

# PREPARING FOR THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

## COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

- Most college applications become available on August 1, but some will open earlier in summer.
- Colleges will either utilize their own school-specific application, and/or use the Common Application or Coalition Application. School-specific applications may be found on each school's individual website. Please reference the "[Guide to Common App 2021-22](#)" site for details on that application.
- College applications often ask if students have participated in dual enrollment/credit at a local college while in high school. It is important to clarify that colleges only need your *high school* transcript at the time of application, and you would only send your college transcript in summer 2022 to only the school you plan to attend.

## APPLICATION TYPES & DEADLINES

- Deadlines vary based on each college/university. The most common options are described below, including examples of schools utilizing those deadlines.
  - **Rolling** – as soon as the application is available, you may submit and then receive an admissions decision shortly thereafter (often in a few weeks or less!). Your application is **not** being compared to other applications for admission, they are simply verifying that you meet or exceed their minimum admission requirements. Examples – Mizzou, MO State, Truman, Central MO, Arkansas
  - **Priority Deadlines** – although colleges may offer rolling admissions, they will also often advertise a "priority" date. This means your application must be in by that date to receive full consideration for scholarships. Examples – Arkansas (Nov 1 to then meet Nov 15 scholarship app deadline), Mizzou (Nov 15 to meet Dec 1 scholarship app deadline), Truman (Dec 1)
  - **Early Action** – the college makes admissions decisions for all applications submitted by a particular date and announces all decisions at once. Because your application is submitted early, you will receive your admission decision earlier, often in Dec/Jan. Your application is being compared to all other applications submitted for that particular deadline, and the admissions committee makes selections based upon the pool available. This is **non-binding**, so you are not committing to attend if admitted! Therefore, there are no guaranteed formulas for admission. Examples – Univ of Georgia (Oct 15) Indiana (Nov 1), Michigan (Nov 1), Wisconsin-Madison (Nov 1), CO-Boulder (Nov 15), Tulane (Nov 15)
  - **Early Decision** – you, a parent, and a counselor sign a binding contract that you will attend the school if admitted, and will withdraw all applications to other schools. You may only select to apply Early Decision to one school. Your application is being compared to all other applications submitted for Early Decision. There is no formula guaranteeing admission. You are also committing prior to knowing your final financial aid award from the school. It is important to utilize the school's Net Price Calculator to predict your final costs before signing the ED contract. A few schools also offer Early Decision II options, as well, which are typically in January but follow the same guidelines. Examples – Wash U (Nov 1 or Jan 4), Vanderbilt (Nov 1 or Jan 1), Duke (Nov 1), Tulane (Nov 1).
  - **Regular Decision** - the college makes admissions decisions for all applications submitted by a particular date and announces all decisions at once. Because your application is submitted later, you will receive your admission decision later, often in March/April. Your application is being compared to all other applications submitted for that particular deadline, and the admissions committee makes selections based upon the pool available. Therefore, there are no guarantees for admission. If you have applied to the school as Early Action or Early Decision, there is a possibility that your application will be deferred to Regular Decision if you are a competitive applicant, but they are not quite ready to offer you an admissions decision. Examples – Entire UC school system (Nov 30), Vanderbilt (Jan 1), Wash U (Jan 4), Georgia Tech (Jan 5), Tulane (Jan 15), UC-Boulder (Jan 15), Wisconsin-Madison (Feb 1)

## TRANSCRIPTS & TEST SCORES

- Students are required to have a signed "[Authorization to Release Records](#)" on file in the Counseling office. This form gives permission for us to send records and communicate with college admissions offices about the applicants. If you are unable to print the document, students may either use the Kami Google extension on their Parkway Chromebooks to sign digitally, or pick up a hard copy from the Counseling lobby during regular business hours. Once signed, students may scan or take a pic of the signed form and return to Mrs.

Prange via email, or return to the Counseling lobby during regular business hours. Once the form is on file and students are classified as seniors in Naviance (late summer), they will be able to request the specific places they would like their records to be sent through their Naviance account.

- Because many applications become available on or before August 1, students may submit their applications before we return to school. Students are encouraged to send their application in as soon as possible to schools with rolling admission, and then records may follow after students return to school. College/universities know that they are opening application portals while high schools are still on summer break, so they expect the delay in receiving official school records, and no student may be held at a disadvantage for transcripts and supporting documents not arriving until their high school is back in session and staff is available to process.

### **SELF-REPORTING**

- Many schools are transitioning to having students self-report their high school grades and/or standardized test scores during the application process, and do not require official records until the student has been admitted and decides to attend. Students should access a copy of their unofficial transcript through Infinite Campus to ensure they are entering accurate courses and grades into their application. Examples of schools who use self-reporting grades – Kansas, Purdue, Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), and the entire Univ of California school system. Transcripts are available in Infinite Campus until June 20th and then become available again in August.

### **TEST SCORES**

- If a college/university requires a student send their official test scores directly from the testing agency, the students will need to log into their [ACT](#) and/or [College Board](#) web account and pay to send their scores to the colleges to which they are applying. **This should be done well in advance of the application deadlines to ensure the college receives them on time.** Delivery is not based upon request, but upon the established schedule the college has with the testing agency (which might be as infrequent as two times per month!!!).
- If the college/university will accept test scores with their high school transcript, students will have an opportunity to request that we include test scores when they make the records request in Naviance. Submitting in this manner is free, however, **all** ACT and SAT scores taken will be sent together.
- As mentioned above, many colleges are shifting to allow students to self-report their test scores within their application, and only require students to submit official scores if they are admitted and choose to attend.
- If a school is **test-optional**, the college will allow students to apply without submitting standardized test scores at all. My advice is to consider whether your current scores fall within the average range of admitted students at that university and whether you can be considered for merit scholarships without test scores. For a current list of test-optional universities, click [here](#). In addition, please check college websites for the most up-to-date information on what is required to apply and have full consideration for scholarships and competitive programs.

### **RECOMMENDATION LETTERS**

- Some colleges/universities require submission of recommendation letters. The number of letters required typically range between 1-3. Because admissions offices are looking for current perspectives, they like for you to use core teachers (English, math, science, social studies, MCL) from junior or senior year.
- Many colleges also request a recommendation or report form be completed by your school counselor.
- We ask that you give teachers and counselors 3-4 weeks to complete recommendation letters prior to application due dates. Since colleges requiring letters will not have deadlines until October/November, it is acceptable to connect with your letter writers in August/September.
- If a student needs a recommendation letter from a counselor, they should reach out to one of the five PCH counselors they'd like to ask, and then complete the "Counselor Recommendation Survey" in Naviance.

- All recommendation letters are confidential (may not be viewed by the student/family) and are submitted by the counseling department along with transcripts and school report forms. Transcripts will not be sent until all supporting documents are uploaded, as everything submits in one bundle.
- **After** a student has had a personal conversation with a teacher, and they have agreed to write for them, the student will make the formal request in Naviance in the “letters of recommendation” section on the colleges tab. The student may then monitor if the request is “pending” (not yet started), “in progress” (teacher is finished and waiting for counseling to submit), or “submitted”. This feature is not available until you are classified as a senior in Naviance (late summer).
- Although students may submit their applications well before the college deadline, the deadline for the teacher/counselor is the deadline listed for the application. If the student would like the teacher to submit earlier than the posted deadline, they must work out arrangements with the teacher(s) to do so.

### **APPLICATION FEES**

- Most colleges/universities require a fee to submit an application. Fee waivers are available for students who qualify for the free/reduced lunch program. Students may also show eligibility through their FAFSA Student Aid Report. Students who are eligible to submit fee waivers should see Mrs. Prange to complete the required paperwork.

### **ESSAYS**

- College applications often ask students to complete one or more writing samples. The length of the writings varies from school to school. Students are typically expected to answer specific prompts that are intended to give the college admissions team more information about the applicant; their personality, their passions, their character. Although editing for grammar and spelling is important, you want to make sure that edits do not interfere with the authentic voice of the student.
- A college admissions representative from Tufts University shared that if a parent walked in to their office and went through a pile of anonymous essays, the parent should be able to clearly determine which essay was written by their child. It should “sound just like them”.
- Essays/short answer questions are one way a student becomes “human,” not just pages of data and facts.
- If you are using the Common Application, please see the “Guide to the Common App 2021-22” site to view the 2021-22 essay prompts. College-specific essay prompts may not be available until after August 1.
  - Although there is one main Common App essay on the “Common App” section, students should preview all additional questions for each college on the “My Colleges” section as many colleges add their own **school-specific essays** and/or short-answer questions. It is never a fun thing to be surprised by additional essays as you think you are finished and try to submit!! These college-specific essays responses should not be generic (i.e., you should not copy and paste from one college to another). They are looking for genuine responses which truly reveal your knowledge of their school and why that school is a good fit for you!
- The Common Application has added an optional writing section to discuss the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Colleges are discouraging students from writing about COVID in their main essay. Before responding to this optional prompt, it is important to reflect on whether your experience is significantly different from others, are there noticeable changes on your transcript, and/or is this information elsewhere on your application already.

### **RESUME**

- Applications often require that students list their high school activities, honors/awards, part-time employment and even family commitments. It is helpful if the student has already spent time organizing and brainstorming.
- There are 2 sections of the Common Application to input resume information: (1) Activities section – list up to 10 activities in order of important to you, (2) Honors & Awards (under the Education section) – list up to 5.
- Letter writers often ask students for a copy of their resume or activities list. This helps them to have a global perspective of everything you are balancing outside of their classroom.

## **SPECIAL TALENTS**

- Athletes – if you are planning to consider NCAA Division 1 or 2 or NAIA athletics, you will need to register with the NCAA and/or NAIA eligibility center(s). There are links on the PCH Counseling home page that includes specific details, a link to register, and a downloadable guide for college-bound athletes. Please ensure that you are communicating with Mrs. Prange, your counselor, and your coaches about your intentions.
- Visual & Performing Arts – your application process will likely include the submission of portfolios or required tapes and/or auditions. Because each individual college/university will have different expectations and requirements, it is even more critical to stay organized.

## **ADMISSION DECISIONS**

- Automatic decisions – some schools publish their automatic admissions criteria and if a student meets/exceeds those minimum requirements, then they can know with confidence that they will be admitted. Examples – Mizzou, MO State, SEMO, Central MO, KU, Arkansas
- Holistic Reviews – many schools do not have minimum requirements. Although they publish “average GPA and test scores”, so you can verify that you are competitive academically, they also take many additional factors into consideration when making their final decisions. Because the most highly selective/competitive universities are receiving applications from students with similar GPA and testing data, they are giving heavier focus to the additional items mentioned above (resume, essays, special talents, interest). These additional items are very subjective, which often makes the decisions confusing/frustrating for students.
- Students will receive admission decisions throughout the school year, as outlined above in the “Application Types & Deadlines” section. Students will know most of their decisions by the spring, and will need to make their final decision by May 1.
- Although being denied admission is extremely difficult, I encourage students not to take this personally. It is a stressful, overwhelming and complicated process. It is important for students to be confident about several of their college options. If all of the schools you are applying to have “holistic reviews,” you have not given yourself any guaranteed admissions. All too often, seniors who have applied to several universities are only left with what they considered their “back up”. If your back up is truly not a college that you want to attend, then it isn’t a solid back up plan.
- Other than being admitted or denied, students may also receive a decision to be placed on a waitlist, or to be deferred to another decision date. If deferred, it is important for students to update the college with any new information (increased grades or test scores, new resume items or recognitions) and to continue showing interest in the school. If a student is placed on the waitlist, they would want to do these things as well, but also make a commitment to another college. Schools often do not look to pull students from their waitlist until mid-summer, so the student would certainly want to have housing secured at another university in case they were never admitted.

## **FINANCING COLLEGE**

- The “sticker price” at a college is usually overwhelming, but I encourage students and families to apply and then provide the college the opportunity to make the final cost of attendance more affordable. Be sure to contact each financial aid office individually to learn about the school’s financial aid opportunities and to let them know about your family’s special circumstances.
- I encourage families to speak openly with one another about financial expectations of the parents and the student. Whether that includes an expectation of applying for scholarships, being willing to take out parent or student loans, or finding college options that stay within a specific budget.

## **FINANCIAL AID**

- FAFSA4caster is a website that enables students and parents to receive an early estimate of eligibility for federal aid, and learn more about Federal Student Aid programs, the financial aid process and other sources of assistance. This may be done over the summer so you have an idea of what your Estimated Family Contribution (EFC) may look like. The website is [here](#).

- Apply for financial aid using the [FAFSA](#) (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). You should submit the FAFSA as soon as possible **after October 1** of senior year. Most colleges have a FAFSA priority deadline early in the spring for the upcoming academic year. Be sure to check this deadline with the college you plan to attend.
- By federal law, each institution is required to provide a version of the Net Price Calculator on their website. To find out what the “net price” is for the college of your choice, check out <https://collegecost.ed.gov/net-price>, from the U.S. Department of Education.
- PCH will host a Financial Aid Night in September, so be watching for that date. Due to current circumstances, this event will likely be virtual.
- A great reference tool is “[The Missouri Source](#)” which is published each summer by the Missouri Department of Higher Education.
- The [Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis](#) is a local, nonprofit organization which supports local families by “helping them navigate the complex process of applying for financial aid for higher education and making enrollment decisions”. They offer free workshops/clinics and have valuable resources posted on their website.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

- Most colleges will determine their automatic scholarship offers based upon the admissions application. A few will prompt students to complete additional scholarship applications.
- There is a “Scholarships & Money” section on the colleges tab in [Naviance](#) which will include all scholarships we are asked to advertise to students at PCH, plus a national scholarship search which contains a database of over 3 million scholarship opportunities. The home page of Naviance also includes links to several additional scholarship databases, like [Scholarship Central](#).
- Searching/applying for scholarships can be as time-consuming as a part-time job, but many students have found great success when willing to devote efforts towards this endeavor.
- If financing college is going to be difficult, I would also encourage you to explore the options of the A+ Program. Students, who enroll in the A+ program and meet all of the requirements, are eligible for tuition reimbursement for two years at any community college in Missouri. Program requirements are listed on the [Central High A+ Program](#) section of the Counseling website.

## LOANS

- There are 3 types of Federal Direct Student Loans offered for undergraduate studies through the federal government. To be eligible for these loans you must complete the FAFSA.
  - [Federal Direct Subsidized Stafford Loan](#) – available to students **based on financial need**. The federal government pays the interest on this loan while the student is in school.
  - [Federal Direct Unsubsidized Stafford Loan](#) – available to all students regardless of family finances, so it is **not based on financial need**. The government does not pay the interest on this loan, so the borrower is responsible for all interest.
  - [Federal Direct Parent PLUS Loan](#) – available only to parent/legal guardians of undergraduate students. Parents can borrow up to the full cost of attendance minus other financial aid received. **Credit approval is required** and these loans are in the **parent’s name** only.
- As a general rule, you should only consider obtaining a private student loan if you have maxed out the Federal Stafford Loan options.
- Private Student Loans – help bridge the gap between federal loans and the actual cost of college. Credit approval is required, and you can borrow up to the cost of attendance minus other financial aid received.
- The main difference between a Parent PLUS Loan and a private student loan is that the Parent PLUS Loan is taken out in the parent’s name and cannot be transferred to the student. A private student loan is taken out in the student’s name, but a parent may serve as a cosigner to secure a lower interest rate or to have a better chance of approval. The cosigner does not have to be a parent or legal guardian.
- When considering a private loan, families are encouraged to research their options.