Megan Becker
Counselor, Wellman-Union
mbecker@esc17.net

Senior Folder

"Good order is the foundation of all things." –
Edmund Burke

Senior Timeline

SEPTEMBER
- Narrow your list of colleges to 5 or 10. Plan to visit as many of these as possible.
- Create a master list to include:
  - SAT/ACT tests you'll take and their fees, dates, and registration deadlines.
  - Financial aid application forms required and their deadlines (Note: Aid applications may be due before college applications)
  - Other materials you'll need (recommendations, transcripts, essays, portfolios, etc.)
- Notify a teacher of choice to complete recommendations; ask politely and do NOT give short notice. Provide teachers with an outline of your academic record and extracurricular activities and a stamped, addressed envelope.
- Watch for College and Career Event dates.
- Register for additional SAT or ACT tests administered in October, November, or December.

_____

October
- Try to finalize college choices.
- Apply to FAFSA using 2016 tax return.
- Plan for any additional SAT or ACT testing dates.
- If essays are required, write first drafts and ask teachers/counselor to proofread.
- Send SAT/ACT to the colleges where you are applying (if you did not include them on the original score report when registering).
- Visit colleges of choice
- Begin completing applications online and be sure to print and proofread before sending.
- Request official high school transcripts to be sent after you have officially applied to college of choice.

_____

November
- Investigate scholarship opportunities at each particular college and other websites (see provided list).
- Attend local college fairs and continue to visit potential colleges.
- Complete FAFSA application if you have not done so already.
- Begin applying for university-sponsored and outside scholarships.
- Continue to complete and submit college applications.

_____

December
- Complete admissions applications and begin scholarship applications.
- Notify counselor of any acceptance/denial letters.

_____

January
- Continue admission and scholarship applications.
- Complete FAFSA application if you have not done so already.

_____

February-May
- Complete local scholarships
- Weigh options and make FINAL decision.

SAT vs. ACT

The road to college can be a confusing and hectic one. Choosing the right admissions test to take (SAT or ACT) doesn't have to be one. While most colleges across the country accept scores from either test, the SAT and ACT are significantly different and in many ways, measure different skills. Check with your school counselor and preferred colleges, then use the information below to decide which test if right for you.

SAT	ACT
• No science section	• Science reasoning section
• No trigonometry	• Math sections include trigonometry
• Vocabulary emphasized	• Vocabulary less important
• Non multiple-choice questions included	• Entirely multiple choice
• Guessing penalty	• No guessing penalty
• No English Grammar	• English Grammar tested
• Math accounts for 50% of your score	• Math accounts for 25% of your score
• Questions go from easy to hard in most sections	• Easy and hard questions mixed within sections
• All your SAT scores reported to colleges.	• Report scores only from the test dates you choose.

The College Essay

- The college essay should be thought of as an interview.
- This is a school's change to get to know the student (YOU).
- Be yourself, this is not the opportunity to impress by using big words and complicated literary devices.

Choosing a Topic
- Choose a topic about which you are an expert.
- Don't make it more complicated than it needs to be. Admissions officers will read plenty of essays about Egypt, the war in Iraq, and global warming.
- Tell the reader why an issue is important to you, why have you made choices in life, or why you care.

Previous Common Application Essay Questions
- Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
- Discuss some issues of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.
- Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.
- Describe a character in fiction, a historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you and explain that influence.
- A range of academic interest, personal perspectives and life experiences adds much to the educational mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you.
- Topic of your choice.

College Essay Tips
- Give yourself time to do a good job.
- Invest in the drafting process (even if it means starting over and trying again).
- Focus on one specific event.
- Be careful about pet stories, accounts of a dear, departed relative, or your efforts in delivering the big play in the big game.
- Do not be redundant. Don't repeat information about yourself that can be found elsewhere on your application.
- Eliminate distractions such as spelling and punctuation errors.
- When you think you are finished with your essay, read it again.
- Be careful about becoming involved with essay editing services.
- Be original.
- Do NOT let your parent write your college essay.
- Think of your audience. Admissions committees will not read your entire essay unless it catches their attention from the beginning.
- Stick to the word count limit!

<u>FAFSA</u>
Free Application for Federal Student Aid

- What is federal student aid?
  It's money from the federal government—specifically, the U.S. Department of Education—that helps you pay for college or career school, or graduate school expenses. More than $150 billion in federal student aid is available through grants, work-study, and loans every year.

- Who gets federal student aid?
  Every student who meets certain eligibility requirements can get some type of federal student aid, regardless of age or family income. Some of the most basic eligibility requirements are that you must
  • demonstrate financial need (for most programs);
  • be a U.S. citizen or an eligible noncitizen; • have a valid Social Security number;
  • register (if you haven't already) with Selective Service if you're a male between the ages of 18 and 25;
  • maintain satisfactory academic progress in college or career school; and
  • show you're qualified to obtain a college or career school education by
  • having a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate or a state-recognized equivalent; or
  • completing a high-school education in a homeschool setting approved under state law; or
  • enrolling in an eligible career pathways program. Find more details about eligibility requirements at StudentAid.gov/eligibility.

- How do I apply for federal student aid?
  You must create an FSA ID and complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®).
  1. Create your FSA ID at StudentAid.gov/fsaid. Students and parents are required to use an FSA ID, made up of a username and password, to access and submit personal data at U.S. Department of Education websites. Your FSA ID is used to confirm your identity and electronically sign your federal student aid documents.
  2. Complete the FAFSA at fafsa.gov.
  Completing and submitting the FAFSA is free and quick, and it gives you access to the largest sources of financial aid to pay for college or career school—federal, state, and school sources. If you need a paper FAFSA, contact our ED Pubs Distribution Center at www.edpubs.gov or toll-free at 1-877-433-7827.

- When do I complete the FAFSA?
  If you plan to attend college the fall semester of 2021, start creating your FAFSA account October 1st, 2020. You will use your parent's 2019 tax return.

- Why should I apply as soon as possible?
  Your FAFSA helps you apply for federal, state, and school financial aid. Schools and states often use FAFSA information to award nonfederal aid, and their deadlines are usually early in the year, so you should apply as soon as possible. You should check with the schools you're interested in to find out about their deadlines. You can find state deadlines at fafsa.gov.

- Do I need to apply for financial aid every year?
  Yes, you must reapply for aid every year. Also, if you change schools, your aid doesn't automatically transfer with you. Check with your new school to find

out what you need to do to continue receiving financial aid. If you're not ready to apply for federal student aid but would like to estimate your aid, visit StudentAid.gov/fafsa/estimate to use FAFSA4caster, an early eligibility estimator.

- What information do I report on the FAFSA?
  The FAFSA asks for information about you (your name, Social Security number, date of birth, address, etc.) and about your financial situation. A series of questions will also determine whether you must provide information about your parents. The answer depends on whether you're considered a "dependent" or an "independent" student. Learn more about dependency status at StudentAid.gov/dependency.

- Where does my FAFSA information go once I submit it?
  Once you submit your FAFSA your information is shared with the colleges or career schools you included on your FAFSA, and in some cases with your state's higher education agency.
  • The financial aid office at a school to which you applied for admission uses your FAFSA information to determine how much federal student aid you may receive at that school.
  • If the school has its own funds to use for financial aid, it might use your FAFSA information to determine your eligibility for that aid. (The school might also have other forms it wants you to fill out to apply for aid there, so check with the school's financial aid office to be sure.)
  • Your FAFSA information also goes to the higher education agencies in the states where your chosen schools are located. Many states have financial aid funds that they give out based on FAFSA information.

- I completed the FAFSA, now what?
  After you submit your FAFSA, you'll receive a Student Aid Report (SAR), which is a summary of the FAFSA data you submitted.
  • You'll get your SAR within three days (if you complete your FAFSA online) to three weeks (if you mail your paper FAFSA) after you submit your FAFSA.
  • Be sure to look over your SAR to make sure you didn't make any mistakes on your FAFSA.
  • The SAR won't tell you how much financial aid you'll get; it's a summary of the information being sent to the schools you listed on your FAFSA.
  • If you don't need to make any changes to the information listed on your SAR, just keep it for your records. • To find out how to correct mistakes, or update your tax return or other information in your FAFSA, visit StudentAid.gov/fafsa/next-steps/accept-aid or contact the school you are applying to for instructions.
  • Next, expect to receive an award letter from the schools at which you were accepted for admission.

- What's an award letter?
  If you applied for admission to a college or career school and have been accepted (although not all schools require students to be accepted before telling them of their eligibility for aid), and you listed that school on your FAFSA, the school will calculate your aid and send you an electronic or paper "award letter" telling you how much aid you're eligible to receive at that school. The timing of the award letter varies from school to school and could be as early as springtime (awarding for the fall) or as late as immediately before you start school. It depends on when you apply and how the school prefers to schedule awarding of aid.

- How much will I get?
  When a school's financial aid office sends you an award letter, the letter will list the types of aid and amounts (from all sources) the school will offer you. How much aid you receive depends on a number of factors, including
  • cost of attendance (for each school);
  • Expected Family Contribution (EFC)—(EFC does not represent a dollar amount but rather it is a number used to calculate how much financial aid you're eligible to receive based on the information in your FAFSA);
  • year in school; and
  • enrollment status (that is, full-time, half-time, etc.).
  You can compare aid offers from the schools to which you applied and see which school is the most affordable once financial aid is taken into account. Keep in mind that the financial aid office at the school will determine how much financial aid you're eligible to receive. Contact the school's financial aid office if you have any questions about your award letter or the aid being offered to you. For more information on how aid is calculated, visit StudentAid.gov/how-calculated.

- Should I accept all of the aid that I am offered?
  You don't have to. When your school's financial aid office sends you an award letter, they'll ask you to indicate the financial aid you want to accept. Look carefully at your options and make sure you accept only what you need. A good approach is to
  • first, accept free money (scholarships and grants), i.e., funds you don't have to pay back;
  • then, accept earned money (work-study), i.e., funds you earn through a job; and
  • finally, accept borrowed money (student loans), i.e., money you have to pay back with interest.
  Look carefully at your options, especially when it comes to loans that you'll have to pay back. For more details on accepting aid, visit StudentAid.gov/fafsa/next-steps/accept-aid.

- How will I receive my aid?
  Your college or career school—not the U.S. Department of Education—will distribute your aid and, in most cases, your federal student aid will be applied directly to your school account. The financial aid staff at your school will explain exactly how and when your aid will be disbursed (paid out). If you're getting federal student loans for the first time, you must complete entrance counseling and sign a master promissory note before you receive your loan money.

- Do I have to repay my loans?
  Yes. Student loans, unlike grants and work-study, are borrowed money that must be repaid, with interest, just like car loans and home mortgages. You cannot have these loans canceled because you didn't like the education you received, didn't get a job in your field of study, or are having financial difficulty. So think about the amount you'll have to repay before you take out a loan. Student loans aren't easily written off in bankruptcy.
  • While you don't have to repay your Direct Loan while you're enrolled in an eligible school, you don't have to wait until you graduate to start repaying your loans. For detailed information on repayment, visit StudentAid.gov/repay.

- • You can use our repayment estimator to estimate your federal student loan payments under each repayment plan. Visit StudentAid.gov/repayment-estimator to use the tool.

- **What else do I need to remember when applying for financial aid?**
  • Free help is available any time during the application process. Online help is available while you complete your application at fafsa.gov, and you can get free information and help from your school counselor, the financial aid office at the school you plan to attend, or the U.S. Department of Education at StudentAid.gov or 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800- 433-3243). You should never have to pay for help!
  • Your Student Aid Report (SAR) has to be correct to ensure that you receive your aid. The U.S. Department of Education will send you your SAR. Review it and, if necessary, make changes or corrections following the instructions in the SAR.
  • Be sure to always respond to any correspondence your school sends you.
  • Review award letters, compare the types and amounts of aid you are offered from each school, and contact the school's financial aid office if you have any questions about the aid being offered.

- **If I make a mistake on my FAFSA or need to update my information, how do I do that?**
  If you wrote an incorrect email or mailing address, forgot to sign the FAFSA, or need to update your income, you may log in to make those changes. However, if you incorrectly reported your SSN, contact the Financial Aid office at the college.

College Visits
Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

How should I schedule a college visit?
Contact the college/university admission office or register for a pre-scheduled Open House or college visit.

When should I schedule a college visit?
Visit before you apply and after you are admitted to a college. Visit during the spring of your junior year, the summer after your junior year, or fall of your senior year.

Are college visits counted as excused absences?
Students have up to 2 days of excused absences to schedule a college visit during the school year. Please notify your administrator and provide a letter with the date and times of your college visit to the attendance office. You are still responsible for getting missed assignments/work from teachers prior to the college visit.

What are some things I should look for in an effective/productive college visit?
Tour the campus (be sure to check out dorms, dining hall, library, etc.). Identify career planning services for undergraduate students, health services, find out about student activities, campus life, social activities, and transportation options around college campus and community.

Verify admissions requirements (i.e. required standardized tests and high school courses).

Determine college costs.

Attend a class to get an idea of the typical size, teaching style, and academic atmosphere. Schedule an overnight stay during the school year. Talk to college students about general academic environment and student commitment necessary for students.

Questions for you to consider:
- Can I see myself attending this school?
- Is it the right fit for me (programs of study, personality, learning style, and activities)?

Social Media Dos & Don'ts

Use your page to talk your page to talk yourself up: what books you like, interests, academic interests.

Your page should be consistent with your college applications.

Look at your page: Is this something you want your grandmother to see? If not, do not put it on your page. Review comments and pictures.

Schools are competitive. For example, the University of Virginia admissions staff is free to check anonymous tips about social networking sites or verify information about you when evaluating and making an application decision. Content could be what gets you in or keeps you out of a college or university.

Schools do internet searches, if a red flag appears on applications like a suspension from school.

When in doubt, leave it out.