

## THE COLLEGE SELECTION PROCESS

Juniors, your goal: Return to school at the start of the senior year with a list of 3 to 5 schools in mind where you intend to apply. Doing this will help assure your acceptance while also allowing you to apply to a potentially more competitive school. Those schools should be placed in the following categories:

REACH – This college’s entrance standards may seem a cut above your qualifications. The college’s mean rank will be in the fifth above yours and the average SAT scores will be 40 to 100 points higher than yours. Factors other than academic record that may affect your chances for admission could include an unusually strong letter of recommendation, your essay, a parent who is an alumnus, or extracurricular activities.

AVERAGE FOR ME – This should be a realistic choice, one that has admissions criteria corresponding closely to your credentials. The mean rank and yours should be in the same fifth and your SAT scores should be within 40 points of those given as the average by the college.

SECURE/SAFETY - This is a college with an admissions policy clearly making you acceptable with a margin to spare. This college may seem below your potential; therefore, choose carefully as this is where you may attend. You might consider a community college.

A student’s college choice must be made sincerely and realistically. Examine the advantages and disadvantages of each. Though you will probably not find the “perfect college,” you can determine which ones have the most characteristics you desire. Weigh the strengths and weaknesses to find one that is most likely to meet your needs.

### PARENT INVOLVEMENT

A team approach to the search and planning process is strongly suggested meaning students and parents should work together.

- Students should express their goals, desires, and reactions to different options.
- Parents should share insight they have regarding their child as well as guidelines on cost limitations. This should be done early in the process.

Students – keep in mind this in **your** education! Parents – don’t do for your child what your child can do for himself/herself.

## STEP ONE – DEFINE THE IDEAL

Each person must define his/her ideal school. To do this, think of what features and characteristics make a school a “good fit.” This is essentially a self-exploration process that must take place. Things that may be factors are:

Size – large, medium, small - keep in mind that smaller campuses typically have smaller class sizes and larger campuses may have classes with large numbers of students taught in an auditorium-type setting. At large schools, classes may be taught by graduate assistants compared to the smaller schools where classes are typically taught by professors.

Location – urban, suburban, rural, in-state/out-of state, distance from home – schools in different types of settings will have different “personalities” and community resources accessible to students.

Type of school – state, private, religious affiliated, trade/technical.

Major - is the desired field-of-study offered at this institution? If choosing between several majors, does this college provide the opportunity for all possible majors? Students who are uncertain of a field-of-study are encouraged to use websites listed at the end of this document to help identify possible careers.

Activities/special programs – be sure activities important to the student, such as sports, music programs, theme-focused clubs, internships, are available.

Cost – is this school within the acceptable financial range the student/parent is able to pay? *However*, at this time, do not rule out a high-cost school until the financial aid package is available. \*\*Financial aid information will be presented later.

## STEP TWO – CREATE THE LIST

Once students, with the help of their parents, identify the features they are looking for in a school, the process of investigating should begin. From this procedure, a list of possible colleges will be created. This course of action is initially very computer-oriented.

College-search websites – These websites allow students to input the desired characteristics/features and provide a list of schools that match their list. Commonly used and recommended sites are [www.educationplanner.org](http://www.educationplanner.org) and [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

College websites – The college’s own websites will offer an opportunity to become acquainted with their specific school. Opportunities for “virtual tours” are available. Admissions requirements and application procedures will be explained. Curriculum in majors is presented. There is a growing trend among college admissions offices to adopt the use of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to make information available and to communicate with students.

Campus visit – There is no substitute for visiting the school because being on-campus provides students and parents a true view of the institution. Seeing the dorms, classrooms, and cafeteria as well as the entire campus may confirm or rule out schools on the student’s initial list of possibilities. Take notes about what was seen at each campus and reactions to what was seen because memories may become cloudy after visiting several schools. The ideal is to visit when classes are in session to have the full experience of life at that college. (If/when you narrow down your list, consider a second visit with a possible over-night stay.)

### **STEP THREE – PLAN**

After the student has clearly defined what they are looking for in a college and then created a list of possible colleges, it is time to come up with a plan. Which colleges come closest to meeting the ideals established by the student? These schools should be on the list of 3-5 colleges where the student will apply.

- Know the deadlines and suggested procedures for applying to each institution.
- Establish a calendar or record-keeping system to be sure deadlines are met.
- Be ready to apply “early” in the senior year – early means September and October.
- If an essay is needed, students may research topics and start writing over summer.
- If a letter of recommendation from a teacher is needed, students should make the request early. (\*Please ask for only as many letters as the college requires.)

### **PAYING FOR COLLEGE**

The dollar figures students and parents are looking at this point in time are what would be considered “sticker price.” The “actual cost” of attending a college will not be known for most students until March of the student’s senior year. Students are strongly encouraged to apply for financial aid.

-In January of senior year, students and parents complete and submit the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) to Federal processors. Completion of the FAFSA is required to start the financial aid process at any college, but institutions may have additional forms required.

-Colleges where the student has applied and been accepted pull the information from the FAFSA and any additional forms they may require and compile a “Financial Aid Package” for the student. The Financial Aid Package will detail any kind of aid the student will receive including federal and state grants/loans, campus-based grants, merit based scholarships and work study. This allows students and parents to see the bottom line actual cost of attending the school

-Students and parents do a side-by-side comparison of the Financial Aid Packages to determine the one that best fits the circumstances of the family.

**\*Penn-Trafford will host a financial aid meeting for parents of seniors next November or December.** To learn as much as possible about financial aid, it is suggested that you visit the websites listed at the end of this document.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

### Websites:

Career Exploration

[www.educationplanner.org](http://www.educationplanner.org)

[www.personalitytype.org](http://www.personalitytype.org)

College/Tech School Search

[www.educationplanner.org](http://www.educationplanner.org)

[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

Financial Aid/Scholarships

[www.educationplanner.org](http://www.educationplanner.org)

[www.ed.gov/studentaid](http://www.ed.gov/studentaid)

[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)

[www.pheaa.org](http://www.pheaa.org)

[www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

### **Books:**

Winning the College Admissions Game – Strategies for Parents/Strategies for Students Peter Van Buskirk

Don't Miss Out: The Ambitious Student's Guide to Financial Aid by Robert and Anna Leider

Paying For College Without Going Broke by The Princeton Review, Kalmn A. Chany and Geoff Martz.