

# PLANNING FOR COLLEGE

This booklet is directed not only to our students but also our parents. Students must understand the college planning/selection process because it is the next important step in their lives. It is also necessary that parents understand the process so that they can help their children make wise choices concerning their futures. This booklet is our effort to work together with parents and students; we hope to answer most of your questions so that you can be prepared.

## WHY COLLEGE?

Before you decide **where** you want to attend college, or **what** you want to study, or **who** will be your roommate, or **when** you will apply, you will have to answer the question – **WHY** are you going to college in the first place?

Many students never even stop to ask themselves why they are going to college. When asked, many are going for vague reasons. We think you should have concrete reasons for attending college so that the time and effort you put into this decision will be focused and fruitful. Ask yourself these questions:

Where do I want to be after graduating?

Why do I want to be there?

What do I have to do to get there?

Essentially, there are three very solid reasons to attend college after high school:

1. **To get a better job** – studies have shown that the average college graduate earns over \$750,000 more than a non-college graduate over the course of a lifetime.

2. **To break away from home** – in our society, a rite of passage into adulthood centers on leaving the dependence of home. In college, students accept responsibility for every decision they make – from choosing courses, to managing money, to doing (or not doing) laundry, to choosing friends, to embracing values. Going to college makes the process of breaking away from home more organized and complete.

3. **To learn** – quite simply, college is higher education. College students learn a great deal about the world around them through the liberal arts courses they take; from their major field courses, students specialize in one particular field of study. The college experience enhances knowledge, develops and strengthens critical thinking skills, reinforces analytical, assimilative, and comprehensive skills. Higher education is just that – an opportunity to further develop your intellectual ability.

# When should preparation for college begin?

Answer: As soon as a student enters high school

Every high school – both public and private – sets its own course requirements, in keeping with the standards prescribed by the New York State Department of Education. In order to understand the policies of Our Lady of Lourdes High School, we urge you to read our Student handbook each year. You will find an explanation of our course and credit requirements, school philosophy, grading system, special programs, school regulations, failures, dress code, and school activities.

## ***Freshman Year***

When a student becomes a freshman, everything begins to count toward college acceptance. The things they do academically, athletically and socially begin “to count.”

**Work hard to get good grades.** Grades this year are part of the determinant of their GPA. Freshmen should take the most challenging courses they are capable of handling.

**Develop good study habits and organizational skills.** The habits you learn this year will stay with you throughout high school.

**Become involved in a wide variety of activities.** College applications generally request a list of high school activities and evidence of leadership. Depth of involvement and leadership positions are considered important when participating in activities both in and out of school.

**Select meaningful summer activities.** Use your time wisely – join a team, do volunteer work, read!!

## ***Sophomore Year***

Sophomore year should be a year of personal growth.

**Work hard to get good grades.** This can be a difficult year for many students, but it is important to keep grades up. This year is the second third of the GPA that will be sent to colleges.

**Begin exploring the various college options open to you.** Gather information, attend college fairs, and begin to think about career possibilities and college majors. Families might want to take the opportunity to make informal visits to colleges that interest them.

**Carefully consider and select appropriate courses and electives for 11<sup>th</sup> grade.** Check to see what is necessary for the type of diploma you want. Be certain you have taken or will take all of the classes required for that diploma. Discern which electives will be most beneficial and appropriate for you to take.

**Update your activities list.** Keep your list current with the addition of any awards, new activities, offices held, etc. that were added this year

**Select meaningful summer activities.** Look for activities/volunteer work/employment which might be related to the career field you are considering.

*These first two years can set the tone for a successful high school career and will help you get into the college of your choice. Remember, your success comes from the combined efforts of you, your parents and Our Lady of Lourdes High School.*

## Junior Year

Junior year is when students should begin exploring post-secondary plans and options.

**Continue to work hard to get good grades.** Your junior grades will be the last grades on the transcripts you send to colleges next fall. These will constitute the final third of your GPA. Be sure to also check your class rank.

**Continue to be involved in activities and to develop leadership skills.** Update your list with current achievements.

**Take the PSATs.** In October of junior year, all Lourdes juniors take the PSATs (no outside registration is necessary). Almost every junior in the country takes this exam both as a practice test for the SATs and to participate in the National Merit Scholarship Program. Because the information from this exam may be sent to colleges along with score reports, this test really starts our juniors on the first step of the college process.

**Actively explore college options.** Investigate colleges which meet your requirement – and whose requirements you meet. Go to college fairs, speak with college representatives who visit school, do on-line research to narrow your choices. The College Board has a program called Big Future which can be a great resource in finding colleges appropriate for you.

**Sign up for and take the SAT and/or the ACT in the early spring.** Register for either of these on-line (<https://sat.collegeboard.org/register>, [www.actstudent.org/regist/](http://www.actstudent.org/regist/)) Both tests are offered a number of times – you may take them multiple times.

**Visit colleges.** It is always a good idea to see a college when it is “up and running.” Call the admissions office for a tour or go to an Open House. This is the best way to find out if a college is a “good fit.”

**Carefully consider courses and electives for senior year.** Be sure you have fulfilled the graduation/diploma type requirements. See if a majority of the colleges in which you are interested will accept college credit from Dutchess Community College classes or if they might prefer AP classes. Take a strong schedule of classes.

**Register with the NCAA Eligibility Center** if you are planning on participating in a sport in college (<http://www.ncaa.org/>)

**Update your activities list.** This will be an important resource when you begin filling out your college applications.

**Again, select meaningful summer activities,** perhaps something related to your intended major.

**Narrow down your list of college choices.**

**Check out the Common Application** ([commonapp.org/CommonApp/default.aspx](http://commonapp.org/CommonApp/default.aspx)). Become familiar with the questions asked and begin to prepare your essay.

## Senior Year

Senior year is when everything comes together – all of your hard work and planning begin to pay off.

**Continue to work on grades.** Senior grades are important – many colleges use mid-year grades when deciding on acceptances.

**Work on your essay.** This is an integral component of your application. Your English teacher will be able to offer assistance in this.

**Visit Colleges.** Quite simply, there is no substitute for the college visit! You should visit prospective colleges since choosing one is a very individual, personal decision and only you can evaluate how comfortable you feel on campus, and if a particular institution meets your needs. When visiting a college, you should tour the campus, looking into laboratories, libraries, residence halls, dining halls, student union, and athletic facilities. It is very valuable to spend time in a class if possible.

**Set up a calendar for the year.** Include test dates, application deadlines, college visits.

**Register to retake the SAT or ACT.**

**Be certain, if you plan to play a sport in college that you have registered with the NCAA.**

**Request teacher recommendations.** Speak with teachers early in the fall about writing a recommendation for you. Some may ask for a brief resume – so be prepared with that. Also, send a thank you note to each teacher who writes a letter for you.

**Complete applications in the fall.** Decide if you will do applications for each individual college, the Common Application or a combination of both. Be aware of all deadlines for submitting your applications.

**Complete all financial aid forms and scholarship applications.** The FAFSA, federal financial aid form, should be completed and submitted right after January 1st. Scholarship applications have varying due dates throughout the spring. Much of this information is available on line or in the guidance office. Scholarship lists will also be posted on the Guidance page of the school web site.

**Be ready to make your decision!** Once you have received your acceptance letters, you will generally have until May 1st to send a deposit to hold your place. If it is possible, try to visit schools again so you can be more secure in your choice.

# UNDERSTANDING THE COLLEGE PROCESS

In your initial investigation you will find that there are an incredible number of colleges and programs from which to choose. Keep in mind that while there is no single college or university that is absolutely perfect, there are probably many colleges that meet your academic and personal needs.

The college admissions process produces a great deal of anxiety on the part of both students and parents. What is the right college for you? Will you get into the college of your choice? Will you be able to afford it? The best way to ensure that you make the right choice is to be organized and begin your search as early as possible. Careful planning of your course selections beginning in ninth grade will be an important ingredient.

Your chance of being admitted into any particular college will depend, of course, on the selectivity of the college and your qualifications. The nation's most selective colleges are besieged by record numbers of applications. As a result, selective colleges are more difficult to get into today than they were a half dozen years ago.

Because the process of selecting a college is very personal, it must begin with self-reflection. You must consider many things about yourself: your goals, strengths, weaknesses and reasons for going to college. Then you should consider the criteria which you will use in making college choices.

- What type of college or school would you attend? Liberal Arts? Business? Engineering? Music Conservatory? Trade or Technical School?
- What is your tentative major? Do not worry if you are unsure about a major, but do give the matter some thought.
- What geographical area of the country do you want for your ideal college? Do you want a college in an urban area? Suburban? Small town? Country?
- Do you want to attend a small school, a large university or something in between?
- Do you want a one-year certificate program, a two-year program or a four year program?
- Do you want on campus housing?

- Will you need financial aid in order to meet the costs? How much money are you and your family able to afford for college?
- Are you interested in a public college or a private college?

It is important to keep in mind that college is, above all, an educational institution. You will need to find a college environment which will interest and challenge you, not bore or overwhelm you. You need to consider colleges which fit your academic needs.

When you are checking on the academic requirements, remember to focus on the range of class rank and test scores, not the mean, or average score. All four year colleges set their own criteria for acceptance, sometimes based on the median SAT/ACT scores of their entering freshmen. These medians, which can generally be found on college websites, are only general guidelines and not absolute cutoffs. As they are not the only criteria used in selecting freshmen, colleges do accept students below these scores. Many other factors are used in the admissions process.

Colleges vary in their admissions procedures so it is not possible to predict that any one student will be accepted. There are a number of factors which are taken into consideration when an applicant is being evaluated by the admissions committee.

- **STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE** – the quality of your program of study. Colleges are interested in seeing a challenging course of study – they do not value a bare minimum schedule.
- **GPA (Grade Point Average)** – the average grades from the first three years of high school. At Lourdes the GPA is weighted; grades from honors, AP and College level classes are given extra credit.
- **RANK** – the rank indicates where you stand in relation to all other students in your class and is based on the weighted average at the end of three years.
- **SAT/ACT scores** – colleges have their own general range for scores they accept. Some want high composite scores, derived from the highest individual section score on more than one test. Some colleges will accept lower scores. Some colleges do not require scores at all.
- **RECOMMENDATIONS** – from classroom teachers. Many colleges will require two teacher recommendations. The choice of a teacher is important because you will need to find a teacher who knows you well (a) as a student – your academic strengths and weaknesses, your intellectual ability in all its dimensions and (b) as a person – your

values, aptitudes, goals, character. It is a good idea to ask your teachers sooner rather than later when they might not have sufficient time.

- **ESSAYS** – well conceived and written reflections of you as a person. Many schools ask for a personal essay or brief statement to demonstrate writing skills and critical thinking. The essay also helps the admissions office to get to know the person behind the facts on the application. Many students find this part of the application process to be the most difficult. It's never easy to write about yourself, much less your goals, dreams and ambitions. This essay is the best way to let the real you shine through all those admissions statistics, so seize the opportunity to present yourself in the best way possible.
- **ACTIVITIES** – clubs, sports, volunteer opportunities, employment. These are often a deciding factor. Colleges look for commitment, passion and leadership in what you do.
- **INTERVIEWS** – not always required. Some colleges do not require an interview, while others do. When it is required, it is an important component of the admissions process. At times the interview can actually determine your admissions. If/When you go to an interview, be prepared. Know something about the school and what it has to offer. Also, in order to support your interest in a specific college, be able to ask questions about the programs offered by the school.

Colleges will generally use a combination of these factors in their acceptances. However, it is important to know that they have other criteria which may be considered – types of quotas and geographic mix, among other things. For this reason some excellent students are denied while students with lower scores may be admitted.

You choose a college – then a college chooses you! The match has to be a good one.

Remember, there is no one right school for everyone. You simply have to research as many college as possible that fit your criteria. There are over 3,600 colleges in this country from which you can choose!

# The Application Process

At this time, a majority of college applications are found on line. There are two options for this. First, you can go to an individual school website, select the admissions tab and follow directions to complete the application online. Another online option is to use the Common Application ([www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org)). Member colleges give this the same consideration that they give their own, individual applications. Some colleges might require an additional supplement to complete the application – this information will be given to you on the site. The benefit of the Common Application is that you will have to complete only one application which will then be sent to any number of member schools that you may choose.

When you are finished completing your application(s), you should make an appointment with your guidance counselor in order to be sure all of the necessary information and forms have been gathered. The teachers from whom you have requested letters have the option of submitting them on line – but we also request a hard copy be given to guidance to be put in your file.

At this time, transcripts must be ordered from the main office; they are \$5 each. You will need one for each school to which you apply.

Guidance will send all supporting material to the colleges in one envelope.

Many schools ask for mid-year grades to be sent in January. You should notify your guidance counselor which of your potential schools have requested these, and guidance will submit them.

Be aware of application deadlines – they can sneak up on you!! If you are planning to apply under Early Action (non-binding) or Early Decision (binding – you are obligated to attend if accepted), know that those deadlines are even earlier)

## **Types of Applications**

- Regular Admission – apply before/by deadline, receive decision by April
- Rolling Admission – apply before/by deadline, usually receive decision in 4 – 6 weeks
- Some schools offer a decision within two weeks of applying
- Early Decision (ED) and Early Action (EA)

### **ED applicants**

- Apply early (usually in November) to first-choice college.
- Receive an admission decision from the college well in advance of the usual notification date (usually by December).
- Agree to attend the college if accepted and offered a financial aid package that is considered adequate by the family.
- Apply to only one college early decision.
- Apply to other colleges under regular admission plans.
- Withdraw all other applications if accepted by ED.
- Send a nonrefundable deposit well in advance of May 1.

### **EA applicants**

- Apply early.
- Receive an admission decision early in the admission cycle (usually in January or February).
- Consider acceptance offer; do not have to commit upon receipt.
- Apply to other colleges under regular admission plans.
- Give the college a decision no later than the May 1 national response date.

## **WEBSITES**

Listed below are a number of websites to use in the college search and selection process. This list is by no means complete, however.

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/>

<http://www.collegeview.com/>

<http://www.collegenet.com/>

<http://www.collegexpress.com/>

<http://www.collegedata.com/>

# ATHLETES AND THE NCAA ELIGIBILITY CENTER

Before an athlete can play a sport or receive an athletic scholarship at a Division I or a Division II school, he/she must meet specific academic criteria as set forth by the NCAA.

The first step toward eligibility is to register with the NCAA Eligibility Center ([www.eligibilitycenter.org](http://www.eligibilitycenter.org)). Students considering playing on the Division III level are not required to register.

There are two important components for certification. The first component concerns **amateurism certification**. This is determined by an online questionnaire regarding athletic participation and any agreements made with agents and/or professional teams. The second is **academic certification** which is based on a review of the student's high school transcript and SAT and/or ACT scores. Division I requires 16 core courses and uses a sliding scale for test scores and GPA. This is available on the NCAA website. Division II requires 14 core courses and uses a minimum score requirement and core course GPA (820 SAT, 2.0 GPA).

Student-athletes who do not meet eligibility standards must either sit out freshman season or attend a junior college to enhance their profile, then transfer.

# FINANCIAL AID

Financial aid is money that is given and/or lent to help students pay for their college educations.

All Financial Aid begins with the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form. Senior parents are invited to a meeting in December or early January for an explanation of how to complete this form. Information is also given concerning what monies are available from the Federal Government and individual colleges, most of which comes in the form of grants which do not require repayment. The FAFSA will be available on line in late December or early January but it may not be submitted until January 1. Information from the FAFSA may be sent to any college you choose as a free service. Complete this as soon as possible after January 1 of the year you would need the funds.

Some colleges require that a CSS/PROFILE be filled out. DO not complete this form unless a college specifically requests it since it entails a fee. In addition, some colleges may have their own financial aid forms. If so, you will need to complete them in order to be considered for financial aid.

Applying for financial aid can be done directly by the students/parents. Outside agencies that offer help with this process, for a fee, generally cannot do more for you than you are able to do yourself.

There are many scholarship opportunities available for seniors. National and local scholarships offered to our students are posted on the guidance bulletin boards and on the guidance web page. In addition, some companies offer scholarships to the children of their employees. Individual colleges may also have scholarships available for incoming freshman.

There are four basic categories of aid offered:

- **Grants** – money that is given to students with no repayment obligation. These may come from federal sources or the college itself
- **Scholarships** – money that is awarded on the basis of academic achievement. Athletic achievement, an outstanding talent or skill, and/or financial need. There is no repayment obligation attached to scholarship aid.
- **College Work-Study** – money the student earns by working at an on-campus job, administered by the college financial aid office. Money is earned to offset expenses incurred by the student.

- **Loans** – money borrowed from a variety of sources. There is an obligation to repay loans.

## **WEBSITES**

Listed below are a number of websites to use in the search for college financial aid and scholarships. This list is by no means complete, however.

<https://fafsa.ed.gov/>

<https://studentaid.ed.gov/>

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college>

<http://www.fastweb.com/>

<http://www.gocollege.com/>

<http://www.studentscholarships.org/>

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

# Suppose I do not want to go to college?

Some students are not ready or do not want to go to college. There are legitimate reasons for this decision

- Do not want/cannot afford the expense of college
- Do not want more schooling
- Want to begin work immediately
- Want to take time off (a “gap year”) before beginning college
- Want to help support family
- Want to enter military service

Make sure your decision not to attend college is based on good reasons and you have analyzed your decision carefully. Should you change your mind later, college is still a possibility.