

The Checklist for College-bound Juniors

by Patrick O'Connor, Ph.D. Counselors' Corner Wednesday, May 18, 2022

With another year mostly behind us, it's time to take what we learned after a ride on this year's college-go-round and pass it on to juniors.

Do let your interests, abilities, and needs guide your search for the colleges that are right for you. Do notice that last sentence said "colleges", not "college".

Don't think the rules for applying to college are the same as when your older sibling applied. Testing policies, admission rates, and application deadlines have changed in the last few years. Use the college websites to get the latest information.

Do take the SAT or ACT. Even if your list is all test-optional/no-test colleges, you may fall in love this fall with a college that requires them. Plus, a strong test score can improve your application status at a test-optional school. Just don't send them until you see them. (You can check with Cary to see whether this is worthwhile for you individually.)

Don't forget online college tours are still around, and better than ever. The pandemic made just about every college invest more time and thought to their online tours, leading them to realize what they should have figured out a long time ago; students who can't get to campus still deserve a great look at their school.

Do put together a list of colleges you're interested in if there are any right now. Throw them in a spreadsheet, along with a few notes on why the school interests you, and the application deadline. Don't forget the why; that comes in handy later on. 6-8 colleges max is plenty; 10-12 if some of those are cocktail party colleges.

Don't let cost hold you back from applying to a college. Put your list together based on the qualities of the college. The ones you think you can't afford may offer great aid that makes it possible. Make sure your list is balanced with colleges where cost doesn't matter as much, and you'll be fine.

Do take a few minutes to work on your activities list. Get a notebook or spreadsheet, write down the activities you remember, then—and I'm serious here—ask your parents to look it over. They'll remember many things you forgot, and they'll be thrilled you asked them to do something for college besides pay for it.

Don't leave school before asking two teachers if they can write you a good letter of recommendation. Generally, these are teachers of academic subjects from junior year, and you don't need more than two. They can't teach the same subject—I'd even be careful about getting letters from the Chemistry and Biology teachers—and asking them now gives them the summer to think about your letter, and even write it. (Give them and your advisor a copy of the activity list. I can help you decide which teachers to ask – Cary)

Do ask for help. Teachers help with essays, counselors help with college searches and applications, and online sources from folks like Collegewise and Common Application offer free, solid advice, available anytime. You bring a unique self to the process; they bring the expertise needed to make the logistics look easy. Use them.