policy and timetable. Students often have options with regard to this timetable. Several admissions programs are described below:

ABSOLUTE DEADLINE DATES: This process requires applications submitted and held until date of review whether it's a regular admission date or early decision date, then they are reviewed and notification is made.

ROLLING ADMISSIONS: This process is the most widely used admissions procedure. A student's application is reviewed when it is received by the college. A decision is made and the student is notified of the decision within a few weeks. Some colleges will accumulate applications and review them at certain times and then mail out many acceptance/rejection letters together. It is preferable to apply as early as possible to a school which uses rolling admissions.

EARLY DECISION: Early Decision is a plan under which a student applies to the first-choice college early in the fall (usually by November 1st) of the senior year and agrees by contract to enter that college if offered admission. Decisions are rendered to Early Decision in early December. If not accepted under Early Decision, a student is usually reconsidered for admission later in the senior year. A student should not apply to more than one college under Early Decision Plan, since the student is required to withdraw any applications, which might have been filed at other colleges while awaiting the decision of the Early Decision college. Early Decision applicants are judged on the basis of their junior year test scores, class rank, and grades.

EARLY ACTION: Early Action is used primarily in highly selective colleges. Early Action follows the same application/notification timetable as Early Decision but the accepted candidate has until May 1st to accept or decline the offer of admission. Under Early Action programs, it is possible for an applicant to be denied admission outright and not automatically deferred for late consideration. If your junior year credentials are not truly superior, you must be careful applying under a plan which could harm your chance for admission.

COMMON APPLICATION: This form allows students to fill out one application form (the "Common Application") and photocopy the application and recommendation forms for filing at more than one college. You should check with the admissions office to see if a college will accept the Common Application and whether if any supplements are required. More information and the Common Application are at www.commonapp.org.

OPEN ADMISSIONS: Some colleges do not practice selective admissions and offer admission to all students who apply. Such colleges usually have extensive programs designed to provide remedial or developmental help to student who enroll with academic deficiencies.

SAMPLE LETTERS

Requesting Materials

Your address

Date

Admissions Office

College

College Address

I am a student at Oxford Area High School, Oxford, PA and will be graduating in June. I am interested in the following area(s) of study:

Please send me your view book, application, financial aid information and any other materials I may find helpful.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Your name

Accepting an offer of Admission

Your address

Date

Director of Admissions

College

College Address

Dear Director of Admissions:

I am pleased to accept your offer of admission into the freshman class of (college). I am looking forward to matriculating in the Fall semester of 20___. Enclosed are my deposit and (any other necessary forms).

Sincerely,

Your name

Declining an offer of Admission

Your address

Date

Director of Admissions

College

College Address

Dear Director of Admissions:

Thank you for your notification of my acceptance into the freshman class of Fall, 20__ term. However, since I applied several months ago, my educational plans have changed, and I shall not be attending (College).

Sincerely,

Your name

COLLEGE COMPARISON SHEET

Comparative Criteria	College A	College B	College C
<u>Basic Facts</u>			
Admissions (rolling, early decision, etc.)			
Location (Distance from home)			
Cost			
Admissions Selectivity (Avg. High school GPA)			
Tests Required			
Deadline			
<u>Your College Criteria</u>			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
<u>Your Evaluation of the College</u>			
Positives			
Negatives			
Parent/Counselor Opinion			
Your Order of Preference			
Your Chances of Admission			

WATCH THE MAILBOX... Please remember to notify your counselor of all admissions decisions you receive!



Financial Aid

Types of Financial Aid...

- **Grants**- money awarded that does not need to be paid back. Typically awarded based on financial need.
- **Scholarships** - money awarded that does not need to be paid back. Typically awarded to student based on merit, talent, accomplishments, and/or service.
- **Loans** - funds borrowed that must be paid back at specific interest rates. Students and parents should research loan programs that offer incentives.
- **Work-study** - students earn wages based on employment through the school. These funds offset the total cost of attendance and are often used to cover general living expenses.

Funds from these main scores will be combined to produce a student's "financial aid package", which will be presented by each school.

What % of financial need does the school meet? The www.collegeboard.com listing of schools has a section where financial aid and costs are covered for each school.

Be aware of financial aid deadlines

- Every postsecondary institution establishes its own deadlines for submitting the FAFSA and other required financial aid forms. Some deadlines are as early as February 15th, so be prepared!
- It is the student's responsibility to be aware of these deadlines.
- Missing a deadline could result in the student being ineligible for aid.

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) must be submitted in order to be considered for all types of financial aid, including PHEAA state grants, institutional aid, and federal work-study. The FAFSA form is also used to determine eligibility for federal student loan programs. FAFSA may only be submitted *after* January 1st. It is recommended that you begin and submit an estimation of your tax information. Once your taxes are completed, you can change your tax information.

1. FAFSA worksheets will be mailed to the student if they took the ACT or SAT during their junior year.
2. Students are encouraged to complete and submit the FAFSA form on-line at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>. BE AWARE fafsa.com is not associated with the Dept. of

- education and there is a fee. FAFSA is FREE ...you do not need to pay anything to complete this form.
3. Sign up for a PIN from the U.S. Department of Education. This will allow you to complete and sign the FAFSA online as well as access your financial aid information. Request a pin at <http://www.pin.ed.gov>. *YOU MAY DO THIS PRIOR TO JANUARY 1.*
 4. Be aware of the documents that each school requires you to submit in order to be considered for financial aid. Some schools may require copies of your tax returns or to complete institutional financial aid forms unique to that school.
 5. Find out whether the colleges you applied to require the CSS PROFILE.
 - The PROFILE assists institutions in awarding their own funds and eliminates the need for an institutional application.
 - Register for a customized PROFILE application online at www.collegeboard.com. The PROFILE information may be found under “Pay for College” on the home page. Students may also register by phone at 1-800-778-6888.
 - The costs to complete the PROFILE include...
 - Registration fee of \$5 (if registering online) or \$7 (if registering by phone).
 - Additional fees for each school to which the information needs to be sent.
 - The PROFILE may be completed anytime after September 15th of the student’s senior year.
 - Students should initiate the process to complete the PROFILE four to six weeks before the earliest school/program deadline.
 6. Students and parents are encouraged to complete tax returns as soon as possible after January 1st. The FAFSA form is much easier to complete when tax documents are prepared.
 7. Watch the mail for the “PHEAA status notice” to arrive a few weeks after you submit the FAFSA. This form must be completed in order to be considered for a PHEAA state grant.
 8. Each college, university, and school have their own deadline for FAFSA. Some are as early as February 15th. Check their website.

For more information contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID.

Scholarships \$\$

Scholarship Update is developed by OAHS guidance counselors and posted in all 12th grade English classes, in guidance, and on the web at www.oxford.k12.pa.us under high school guidance. Keep checking for updates to stay informed of scholarship opportunities available to

you. Remember, the small amount of time and effort required to apply for scholarships is worth the free money you could receive.

The counseling department will also present the local scholarship packet in the spring to all English classes. This will have all local scholarship from the Oxford community.

BE WARE –Watch out for schools who will take \$\$ from aid if you receive outside scholarships.

RESOURCES

About Colleges/College Searches:

www.collegeboard.com - side-by-side comparison of colleges (“like-finder”)

www.collegeview.com Hobson’s college view provides free resources to explore careers, colleges, scholarships, and financial aid information.

www.princetonreview.com

www.collegequest.com

www.bestcollegepicks.com

www.mycollegeguide.org

www.careersandcolleges.com

www.collegeanswer.com

Specific types of colleges or programs:

www.hbcu-central.com - Historically Black Colleges and Universities

www.hillel.org - Guide to Jewish Life on Campus

www.ajcunet.edu - Jesuit Colleges

www.studyabroad.com - Colleges who offer study abroad and programs available

www.uwaterloo.ca/canu/index.html - Canadian Colleges

www.womenscolleges.org - links to women’s colleges in the US

www.aacc.nche.edu - search community colleges

www.aihec.org - American Indian Higher Education Consortium

www.hacu.net - Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities

Standardized Tests

www.collegeboard.com - SAT

www.actstudent.org - ACT

www.number2.com - SAT practice

www.lightlink.com/bobp/wedt/sat.htm - list of 2,000 words that frequently appear on the SAT’s

www.testu.com

www.kaptest.com

www.review.com/college

www.powerprep.com

College Newspapers On-line:

www.uwire.com

www.collegenews.com

Virtual Campus Tours:

www.campustours.com

www.collegeview.com

On-line Applications:

www.princetonreview.com

www.applyweb.com

www.zap.com/apply

www.collegelink.com

www.commonapp.org

Applying for Financial Aid:

www.fafsa.ed.gov (FAFSA on-line)

www.collegeboard.com/paying - calculate your estimated expected family contributions

www.finaid.com

www.citizens.com/edu -student loan information

Scholarship Searches:

www.absolutelyscholarships.com

www.collegequest.com

www.collegedata.com

www.scholarships.com/link

www.fastweb.com

www.collegenet.com/mach25

www.freschinfo.com

www.collegeboard.com/paying

www.uncf.org- scholarships that can be redeemed at United Negro College Fund member colleges

www.blackexcel.org - links to scholarships for Native American and African-American students

Source: College.edu – On-line Resources for Cyber Savvy Students