

## College Admissions Timeline

The road to college is long - and sometimes confusing. To help keep you on track, here's a timeline of what college applicants should be doing, and when.

### November - December

Don't Forget: November 1 was the Early Decision/Early Action application deadline <http://www.admissionsconsultants.com/college/earlydecision.asp> at many selective colleges and universities. The deadline for regular admissions at many schools is December 31 or January 1.

### Standardized Tests:

November and December provide seniors' last chances to take the SAT I, SAT II, and/or the ACT in time for scores to be considered in 2008 admissions. Juniors should start thinking about spring test dates, and sophomores might want to start thinking about the PSAT.

- o If you're a senior who wants to re-take the SAT Reasoning Test or the ACT as part of your 2008 applications, register for the test immediately. Visit <http://www.collegeboard.com> <http://www.collegeboard.com/> page for more information. If you still need to take a SAT Subject Test, register immediately for the December (and/or January '09) test date.

- o If you're a junior, think about taking the SAT Reasoning Test or the ACT this spring. Taking the test at the end of your junior year will give you a better idea of how to position yourself for college admissions, and you'll leave yourself plenty of time to re-take the test next fall if you aren't happy with your first set of scores

- o It is now feasible for most high school students to take either the SAT or the ACT. Based upon your unique profile, you may be better off taking one test over the other. Don't just arbitrarily choose to take the test that your peers take. This is your future at stake. We've worked with applicants who were admitted to higher-tier schools precisely because they proactively determined which test better suited their learning style.

- o If you're a sophomore, think about taking the PSAT either

this spring or next fall. Remember, the PSATs are a way for you to gain experience with standardized tests before you tackle the SAT. They are not required for college admissions, and your score will not be reported to colleges or influence your admissions outcomes (unless, of course, you do well enough on the PSAT to win consideration for a National Merit Scholarship, in which case you'll have another star to add to your application!) Take the PSAT when you feel ready to get the most out of the experience.

#### School Selection:

Winter is the time for juniors to continue exploring their school choices and begin compiling a list of 'stretch,' 'good fit,' and 'safety' schools. Seniors should have already finalized their school choices.

- o Aim for a list of 8 to 12 schools that you would be happy attending. Include a mix of reach schools, 'good matches,' and safety schools. But remember - apply only to as many schools as you can submit well-prepared applications for. You'll get better results by applying to 6 schools with applications that reflect 100 per cent of your best effort than you will by applying to 12 schools with applications that each reflect 50 per cent of your best effort.

- o If you visit campuses in the winter, try to avoid periods like mid-terms, finals, and holiday breaks. You'll get a better idea of campus life if you time your visit for a more typical period. Remember, too, that campus life maybe more lively when the weather is warmer, or when more students are on campus.

- o If there's a college or university you're especially interested in, find out whether a student ambassador or other school representative might be visiting your area over the holidays.

#### Academics:

- o Continue to select classes that will challenge and stimulate you, but not overwhelm you. Admissions committees <http://www.admissionsconsultants.com/college/admissions-committee.asp> look for applicants who stretched themselves in high school. You'll be a stronger college applicant if you take challenging classes. This will be even more important to your admissions outcomes if your high school is one of the many that no longer name valedictorians or report class standing.

#### Extracurricular Activities:

"Community service should clearly come from the heart and not appear to have been motivated just by a desire to 'add another bullet point to the resume.'"

- Admissions Consultant Sheri Mural. Sheri is former Associate Director of Admissions for Barnard College, Columbia University.

- o Enjoy extracurricular activities that appeal to your interests - but don't overdo it. Admissions committees can sniff out applicants who only became involved in the community in order to enhance their college candidacies. Selective colleges will be more impressed with evidence of a substantive commitment to one or two activities than by a long list of superficial memberships.

- o Extracurricular activities can be a great way to show there's more to you than simply good grades and test scores. With the proper strategizing, your after-school activities could produce the 'wow' factors you need to be successful at the very competitive schools where the vast majority of applicants clear the high academic qualifications hurdles

- o If you want to play sports in college, continuing participating in appropriate NCAA-approved sports this winter and spring.

#### Strategic Positioning:

- o If you're applying to college this fall and winter, you should continue working on articulating your story themes and 'wow' factors. Good ideas and deep introspections cannot be rushed!

- o The college admissions committees <http://www.admissionsconsultants.com/college/admissions-committee.asp> will be taking a hard, critical look at your profile. You must do the same thing first. Only by understanding your candidacy from their perspective can you best mitigate your weaknesses, highlight your strengths, frame your fit, and employ the 'wow' factors that will differentiate yourself from the many other highly qualified applicants in your demographic

- o Your weaknesses. Sometimes it is best not to bring attention

to a weakness. Other times, it must be acknowledged and explained. Weaknesses can be mitigated in the personal statement, addendum, or letters of reference.

- o Your strengths. You need to become a self-promoter without coming across as arrogant. You also need to prioritize your strengths as you will not likely be able to highlight all of them in adequate detail within your applications.

- o Your story themes and 'wow' factors. What are the most important points you need to make about your background, values, beliefs, and experiences? Have you adequately prioritized these points? If you attempt to convey too many different points, you risk coming across as unfocused. You also risk not covering any of your points in adequate detail to successfully distinguish your candidacy. Ask yourself what makes you unique in a way that is going to make any admissions officer just really want to recruit you to their school?

- o Your fit. Why are you a match made in heaven for the specific school being targeted? Why will you be a better fit and contribute more to the program and community than the other applicants? Does your application convincingly argue that, if admitted, you will gladly attend the program?

- o If you are a freshman, sophomore, or junior, now is a good time to take a critical inventory of your college candidacy. Will you clear the academic qualification hurdles at the schools you are targeting? Would you benefit from taking a summer enrichment program? Should you find some additional extracurricular activities to improve your candidacy? (Remember, though, that you want to avoid giving the admissions committees the impression that you only got involved in these activities for reasons of expediency.)

#### Applications:

- o If you applied to any schools under their Early Action or Early Decision <http://www.admissionsconsultants.com/college/earlydecision.asp> programs, you should receive notification of your admissions outcomes in December. Make sure you understand what steps you need to take to acknowledge and/or accept any admissions offers. Good luck!

- o Keep working on the applications you will submit under schools' regular deadlines. Keep a list or calendar with reminders about which schools you applied to, when, with notes about what you still need to do to complete any pending applications. Save a copy of each

application you submit.

- o Plan to complete and submit your online applications several days before the actual deadline. You'll be doing yourself a big favor by avoiding the technical problems that invariably crop up on deadline day due to high traffic at application websites. Trust us - you don't want to spend New Year's Eve at your computer, trying to upload the final rewrite of your essays to an agonizingly slow server.

- o If you're using the Common Application, make sure you understand whether your target schools also require school-specific supplemental forms to the Common App. Check that you're submitting those forms through the right channels and by the appropriate deadlines.

- o Use these final weeks before submitting your applications to review and revise your essays. Don't just check for spelling and grammatical errors - check the substance of your essays, too. Ask yourself how well your essay topics convey your optimal story themes. Look at your essays the way the admissions committees will - holistically, and as part of your overall application, rather than as stand-alone application components. Your essay topics should highlight your strengths, mitigate any weaknesses you need to explain, and ensure that your candidacy doesn't look like everyone else's. Our consultants can help you polish your content and carefully scrutinize each essay for opportunities to advance your case to admissions committees.

- o Ask for your letters of recommendation. Smart applicants will make sure their recommendations highlight their key strengths, mitigate any weaknesses they need to address, and substantiate their stories as necessary. Give your recommenders a written list of the points that you want them to discuss. Make sure your recommenders understand where they need to send their letters to, and by what date.

Applying to College? Good to use "online application forms"  
BUT....

source: <http://www.admissionsconsultants.com>  
<<http://www.admissionsconsultants.com/>>

Be Thankful for the Ease of Online Applications - But Be Careful, Too

College admissions consultant Deb Schmidt notes that on-line college applications have made the application process much easier for students.

There's much less paper to keep track of now, and much less need to enter and re-enter the same information into different forms. Applicants can be grateful for that.

But they need to be careful, too, says Deb. The very convenience of online applications can lure students into making potentially deadly mistakes.

### Watch Your Language in Online Applications

<http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php>  
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"The majority of students applying to undergraduate colleges are now taking advantage of the opportunity to apply online," she says. "That's great, because it means applicants avoid the hassle of collecting the right papers into the right envelopes to meet a deadline.

"They also benefit from knowing that their applications are received instantly.

"They can even benefit financially - many colleges waive the application processing fee for students who apply online, because it's easier for them to handle electronic applications.

"But here's a word of caution," she adds. "Some admissions deans say that the online format leads students to be too casual in their responses, especially in replies to short-answer questions.

"Students may unintentionally fall into using an overly-familiar, almost

'instant messaging' writing style, simply because they are writing online. It sends the wrong message. Online applicants should be sure to complete every item on their forms as thoroughly and seriously as they would if they were writing out responses on paper!"

- Deb has worked in admissions for over 20 years, with affiliations including Carleton College and Cornell University  
<<http://www.admissionsconsultants.com/college/cornell.asp>> .