



# ADMISSIONS CHECKLIST/IMPORTANT DEADLINES

A Handy Guide to the Important Deadlines and Must-Do's for College Applicants

BY USA TODAY NETWORK

**T**here's quite a bit that needs to be done in planning for college. Following is a checklist of must-do things and important deadlines as you make your way through the process of college selection, application and admission.

Start by developing a list of colleges you'd like to apply to. You can begin well before senior year and should include visits to a number of schools to get a feel for various sizes, locations, etc. Most offer tours year-round.

"It's really important to visit colleges," says Alan Goodwin, who retired last spring as principal of Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda, Maryland. "It's the only way to get

a sense if you are comfortable or uncomfortable on campus."

Counselors at the high-performing public high school share a lot of good advice and suggest first taking a look at any of the commercially produced college handbooks that offer valuable information: *Comparative Guide to American Colleges*; *The College Finder*; *Fiske Guide to Colleges*; *College Handbook* and *The Insider's Guide to the Colleges*.

After perusing the options, check in with your high school college counselor(s) early in the fall of senior year. Many students find the computerized college search Naviance Student ([naviance.com/content/naviance-student](http://naviance.com/content/naviance-student)) helpful. Your participating school can

give you a login to start the application process.

*Things to consider as you draw up your list:*

## LOCATION:

City, rural, New England, mid-Atlantic, Midwest, South, West, foreign? Or you don't care? Remember to consider travel costs and distance from home. (See CHOOSING A COLLEGE on page 12.)

## PROGRAMS THAT INTEREST YOU:

There are many resources, including handbooks, college bulletins and computer programs, for discovering college majors and specialties (see CHOOSING A MAJOR on page 10). Many, perhaps most,



entering students are not decided on a major and plan to begin with a general liberal arts program.

### SIZE:

Small, medium, large? Doesn't matter?

### COMFORT LEVEL:

For some students, the amount of personal and academic freedom and structure may be a consideration. Some want to attend a school with others who share their religious or other values (see SECULAR VS. FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS on page 18). Some prefer a school with students from varied cultures and traditions.

### COST:

College tuition costs continue to escalate at a much faster rate than the rest of the economy. Financial aid is key for many families.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form must be submitted if you hope to become eligible for any federally subsidized financial aid. (See PAYING FOR COLLEGE on page 14.) The 2019-2020 FAFSA became available on Oct. 1, 2018. Federal aid is need-based, and almost all colleges dispense these funds. Some colleges also require the College Board's CSS Profile™ and/or a form of their own to determine eligibility for need-based aid from the college.

Some aid that is not based on need, usually scholarships, is offered by many colleges and public and private organizations. The amounts of the awards and who is eligible for them vary widely, and deadlines are important. A lot of scholarship information is available online at [finaid.org](http://finaid.org) and [fastweb.com](http://fastweb.com).

Your chances of admission to a particular college will depend on many factors, most importantly your academic record, SAT or ACT scores, school and/or community activities, and the essay question on your college application. (See HOW TO WRITE A KILLER COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAY on page 24.)

The Naviance Student website can help you figure out which schools might be realistic choices.

### SAT OR ACT TAKEN?

SAT Subject Tests where necessary? Test applications and materials are available online at:

[collegeboard.org](http://collegeboard.org) or [act.org](http://act.org). (See ENTRANCE EXAMS on page 8.)

### HOW MANY COLLEGES TO APPLY TO:

Walt Whitman counselors urge students to cover a reasonable range of possibilities: "reach" schools: dearly desired, long-shot hopes; "targets": solid, 50-50 bets; and "likelies," i.e., comfortable choices. You should apply to some colleges you are quite certain to be admitted to and would be happy attending. If you have narrowed your choices in the fall, the final decision in the spring will be easier. The Common Application is used by over 750 colleges and universities to standardize the online application process.

### EARLY APPLICATION:

Many colleges have early application programs. Most deadlines are in November, though they may be as early as October or as late as December. There are, in general, two types of such programs:

**Early Action** application deadlines are usually between Nov. 1-15, and a college will inform an applicant of its decision before the end of December. If a student is accepted, he/she usually has until spring to commit.

**Early Decision** means a student needs to be fully committed to attending a given college if he/she chooses to apply this way.

You will want to make sure your transcripts and any required teacher or

counselor recommendations are sent in time for your schools' deadlines. Talk to your teachers face-to-face well before the first deadline and bring them a list of your colleges and their deadlines. Allow plenty of time to have your SAT or ACT scores sent to colleges, at least one month before the application deadline.



### FOLLOW-UP:

#### MIDYEAR TRANSCRIPTS/RECORDS

Make sure your midyear transcript is sent to all schools that require it. All Common App schools do. You likely will need to have a final graduation transcript sent to the school you will be attending.

#### HELPFUL HINTS

- Start early!
- Read all directions and be aware of deadlines. *Keep a calendar.*
- Check your application thoroughly. *Check again.*
- Keep a copy of your application.
- Ask any questions you have. ■

