



Your College Navigator, LLC

Admissions by design, not chance!

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10th and 11th grade students—

- Register & prepare for PSAT
- Start/remain active in extra-curriculars, focusing on accomplishments.
- Start thinking about college and begin planning and positioning by attending:

**Jump-start
College Admissions
Planning seminar
for students and parents**

**Sept 11th
Sept 15th
Oct 17th**

Go to ycollegenavigator.com for more information and to register

12th graders –

- Finalize college list
- Work on applications/ essays
- Review transcript for accuracy
- Request recommendation letters from teachers and counselors
- Meet with visiting college reps
- Attend area college fairs
- Early Decision/ Early Action applications
- Complete CSS Profile if required by colleges
- FAFSA available Oct 1st

Do Rankings Really Matter?

In a brand-name driven society, it's no surprise that families often turn to magazine rankings to help them find the "best" college. While college administrators may publicly dismiss rankings as meaningless, favorable rankings are often featured prominently on a school's website.

Deans of Admission are under constant pressure to improve their rankings. A college that slips in the *US News & World Report* rankings may disappoint its alumni, and that can impact donations to the school. But families need to keep in mind that the quality of education doesn't change dramatically in one year.

Even if you accept the idea of ranking colleges, can you trust the data used to make those decisions? The class profiles submitted by schools may not give the full picture. Colleges can leave out the SAT scores of certain groups, including legacy students, recruited athletes, and development admits whose families are big donors, because the grades and test scores of these students would lower the class average and make the school look less selective. Schools may count applications that were never completed so it looks like they have more students applying, lowering the acceptance rate and making them appear more selective in the ratings. Also, part of the *US News* score is based on college administrators rating other schools that they may know little about.

How do you compare schools that have different programs and cultures anyway? It's like including romantic comedies and dramas in the same best movies list. Different people love different films, and one person's number one is another person's number eighteen. The enjoyment you get from the experience of watching your favorite movie has nothing to do with its ranking.

The same holds true for colleges. What matters is the experience a student will have at that school. Spending four happy, productive and successful years at a college that is number forty-eight on the *US News* list makes that college number one for that student.

Other magazines have gotten into the rankings game. *Money* magazine ranks colleges based on educational quality, affordability, and alumni success (as measured by PayScale.com). On its list, Princeton ranks #1 this year, followed by Baruch College of CUNY. *Forbes* ranks colleges based on student satisfaction, graduation rate and alumni salaries. Its top colleges are Harvard, Stanford and Yale. *Washington Monthly* takes a different approach. Instead of asking which college is best for you, they ask which college is best for America. Its criteria includes how colleges facilitate social mobility by reaching out to low-income students, whether the college fosters scientific and humanistic research, and how much the ethic of service is promoted. Stanford, Harvard and MIT top *Washington Monthly's* list of national universities while Berea College is #1 on its list of top liberal arts colleges.

But none of the rankings assess the quality of teaching, because that is tough to measure quantitatively. Rankings don't tell us how prepared a school's students are for graduate school or the job market. They also don't say anything about the sense of community that makes a campus welcoming and campus life rewarding.

Perhaps rankings make us feel more secure. If someone pronounces a school the best, we can reassure ourselves that we've made the right decision. But students who trust themselves enough to find their own "best schools" will end up making the most satisfying college choices.

Financial Matters: Keeping College Application Costs In Check



Applying to college can be a costly proposition. According to U.S. News and World Reports, the average college application fee charged by colleges is \$42, with more than a quarter of schools charging \$50 or more. Add in the cost of standardized test score reports and, at some high schools, fees for transcript requests, and the costs can quickly add up. For example, a student applying to just the top 10 universities on U.S. News' college ranking list last year would have shelled out about \$800 in application fees alone.

Here are five ways families can keep college application costs under control:

Build a thoughtful college list. Few students truly need to apply to fifteen or more colleges. Resist the temptation to add colleges to your list that you know little about or would not attend if admitted. Make sure to include several

colleges that you love where you will have a high probability of admission. Then prune your "reach" schools to a manageable number. Not only will this strategy save your family money on application fees, but it will also allow you to do a better job on your applications.

Create an application budget. As you begin to research colleges, check application fees for the colleges you're considering. The College Board, the Common Application, Naviance and other tools make it easy to quickly get an overview of application fees. Although a free application should never be your *only* reason for applying to a particular college, more than 400 colleges and universities never charge application fees.

Read the application instructions on each college's website. Once you've decided where you will apply, be sure to read the application instructions on each college's admission website. Many colleges waive application fees for certain types of applicants, but these "specials" aren't always reflected or explained in the information provided by third party systems.

For example, if you relied only on the Common Application requirements grid, you wouldn't know that the University of New Haven waives its \$50 application fee if you apply by December 1, or that the University of Chicago waives its \$75 fee for students applying for financial aid. Other colleges waive fees for students who visit campus or who apply using the school's own application.

Plan your test score reports strategy. Each time you take the SAT or ACT, you can request that up to four score reports be sent without charge. While students who are taking the exams for the first time might not be ready to send scores to colleges, judicious use of these free reports can reduce the cost of applying to college.

Stay organized. Haste makes waste, as the old saying goes. Rush delivery service for SAT or ACT score reports will add to your application costs. Some high schools also charge extra for last minute transcript requests. Set up and stick to a plan for getting all of your application materials to your colleges well ahead of deadlines.

Making the Most of Your High School Years

It really does not matter if you're an incoming freshman or an experienced high school senior, high school should be viewed as a chance to explore your interests. Get involved with the newspaper, try your hand at the performing arts, or join a sports team, student government or school club. Rather than just going to school and then returning home, stay on campus after school and take part in extracurricular activities. Push yourself to try something new this year; you just may find yourself with new interests, skills and friends.

Speaking of friends - as a child, you made friends by chance; in high school you make them by choice. Your friendships will be based on common interests, similarities or differences. As you learn more about yourself, you might move around from one group of friends to another until you find the place that feels right. Allow yourself the freedom to do this. Take time to be yourself and give some time to others: pursue an interest; take a class in art, music, dance, martial arts, drama or language; volunteer your skills in a meaningful way.

High school is a wonderful time to be open to new ideas, concepts and perspectives, both academically and personally. Learning doesn't end when the class period, school day, or even formal schooling is over. You'll learn from jobs, academic programs, volunteer activities, community service, travel and self-exploration. Be a lifelong learner and keep your brain active! Make the most of your high school years!



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Check out our website for
upcoming seminars
in September, October
and November

The Early Application Dilemma

Early application plans pose a dilemma. Early Decision (ED) means that a student applies to one school, usually in November, receives a decision in December, and is then obligated to attend if accepted. Acceptance rates are higher at most schools for Early Decision applicants, sometimes significantly so, and students may feel pressured to apply ED to a college without considering whether the school is truly a good match, for fear of missing out on the competitive edge.

For a student who is passionate about one school, applying Early Decision can get the stressful college application process over with and allow him to enjoy his senior year. The risk is that his passion may fade, but he's made a binding commitment. What started as a way to lower stress may end up making the student feel trapped.

Early Action (EA) also often has a November deadline and December notification, but the student has until May to decide whether to accept the college's offer of admission. You secure a place early at that college and hold onto it while going through the regular decision process at other schools.

For students who have done their research early and identified the schools that meet their needs, these early notification programs can reduce the stress of applying to college. But applying early isn't for everyone.

Make sure there really is a strategic advantage to applying early. It doesn't make sense to apply early if a student is not a strong candidate. If it looks like his grades will improve senior year, or if he's only

taken the SAT or ACT once and believes he can increase his score, it may be better to wait.

There's another, more practical consideration in applying Early Decision. If the student is applying for financial aid, he may need to consider the financial aid package in determining which school to attend. Some packages may offer more grant money while others are largely loans. If a student has four or five acceptances, he can compare financial aid packages, but with Early Decision, there is no option for comparing student aid offers.

Although most colleges allow ED and EA applicants to apply to certain other Early Action colleges (i.e. public institutions), a few institutions restrict this through their restrictive early action (REA) agreements. Check rules carefully when applying.

While it may seem as though you could wait until you receive responses to your EA or ED application, continuing to research and create other applications helps to take the pressure off the one Early application. Though your chances are higher with an Early application, there are no guarantees you will be chosen. You may be denied, or your application may be deferred and reviewed again during the Regular Decision period. In either case, you will need to submit a flurry of strong applications to other colleges in a very short time period, often by the end of December. Avoid that panic and pressure! Have thoughtful applications ready to go. If you receive an acceptance letter, you'll be happy to end the year with a celebration! If not, you'll feel secure that you can move ahead without skipping a beat.