

# THE HIGH SCHOOL YEARS - High School Courses

For Students and Parents: You Can't Get There if You Don't Plan Here

*Now is the time to grow as much as possible. The goal early in the high school career should be to challenge the student in a broad range of subjects and watch the results carefully. This is the best way to keep all educational and career options open.*

## **Tips for High School Courses**

- English every year in high school is a must
- Math up to and including calculus is desirable
- Science courses should include biology and chemistry, at a minimum
  - Four years of a single Foreign Language is usually preferable to one or two years of several languages
  - Social Studies ranging from ancient history to the present day are desirable

The high school transcript is the single most important document for assessing a student's readiness for college-level work.

## **WHAT COURSES ARE BEST FOR ME?**

The earlier you are in high school the more general your courses should be; however, the best approach is to take courses that you, your teachers, counselors and parents believe are a reasonable challenge for you. There is no trick here— your options after graduation will be greatest if you concentrate your course work in five areas: English, Mathematics, Science, Foreign Language and History/Social Studies.

- Take courses in all five areas every year if you can.
- Take all courses at the most demanding level you can handle successfully.
- Performance counts: do as well as you can in each course every year.
- Balance your academic programs with other interests.

If your talents and interests lead in other directions, work with your guidance counselor to balance your academic work with courses that will give you the best options for post-secondary study and career choice.

## **WHAT ABOUT CAREER PLANS?**

Parents and students should not be overly concerned with career interests when the student begins high school. If a student expresses a particular interest, the guidance office can provide means for helping a student explore those interests. Rather than become too concerned with the future, focus on what the student can handle right now. The program of courses listed above will prepare you for just about any career.

## **WHAT ABOUT ACCEPTANCE TO COLLEGE?**

As the high school years progress, students will be building a performance history, which is recorded on their transcript. Generally speaking, admissions counselors want to see a challenging program with good grades. Good grades in courses that are too easy for the student do not help. The more demanding the course of study you have pursued and the better your grades, the more likely you are to be admitted, but more importantly, the more likely you are to succeed in college. If you follow the advice given here, admission to college will not be hard.

## TWO- AND FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

The fact is most colleges in the United States have more space available than qualified students. The key word here is “qualified.” At some institutions, admission will be simple and available to qualified students at any time of year. At others, acceptance is not automatic and there is an [Admissions Calendar](#). The courses recommended here should meet or exceed the requirements of such schools as far as content is concerned. Performance is another matter; that is up to you and it will have an effect upon the admission decision. At some colleges, however, there are more qualified students applying than space available. For these selective institutions, only the students who are best qualified are the ones who are accepted.

## MAINE COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Maine Community Colleges provide both one- and two-year programs that offer everything from transfer opportunities at four-year degree-granting institutions to two-year associate degrees, two-year technical degrees and one-year certificate programs. The cost is relatively low and community colleges typically have more flexible calendars allowing students to enter most programs at different times during the year. Agreements with the University of Maine System, and others, make it possible for students to move to other institutions, including four-year degree programs, without loss of time or credits (**Articulation Agreements**).

## THE MAINE APPRENTICESHIP AND PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Administered by the Maine Department of Labor, the Maine Apprenticeship Program operates through a network of 23 Maine Career Centers located in all 16 Maine counties. Apprenticeship is a nationally-recognized occupational skills training program. It consists of on-the-job training plus course work that leads to certification in the occupation chosen. The length of time and the number of required courses varies for each program depending upon the occupation. An apprentice must be at least 16 years old and have earned a high school diploma or GED and must be hired as a full-time employee by an employer sponsor. Instruction related courses are offered through the Maine Community College System, the University of Maine System, Secondary Vocational Centers and a number of other agencies. Apprenticeship offers a chance to earn while you are learning an occupational skill, become nationally certified, and keep your educational options open for credits toward an associate college degree with a combination of on-the-job training and course work. Financial assistance is available in the form of tuition reimbursement and other program grants and benefits. To learn more about the Maine Apprenticeship Program and Pre-Apprenticeship (available to high school juniors and seniors,) talk with your school counselor, go to [www.mainecareercenter.com](http://www.mainecareercenter.com) or call your local Maine Career Center.

### **Selective colleges are colleges where:**

- A course every year in each of the five academic areas is essential, including grade 12, even if you have already met the entrance requirements.
- Courses at a demanding level are favored over “softer” programs.
- The better your grades, especially during 11th and 12th grades, the better your chances of being accepted.
- You are not being measured only on your qualifications, but how well you compare with all the other qualified candidates.
- Good grades may not be enough. Some colleges want to see dedication beyond academic work. Get involved and become committed to those things that interest you. Sports, theater, band, student government and publications are obvious avenues, but work or social service outside school is just as important.
  - An active commitment is always more important than limited involvement in a larger number of activities.

### **Did you know?**

There are over 1,000 apprenticeship occupations

In 2006, the State of Maine revised the Maine Educational Assessment, by replacing the 11th grade assessment test with the SAT. As part of this program, all high school juniors are required to take the SAT test. The administration date for the 2007-2008 school year is Saturday, May 3, 2008. Students will receive standard SAT reports and official scores that they may use as they apply to college both in Maine and nationally. The state requires all 10th grade students to take the PSAT test (administrative date is October 17, 2007 for the 2007-2008 school year). In addition to paying for the PSAT (for 10th graders), the state also pays for all students enrolled in Maine public high schools (grades 9-12) to have 24-hour year round access to the official SAT online course from the College Board. The PrepMe online course is also available, free of charge to Maine public high school juniors who are scheduled to participate in the SAT. The program is available for approximately 10 weeks prior to the SAT administration date.

## RESOURCES

*College planning*  
[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

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<http://meoc.maine.edu>  
[www.mesfoundation.com](http://www.mesfoundation.com)  
[www.studentaid.ed.gov](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov)

*College testing programs*  
[www.act.org](http://www.act.org)  
[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)  
[www.educate.com](http://www.educate.com)

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*Independent counselors*  
[www.educationalconsulting.org](http://www.educationalconsulting.org)  
[www.nacac.com](http://www.nacac.com)

## MAKING GOOD USE OF YOUR SCHOOL COUNSELOR

When parents, students, teachers, school counselors and the colleges work together, everybody wins. A school guidance counselor works closely with students to help them make realistic career plans, plan a program of study in high school and assist with college admissions. Counselors welcome parent involvement. While parents can, and should, meet with the counselor, much information is distributed through hand outs, mailings, parent evenings and most recently, the high school web site.

## COLLEGE ENTRANCE TESTS

While opinions and arguments about college admissions testing vary, there are some common understandings around college admissions testing you should know:

- Most colleges require or accept tests from either the College Board (SAT I and SAT II) or the American Testing Services (ACT).
- The results of the test(s) are used to estimate the student's readiness for college and sometimes they are used for course placement.
- The influence that admission testing bears on admissions decisions varies from college to college. Remember that the high school transcript is by far the most important piece of information the college will use to grant acceptance. **By themselves, tests don't get you admitted to college, and they don't keep you out, either!**
- To learn about the tests, start with your school's guidance office. It has valuable material for students and parents.
- Testing programs can be adapted for special needs, but you must contact the testing company early in the process; your guidance counselor can help you.
- Preparation programs are available and may help raise test scores. There are many school-sponsored programs, as well as material from the testing companies themselves. Organizations such as Sylvan ([www.educate.com](http://www.educate.com) or **1-888-EDUCATE**) offer test preparation courses that may be useful. The State of Maine also provides for online courses from the College Board and PrepME.
- Tests such as the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) and the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMQST), which are given in grade 10 and early in grade 11, will help you with college tests and give both you and your guidance counselor an early indication of how test results may fit with your academic performance in school.
- You have two or three chances to take the SAT or ACT, and you will get better as time goes by.

# THE HIGH SCHOOL YEARS - Getting Admitted

For Students and Parents: Junior and Senior Years

Getting admitted to college should be exciting; it should not be frightening. Will I be accepted? Can I do the work? Where do I find the programs I want? How do I get through all these forms? It is important to keep the following thoughts in mind as you work your way through the application process:

- College admissions staff members want the admissions process to work for you. Not only are you a student, you are a customer.
- There are many resources to help you get the information you need to apply to the colleges that can help you achieve your educational goals.
- There is help available that can make college affordable. If you need financial aid you are likely to get it.

## FIND YOURSELF BEFORE FINDING A COLLEGE

Think about yourself first:

- Who are you? Take a careful look at yourself— your interests, abilities, attitudes, likes and dislikes.
- Examine your own:
  - Learning style** Discussion-oriented classes or more lecture style?
  - College program options** Liberal arts, sciences, engineering, or technical study, business or a professional program? What degree are you seeking: associate, bachelors, graduate, professional?
  - Extracurricular and social activities** Where do you want to live, work and play for the next two to four years? Academic and social balance?
  - Academic support needs** Libraries, computer/science labs, other assistance in your areas of interest?
  - Enthusiasm for knowledge** Level of academic challenge desired?
  - Independence** Comfort factors, college location and atmosphere—urban, rural, size, etc.?
  - Readiness for college** Individual preparedness.

## SHORTCUT

*The College Planning Calendar* (pgs. 32-33) and the *Personal College Planner* (pg. 34) can be used in combination to help you manage your trip.

Getting into college can be easy; getting into the college that is best for you may take some work.

### **Selecting the College That is Right for You**

*If you have developed a clear idea of what you want, the criteria for choosing and comparing colleges will present themselves naturally. Use the selection criteria here as a starting point, but be sure to add whatever else is important to you.*

- Program of study (major)
  - Location (climate, urban, rural, etc.)
  - Distance from home
- Size (small, medium, large)
- Class size and teaching style (lecture, conference seminar, etc.)
  - Female/male ratio
- Admission requirements—do you meet them?
  - Cost of attendance
- Financial aid—available? Available all four years?
- Housing arrangements—first year, upperclass years, special living options
  - Food
- Student clubs and activities
  - Sports programs (varsity, intramural, recreation leagues, facilities, etc.)
  - Campus health services
- Academic support services (study skills, tutoring career services, writing center, etc.)

A visit is important, at least for the one or two schools you are most serious about. If you wouldn't buy a car without a test drive, why would you choose a college without one?

## **THE COLLEGE SEARCH AND VISITING COLLEGES**

This process has to begin with you. It comes from the inside out, based upon the interests and requirements you have established. It can start early on, but you should be narrowing your choices during the 11th grade. The object is to get to a manageable number of applications by the start of the 12th grade.

- Make use of computer searches available through your guidance office and Internet resources such as the College Board's College Match Maker, [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com). Most colleges have a web site that you can access.
- Make good use of college fairs and school-sponsored trips.
- Request information provided by colleges using their postage-paid cards or directly through their web sites.
- Upward Bound, Talent Search and Maine Educational Opportunity Centers (MEOC) offer free ongoing services to eligible students.
- Research colleges that interest you before you visit. Request videos and other publications to help narrow the list of colleges you want to visit.
- Take a college tour when you visit. Contact the admissions office to find out about discounted motel rates and other cost-saving options, or spend a night on campus and eat in the dining halls.
- Check with the college to find out if an interview is required and schedule an interview when you visit, or request names of local alumni(ae) who can interview you in your area.
- Speak with students and professors in the major you are considering.
- Carpool with other students visiting the same colleges or combine college visits with a family vacation.

### **WHEN YOUR VISIT IS OVER**

Write down your thoughts of the college while they are still fresh in your mind. Students who have done this, particularly if they visit several months before making their final college decision, have found their notes valuable when it comes time to choose a college. Whatever you decide about a particular college, send the admissions officer a note of thanks for the time and interest in you. If you are particularly interested in the college, say so; colleges like to admit students who want to be there.

## TIPS FOR THE APPLICATION

- Apply only to schools that you would attend if accepted.
- Narrow your list of colleges. Make sure it includes colleges that are competitive, colleges that are moderately safe bets and those that are sure-things in terms of admission.
- The number of applications is up to you: one may be enough; two to five applications is sufficient for most; five to ten applications may be needed if you are seeking admission to selective colleges, or if financial aid is a significant concern. Anything more than ten is probably a sign of paranoia, bad planning or both. Go back to the beginning of this section on page 13 and start over.
- Consider using electronic applications or The Common Application, which is available in guidance offices and on the web at [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org).
- Several hundred colleges now use The Common Application and many of them do not have an application of their own.
- If you are using The Common Application, tailor your comments, essays, etc. to each particular college (that's the beauty of computers). Colleges may also expect you to complete their own supplement to The Common Application.
- Individual applications should present the same "picture" of you. Don't include anything you cannot back up.
- Make sure your essay truly reflects who you are, not who you think the college wants. Write it yourself; **do not** let someone else (including your parents) write it for you!
- If important information is not requested, or you run out of space, include additional pages (mark them clearly with your name and SSN or birthdate.)
- Show interest and enthusiasm on all applications.
- Read the application before filling it out and follow directions carefully.
- Your application should be neat and readable. Many schools allow you to do it online, but if not, typing is preferred. If you write, write legibly.
- Develop a rough draft before you complete sections.
- Check grammar, spelling and punctuation! (Yes, this really counts.)
- Re-read your application and have a second person proof-read it before submission. Remember, your application is your way of marketing yourself to the college.
- Coordinate your application with the guidance office so they can send all the required forms, recommendations and information together.
- **Keep copies of everything!**

### 2007-2008

#### Common Application Essay Topics

- Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
- Discuss some issue 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, an 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 interests, 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.

Work hard on any required essay. College admissions officers actually read them and draw conclusions about you and your language abilities.

### Common Interview Questions

- *Why are you interested in this college?*
- *Tell me about yourself.*
- *What are your strengths and weaknesses as a student?*
- *Tell me about a time you were faced with a difficult challenge and overcame it.*
- *If you could fight for one cause, or make a difference in the world somehow, what would you choose to do?*
- *Why are you interested in this particular major?*

Most admissions officers consider the interview an exchange of information. It rarely has any kind of make-or-break impact upon the admission decision.

### TIPS FOR THE INTERVIEW

- Many colleges do not require, recommend or even offer interviews. You should still visit the campus, take a tour and/or attend an information session.
- Some selective colleges strongly recommend interviews – others do not. Check with the college to find out about their interview policy. The interview may take place on campus or locally with an alumnus(a).
- Schedule an interview well in advance of your visit (3-4 weeks.) They usually last 30-40 minutes.
- Show enthusiasm! Be able to explain your interest in a particular college and why you are a good match.
- Dress appropriately – avoid hats, t-shirts, jeans or shorts and no gum!
- Be knowledgeable. Review the college's web site or other publications before you get to campus so you know what the college offers and what it views as its strengths.
- Ask questions and talk. The best interviews are conversations. Ask about things that interest you; majors, campus life, etc.
- If you are unsure of your major and/or career path, don't worry; you are just like most other students.
- Be prepared to discuss your interests, academics, extracurricular activities, etc. Consider your strengths, weaknesses, skills, accomplishments, etc. before the interview and be ready to talk about them. It is often handy to bring an unofficial transcript to the interview.
- At the end of the interview, if you have not touched upon a subject that you want to talk about, bring it up. This is your time to tell who you are and portray yourself in the best possible light.
- Relax. While you want to make a good impression on them, they are also concerned about making a good impression on you.
- Arrive on campus early enough to find parking and the admissions office without having to rush.
- Send the interviewer a thank you note after the interview.

### WHAT SELECTIVE COLLEGES LOOK FOR IN THE FOLLOWING:

- **Transcript** Challenging courses taken plus performance to match (first year students typically have taken 4 years each of English, Math, Social Studies, Foreign Language and 3-4 years of Lab Sciences.)
- **School profile** Grading system, courses offered (# of APs, honors), average or range of test scores of seniors; helps colleges understand how an applicant has performed in relation to others in the class.
- **Rank** Students who submitted ranks were mostly in the top 25% of their high school class.
- **Essay** Content and form; there is a lot of writing at most selective colleges, so the schools need to see strength in that area. They really do read your essay(s)!
- **Teacher Recommendations** Choose teachers carefully. Colleges are looking for a sense that the teacher has a strong awareness of you as a learner. It is less helpful when teachers just list your activities; this information can be obtained from your application.

- **Optional Arts & Athletic Supplements** You may submit tapes, videos and/or a portfolio for faculty and coaches to review. If you have press coverage of your activities, you may want to include some of your press clippings with your application. If you have written an essay that brought praise, consider submitting it along with the required essay. Keep items limited and include just enough for the admissions committee to understand what you are bringing to their campus.
- **Interview** Recommended, may not be required. Alumni(ae) interviewers usually carry equal weight with the admissions staff, so take these contacts seriously.

### PAYING FOR HELP WITH ADMISSIONS AND AID APPLICATIONS

Many parents see the workload of school counselors and they fear the guidance staff will not have time to help their child. **Parents should meet with their son's or daughter's counselor before spending any money on outside help.**

While many paid services are helpful, parents may be paying for what is already covered by their local guidance office. The National Association of College Admissions Counselors (NACAC) suggests that you look to see (1) if the school counselors have enough time to work with college-bound students, (2) if they have attended workshops on admission and financial aid, such as those offered by the College Board, and (3) if they provide access to the resources you need? If yes, you may want to save your money. If not, then an independent counselor may be appropriate. Services are available in most areas of Maine and over the Internet. Counselors have worked with college-bound students over the telephone, the Internet and in person. **Check references and fees carefully!**

### LEARNING DISABILITIES AND THE COLLEGE-BOUND STUDENT

During the college selection process, all families need to consider financial ability, the student's academic ability and the college's admission criteria. A student with a learning disability may also want to consider whether or not a college offers appropriate support services. All colleges are required to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), but the degree of compliance can vary from college to college. Some colleges are focused on special programs for their students, some are not. Some colleges offer individual diagnosis, assessment and testing. Colleges may also have a learning center with a learning disabilities specialist present. Consider visiting the college's learning center to see for yourself what is available.

Parents sometimes wonder if they should discuss their child's learning disability with the college: will it hurt my child's chances of being admitted? In most cases, students should indicate the nature of the learning disability services they have received in high school and the nature of the accommodations that will be necessary in college, if any. If you attend that college it will come up anyway, so it is best for all concerned, **especially the student**, if the family and the college are both up front on this issue. If the college has a special learning support program, the student may want to contact the director of that program during the admissions process. Colleges that have a program for learning disabled

### Admissions at Selective Colleges

If you are interested in applying to a selective college, keep the following in mind:

- Selective colleges receive many more qualified applicants than they have spaces for.
- Many use The Common Application plus a supplemental essay on a specified topic.
- Early Decision deadlines are in November. You should usually hear from the college in mid-December. Some offer another deadline in January. At some institutions, approximately 35% of the entering class will be accepted during this time.
- Early Decision and Early Notification are different. You request Early Decision and must commit to the college if accepted; under Early Notification (or Early Action), the college admits you, but leaves you free to explore other options until some later date, usually the Candidates Reply Date of May 1.

**CAUTION**

*Beware of fee-based consultants who promise admission and financial aid!*

**Basic services that should be available for those with learning disabilities:**

- Study skills training
  - Tutoring services
    - Provisions for alternate testing
    - Availability of taped textbooks
- Course load modifications
  - Taping of lectures
- Specialized study aids

students may require professional assessments that document and identify the specific learning disability of the student who is applying. **Federal Law prohibits discrimination against learning disabled students in recruitment, testing, admissions and treatment after admissions.**

For more information check out these resources:

*Lovejoy's Guide for the Learning Disabled*

*Learning Disabilities Association of Maine: (207)582-2866/www.ldame.org*

## TRANSFERRING FROM ONE COLLEGE TO ANOTHER

If you are moving from a two-year to a four-year program under an Articulation Agreement (see page 11), transfer is simple; most of the work has already been done for you. Talk with the appropriate counselor at your present college. If you want to transfer because your college choice has not worked out, it gets more complicated. Filing a transfer application is much like filing any other college admissions application – it starts with you. Review **Find Yourself Before Finding a College** on page 13. In addition:

- Review transfer options with advisors at your present college. Be prepared to submit a financial aid transcript as well (detailing whether or not you have previously applied for and/or received any financial aid.)
- Check with the college(s) you are considering as soon as possible. Space available, admissions timetable, entrance requirements, transfer of credit, residency requirements, financial aid options and other things may be different and more restrictive from those that apply to first year applicants.
- Transfer at the beginning of the academic year is usually preferable to entrance at mid-year.
- You will probably have to file a transfer application that will require a history of your performance at all colleges attended, and it may require similar information from your secondary school.
- Have an official copy of your academic transcript(s) sent to your new college.
- Meet with the transfer counselor at your new college, if possible.
- Make sure that you clarify whether credits will be accepted and how they will count in your new program of study before making an enrollment decision. Ask about other credits for work experience, AP and other courses, etc.
- Transfer conditions and calendars vary widely from college to college. You may have to make your decision very quickly.
- If financial aid is important, talk with those in the Financial Aid office. The amount of aid and when you will hear may depend upon what resources the college has already committed to enrolled students and first year applicants.

## RESOURCES

### *College searches*

[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)  
[www.mesfoundation.com](http://www.mesfoundation.com)  
[www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)  
[www.princetonreview.com](http://www.princetonreview.com)  
<http://meoc.maine.edu>

### *Getting admitted*

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

### *Learning disabilities*

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