



# Fueling Your Future

## College Process Handbook Student Edition

Rutgers Preparatory School  
Class of 2018



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**For Your Notes**



# Fueling Your Future

The college process is an exciting opportunity to have a significant impact on your immediate future. It is also a long-term process which might be the biggest project you've ever tackled. You'll need to take ownership of the process... it is, after all, YOUR future we're talking about! But you'll also need to be able to assess for the times when you'll need help... because there will be those times. During the process you will likely experience a wide range of emotions: success and disappointment are the predictable; others might be excitement and probably some fear, which is expected and a completely natural part of the process. We are here to support you, and hope you are ready and willing to undertake the challenges that lie ahead of us.

We are very aware that every student may be in a different place at the start of this process. Some of you have ideas of where you want to apply while others have not even started to think about college. Unofficially, the college process has been going on since you entered ninth grade. The courses you have completed, the activities you have been involved in, and your summer experiences will all have an influence on this process. It is time to get started and GET ORGANIZED!

## Step 1: The Questions

Begin by making intelligent and rational decisions about why you wish to go to college. Honestly assess your intellectual abilities, motivations, and interests. Ask yourself, "What have I done in high school with the opportunities which have been available to me?" "What will I bring to a college or university campus?" "How do I learn best, and what kind of college environment best suits my learning style?" After you have answered these questions, ask yourself more specific questions in terms of your academic pursuits, personal needs, career interests, creative interests, and extracurricular interests.

## Step 2: The Search

Now, you are in a better state of mind to begin the search. Do NOT look for "the perfect college," because IT DOES NOT EXIST. Instead look for a number of schools that offer what you are looking for. You must be realistic, focused, and organized. You must take a critical approach, familiarizing yourself with many colleges, and weighing the strengths and weaknesses of each. You must then evaluate the schools against your own strengths, weaknesses, interests, goals, and needs. So, instead of looking for one perfect college, *look for a number of schools which BEST meet your needs.*

**TIP #1: BE OPEN MINDED.** Keep as many options open as possible. Your goals and needs as a learner should always take priority over the selectivity or perceived prestige of a college. Be aware of the potential dangers: apathy, indecision, fear, procrastination, or letting others make the decisions for you.

**TIP #2: COMMUNICATE.** Throughout the process, keep open the lines of communication with the adults who will be partnering with you. Remember that the people who care about you want what is best for you. Make every effort to speak honestly with your parent(s) about your college plans, but do not let them take over the process, as you are the one who will have to live out your college career according to the choices made this year. The final responsibility for this process rests in your hands!

**TIP #3: ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY.** The first few steps of the process are as important as submitting the actual applications. Students who commit to stepping up and assuming this responsibility from the beginning are the most successful, least frustrated, and ultimately end up with the best options. Those who sit and let things happen will see quite opposite results.

Rutgers Prep has made the commitment to do everything possible to help you achieve success through the college process. The College Counseling team in the Upper School is looking forward to working with you, to helping you find a list of schools with varying degrees of selectivity that will each fit with your academic, social, and extracurricular needs. We hope that your goals and dreams for your future will be your inspiration and fuel for moving forward in this process.

JUNIOR YEAR*In general*

- Speak with current seniors about their plans.
- Think about who you are and why you want to go to college.

October

- Take the PSAT.

December

- Receive results of the PSAT shortly before winter break.

January-March

(Includes College Kickoff  
in early February!)

- If planning to take the ACT on Feb. 11, register by Jan. 13.  
If planning to take the SAT on March 11, register by Feb. 10.  
If planning to take the ACT on April 8, register by March 3.
- Explore summer opportunities. See Dr. Cooper and/or the RPS college counseling website for materials and suggestions.

Spring:

- After completing student and parent questionnaires, meet with your college counselor to discuss goals and to establish draft list of colleges to investigate.
- Discuss senior schedule with your advisor and/or a member of the college counseling staff.
- If at all possible, visit some colleges during Spring Break. Keep a journal of your impressions, ask questions, and take pictures.
- Students, meet your college counselor for a mock interview; this gives you practice, and offers your college counselor an opportunity to gather information for your recommendation letter.
- Attend Junior Seminar. Keep up with homework and ask good questions.
- SAT is on March 11; ACT is on February 11 and April 8.

April

- If planning to take the SAT or SAT Subject Tests on May 6, register by April 7th.
- Attend regional College Fairs

May

- If planning to take the SAT or SAT Subject Tests on June 3, register by May 9. If planning to take ACT on June 10, register by May 5.
- SAT/SAT Subject test date is May 6.
- Advanced Placement Exams are in the first half of May.
- Develop a list of colleges to visit during summer. Sign up online to request information. Set up visits and schedule interviews.
- Ask two teachers to sign the form which commits them to supporting your college applications by writing letters of recommendations.



June

- SAT/SAT Subject test date is June 3; ACT is June 10.

July/ August

- **VISIT COLLEGES!!** Update journal, compare colleges, discuss your reactions and opinions with family and trusted friends.
- Narrow list to about 10 colleges. Be sure to include a range of selectivity.
- Plan to draft application essays; the Common App goes "live" over the summer; create an account and begin working on your first applications.
- Plan fall visits (campus interviews, events, tours) & your testing schedule, e.g. register by July 28 if planning to take August 26 SAT.
- Sign up for email lists & campus visits if you have not already done so.
- End-of-summer SAT is on August 26th..

## SENIOR YEAR

Fall

- Watch for announcements re: summer essay workshops.
- Attend the Senior Retreat and Senior Seminar.

September

- Meet with college representatives who visit RPS. (A full list of scheduled visits will be accessible via the Family Connection site.)
- Meet with your college counselor to finalize your college list.
- Begin writing application essays if you haven't already done so.
- No Sept. SAT; ACT exam is Sept. 9. Register by Sept. 8 for Oct. 7 SAT.
- Review transcript for accuracy; see "Mrs. I" to approve information or request additions or corrections.
- Confirm with the teachers you spoke with in May that they will write your recommendations; provide them with your first application deadline.

October

- If planning to take SAT's on November 4, register by Oct 6. (Nov. is typically the last acceptable test date for ED/EA applications.)
- Begin to activate applications to colleges with rolling admissions.
- All applications with a college deadline of Oct 15 must be activated with a member of the college counseling staff no later than October 2nd.
- The fall SAT test date is October 7; ACT is offered Sept. 9 and Oct. 28.
- All applications with a college deadline of November 1 must be activated with a member of the college counseling staff no later than October 16.
- If planning to take an SAT on Nov. 4 or Dec. 2, register in October.

- All applications with a college deadline of November 15 must be activated with a member of the college counseling staff no later than November 1.
  - Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and CSS Profile (if required) if planning to apply for financial aid. International students should check their colleges' websites for Certification of Finances forms applicable to them.
- November
- Review final list of colleges with your college counselor.
  - The November SAT I/SAT Subject Test date is November 4.
  - Applications with a deadline of December 1 must be submitted to a member of the college counseling staff no later than November 15.
- December
- Applications with a deadline of December 15 must be activated in the Upper School Office no later than December 1.
  - Applications with a deadline *anytime in January* must be activated in the Upper School Office no later than December 1.
  - The SAT I/SAT Subject Test date is Dec. 2; the ACT test date is Dec. 9.
  - **We strongly encourage students to complete all applications before the winter break in order to avoid a conflict with exams in January.**
- January
- Applications with a deadline of February 1 must be activated with a member of the college counseling staff by Friday, January 12. All remaining applications must also be activated at this time.
  - There will be no SAT I/SAT II offered in January of 2018.
  - **REMINDER: Seniors' mid-year grades are sent by the College Counseling Office to all colleges to which each student has applied.**
- February
- Colleges will notify students of their decisions.
- April
- Students may want to visit schools where they've been accepted.
  - Make your final college choice. Inform only one college that you plan to attend. Send your regrets to the rest. In general, you should plan to notify colleges of your decision no later than May 1.
- May
- Advanced Placement Exams take place in early May.



# Myths and Realities:

## *The College Admissions Process*

Because so much of the process happens behind closed doors, and because the stakes are perceived to be high, there are rumors running rampant about the college admission process. We get ideas in our heads because we've heard them from some horribly (and we do mean "horribly") reliable source (like the check-out lady in the supermarket). Or, in some cases, the ideas stem from some long-buried kernel of truth (many times, there is some truth in them somewhere). But, as the process has certainly changed since your parents went through it twenty or so years ago, and even in the last few years, let's take a look at some of the myths and realities related to the admissions process.

### The Myth

### The Reality

1

There's only one school for me.

Commonly translated as, "If I don't get in to my dream school, I'm just going to die!" This simply isn't true. While we won't try to convince you that you can be happy at each and every one of the 3000 four-year colleges in the country, there is more than one school with the qualities you seek -- in fact, there are probably *many*! You need to research the schools you are considering and make sure they have the things that are important to you, like location, campus atmosphere, study abroad, or varsity water polo. And remember, wherever you go, you bring with you your talents and interests... in some way, you will enliven that campus.

2

The only schools worth considering are those which everyone has heard of.

Just because you haven't heard of a college, does not mean that it isn't good or that it should be crossed off your list. There may be college admission officers who have not yet heard of Rutgers Preparatory School, but they wouldn't automatically deny you. Don't be an educational snob. Think about what you want in a school. Figure out what is important to *you*, and then look for schools that meet *your* needs! Don't just consider the school to which your friends are applying. Use the feedback and information they give you, but don't close your mind to finding things out for yourself. You need to find and follow your own path!

3

The more recommendations I send, the better.

Choose your recommendations carefully. You don't want to look desperate or appear to be using the "shotgun method." Ask people who can actually say something substantial about you -- who can illuminate who and what you are. Recommendations for the sake of recommendations only serve to thicken the file. Recommendations from famous people aren't necessarily going to do anything for you. Likewise, a recommendation from an alum who is your father's business associate but who has never met you means little. On the other hand, carefully chosen, "meaty" recommendations can really help the admissions person who will be advocating in committee on your behalf.

## The Myth

## The Reality

### 4

My SAT's are all that count.

Frankly, at some schools, particularly large state schools, this may be the unfortunate truth. But most admissions officers are well aware that a one-day, three-hour "bubble" exam is not an absolute indicator of college success. Your transcript and the work you've done over the course of four years in high school is much more important. Admissions officers will look at the courses you've taken, the challenges you have mastered, and of course, how well you've done. Some colleges have even decided to join a growing list of "testing-optional" schools (see page 13).

### 5

These myths are all related:

If I have a connection, I'll get in.

If my parents (or any relatives)  
went there, I'll get in.

If I play a varsity sport and the coach is  
recruiting me, I'll get in.

If I'm a minority student, I'll get in.

While each of these factors can, in some cases, affect your chances of admission, they are never a guarantee. Connections can help, but be careful. Your mother's uncle's mailman's nephew -- whom you've never met but who is on the Board of Trustees -- may be able to write you a letter of recommendation, but it isn't going to do you a whole lot of good. Admission officers are very conscious of people using loose connections. Likewise, if twenty-eight of your closest relatives went to X University and you can't spell your own name, it probably will not help. And, if the coach tells you that you're her "number one recruit," that's terrific, but in the end, coaches are not the ones making admissions decisions! Take what a coach says with a pound of salt, but continue to show your sincere interest in the school. As for your race and ethnic background, while most schools would like to increase the diversity on their campuses, you still have to meet their academic standards. We do not mean to suggest that you should ignore the edge that each of these qualities can give you. Everything that is going to give your application a boost is a plus. But no one factor is a guarantee. You still have to put effort into your application, time into your essays and energy in your presentation.

### 6

Ratios of applications received to the size  
of the freshman class indicates the quality  
of the institution.

College admission people love to say they receive ten applications for each space in their school's freshman class. What they don't tell you is they may have offered admission to eight of those applicants. Further, in the last few years a number of selective schools have enjoyed a 30-35% increase in applications in a single year. The schools are not 30-35% better than they were a few years ago. But a combination of demographics and individual circumstances -- e.g. a suddenly successful football team -- can change the equation dramatically.

## The Myth

## The Reality

7

Schools that are less selective will not offer programs of a quality equal to that of more selective schools.

Such an assumption is, in many instances, incorrect. The selectivity of any institution is dependent on the size of its applicant pool, which in turn may be affected as much by geographic location, popularity, and reputation as by actual academic quality. More importantly, the quality of specific programs may vary greatly at a given college or university. A less selective school may have an outstanding program in one area and vice versa.

8

If you want to go to a good college or university, you must look in the Northeast.

There are many good schools throughout the country and you should investigate options outside the Northeast. Adopting a geographically restricted approach can in some instances limit your ability to be accepted to the quality of school you desire. You may, for a variety of reasons, be considered a more unique and attractive candidate by a highly selective school outside the Northeast than by a school equal in quality nearby.

9

State universities are easy to get into, especially if you are a resident of the state.

This is no longer the case -- if in fact it ever was. Many state universities have become more competitive for both in-state and out-of-state students. Major state universities often have quotas which govern the in-state/out-of-state split, thereby creating keener competition for the already limited number of spaces. The New Brunswick campus of Rutgers has become more competitive in recent years. And The College of New Jersey has been included in Barron's "Most Competitive" category, making it only the second school in NJ (after Princeton!) to be so rated.

## The Point

- Think about who you are and what you want.
- Ask questions throughout the process.
- Visit lots of schools. There is no substitute for personal experience.
- Do your research early; don't wait until next fall.
- Don't leave the process to chance, your parents, or your best friend.
- Don't apply to a school unless you can **genuinely** envision yourself attending there.

Because this process is inherently about imagining yourself into an unknown future, it can seem overwhelming at times. But as with everything else in life, the more time and energy you invest in this process, the happier you'll be with the result. And, most importantly, use the College Counseling Office every step of the way!

## VISITING COLLEGES

Visiting colleges is an important part of the college search process. Try to visit a few during the spring of your junior year to help sort out basic questions of what feels right - large vs. small, urban vs. suburban vs. rural, etc. Once you have the start of a list, try to visit as many of those colleges as possible. Some you may visit to have an interview, but that is by no means the only purpose of the visit. Here are some useful tips about visiting:

- Visit before you apply. The visit should help you decide if the college will stay on your list.
- Plan your visit 2-3 weeks in advance. Check to see if online registration is available through the admissions page of the school's website. Phone ahead to find out if interviews are available and to set one up if they are (at highly selective schools, you may need to do this 2-3 months in advance).
- If possible, visit when school is in session. If you're planning a trip during a spring or fall break, try to lean towards visiting colleges whose breaks don't overlap with ours. Remember that some colleges start back up in the fall before RPS, so late August or early September may also be good possibilities.
- If possible, visit on a weekday, when it is possible to sit in on classes and to speak with faculty.
- Visit the college's website before you go. Go beyond the Admissions page and really explore what the school offers as well as what seems to make it distinctive.
- Including your parents can be helpful, in order to compare notes and share impressions while they're still fresh in your mind. But, be sure to schedule in some time alone as well so that you can form your own impressions; we recommend keeping a journal so that you can refer back to your own notes.
- The summer may be the only convenient time to visit. It's much better to go when it is convenient than not at all. But, if admitted, be sure to go back while classes are in session if at all possible.

### Things To Do While You Are There

- Take a tour - but remember that while some tour guides are dynamic and well-informed, others are not. This is not a reliable indicator of the college as a whole.
- Sit in on an admissions information session, if offered. It will round out your knowledge of the distinguishing features of the school, and may offer helpful admissions hints.
- Eat a meal. The food might be less than memorable, but the company and the sense of ambiance are important (and you'll want to know if the food is inedible or surprisingly tasty).
- Meet with faculty and coaches, if appropriate. Set these visits up ahead of time or you may be disappointed - even if they're there, they might not be able to squeeze you in.
- Stay overnight in a dormitory. (We recommend this for a follow-up visit, not your first.) This will give you more opportunity to meet students and faculty first hand and get a broader view of the place that you might call home for the next four years. Many colleges have hosts available, so you don't have to have a friend there.
- Visit with students in an academic setting (such as within the department where you might end up) and a nonacademic setting (an extracurricular activity). This is especially important if you are not being hosted overnight.
- Have an interview (if offered). Be sure to write a "thank-you" note to the person who interviewed you.
- Find a college newspaper. Read it, with an eye for more controversial events and topics which could be valuable to discuss further with students.
- Gather as many different opinions as possible. The first student with whom you talk may be disappointed with the school, while the next six may love it.

## COLLEGES VISITING PREP

In a typical year, well over 100 colleges, representing a wide range of academic styles and selectivities, send representatives to Rutgers Prep to meet with both students and members of the college counseling team. Most of the colleges represented are in the Northeast and mid-Atlantic states, although there are some notable exceptions. During the fall seniors are urged to take advantage of the opportunity to connect with visiting representatives; a comprehensive and up-to-date list of which representatives will be visiting and when will be available via your Family Connection account, which is in turn activated once you've had your family meeting. Here are a few pointers about the visits themselves:

- Check with your teachers about missing class at least two days in advance. If approved, sign up in the Upper School Office, and make a note of the appointment so you don't forget! In those instances in which a student is NOT able to participate in a visit, it is a good idea for the student to let his/her "point person" know about it, so that he/she can put in a good word on the student's behalf.
- Unless a test or other class requirement makes it very inconvenient, it is a good idea for seniors to attend the session of any college you are seriously considering. This enables you to demonstrate your interest, gives you a chance to find out more, and may provide you with helpful tips about how that particular school evaluates applications. There's a very good chance the representative who visits Rutgers Prep will be the same person who will review your application later - a great opportunity to make a good impression!
- Be respectful and attentive. Be an active, curious audience, not just sitting back and absorbing; ask questions but don't go overboard to the point where it may appear you're trying to "brown-nose" the admissions officer. Be yourself and aim to have a representative leave feeling good about you and about RPS.
- Do at least basic homework prior to a session, so you can have more specific questions and can concentrate on understanding the nuances which separate this school from others.
- It is fine to ask for a profile of a typical student or specific questions about a college's application process and admission priorities. However, do not expect admissions representatives to be able to give you odds on your own admission.
- Thank them for coming! (Admissions representatives sometimes visit 4 or 5 schools in one day, but in a populous state full of well-educated people like New Jersey, they can't visit every school they'd like to. Your response to their visit helps them know that they made the right choice when deciding whether to visit Rutgers Prep.)

## COLLEGE ADMISSIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

As with the rest of our lives, technology is having an increasing impact on the way students apply to colleges. In earlier generations, applications were printed on paper, and painstakingly completed with a typewriter. Today students draft essays on their tablets, laptops, and even cellphones, take virtual tours of campuses via the colleges' websites, and file virtually all of their applications electronically. Technology has changed as the college process completely. Below are some of the ways students can expect to use technology throughout the process.

### Developing and Narrowing Your List

There are a number of resources that you can use to help you create a preliminary list of colleges. Start by going to the College Counseling Home Page via either the Student or Parent section of the Rutgers Prep homepage (<http://www.rutgersprep.org>), where you will find links to a number of sites which will help you as you conduct a search. You may also ask us about whether your questions might be addressed by a page on the College Lists wiki (<http://www.collegelistswiki.com>), which includes information on a range of college search related topics.

When beginning to create your list, try to remain as open-minded as possible... initially, you actually WANT your list to be too long. You also want it to reflect the things that you think might be important to you in a college. Academic reputation, availability of your intended program of study, campus environment, distance from home, size of student body, and social and extracurricular options are likely to all play a role in your decision-making. Don't know what you want in a school? Go visit a bunch! Your list won't be "carved in stone" until October of your senior year... and maybe not even then. Your list will change and evolve as your knowledge of both your needs and what schools have to offer deepens. During this part of the process, YOU are in the driver's seat, and you determine whether a school stays or goes. And although each student's search is by definition an individual one, you will not be alone! Rutgers Prep's College Counseling staff is here to help you.

Once you have a list, you can often use the web to 'visit' by doing a virtual tour on the college's web site. The "Additional Links" page of the College Counseling Home Page is another great place to start. Through it, you can access websites which both the counselors and other RPS students have found helpful. Whether you're looking for information about a particular college, concerned about financial aid, or wondering about your prospects as a possible college athlete, the internet has increasingly become a resource tool of choice.

### "Family Connection"

In addition to the public resources gathered and made available via the website, we are also encouraging students and families to take advantage of an internet-based resource which is specific to Rutgers Prep. This resource is "Family Connection," a one-stop database of colleges which each Rutgers Prep student can access and use as a resource when building his/her college list. This database can be accessed at <http://connection.naviance.com/rutgers> and will be available to all RPS students once they've completed their student questionnaires and scheduled their initial family meeting with their assigned college counselor. Once given their unique access code to this password-protected site, students and their parent(s)/guardian(s)



will be able to see their current list of prospective colleges, and can link directly to those schools' websites. Additionally, the site offers information about colleges' deadlines, and can serve as a very helpful "one stop shop" for tracking a student's college application process. Detailed information about how best to make use of your "Family Connection" account will be mailed home after your family meeting, and this will be covered during the course of Junior and Senior seminar as well.

## Contact With Colleges

A phone call is still sometimes the most efficient way to receive an answer to a specific question, but the internet has become the preferred method of communication for many. Once you have visited the website for a particular college, you can usually e-mail the admissions office to get on their mailing list. (You may want to create a special email address specifically for this process.) If you have a question that does not require an immediate response, e-mail may be the best and most cost-effective way to communicate with an admissions office, especially if the answer is likely to require research on the part of an admissions representative. In most cases, if you're trying to contact a specific admissions representative in order to ask questions and network, email can be very effective. Whenever possible, please have the student be the person reaching out; colleges are more interested in the applicants than they are in their parents! Many colleges also send representatives to Rutgers Prep, and you want to take advantage of those opportunities to connect, as well. Don't let your application be the first time that a school has ever heard of you... colleges sometimes refer to those applicants as "ghosts," and you want to avoid being a "ghost applicant" whenever possible.

## Applying to Colleges

Almost all colleges now have an online application process, either through their own website or through membership in the Common Application. The Common Application (a single form designed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and shared by over 600 colleges) is available on their web site at <http://www.commonapp.org>, and can be a HUGE time-saver. One of the additional benefits of the current system is that it makes it easier for students to retain reference copies of all their work.

As hard as it may be for you to believe while you're in midst of it, the process of applying to college has become a lot easier over the last 20 years. Use technology to facilitate your search and ease the process. The bottom line is that it does not matter whether you use the Common Application, the Coalition App, or use the college's web site and apply "on line." What matters is that your applications are an authentic expression of who you are. Applications also need to be thoughtful, timely, accurate, complete and organized: they will be standing in for you when the admissions committee makes its decisions.

## THE SELECTION PROCESS

Before spending time traveling to visit campuses and/or writing lengthy application essays, consider the needs of each college and how your academic and non-academic criteria may match up with theirs. Many colleges now use an enrollment management model, which can place additional constraints on which students a college will accept. Ask about differences between majors, whether demonstrated interest is a factor, and whether or not additional talents (e.g. music, art, athletics, leadership) could play a role in your application.

### The High School Record

Every college admission officer will agree that the applicant's academic record is the most important piece in making decisions. This record consists of two main aspects: the nature of the curriculum (within the context of what is offered) and the grades earned. In general, highly selective colleges and universities want to see that students have challenged themselves academically and have risen to that challenge.

Your grades and curriculum, especially in 10th, 11th, and the first half of 12th grade, are given close scrutiny by the admission committee. They will compare your curriculum against RPS's offerings, as highlighted in the "School Profile." The School Profile is sent along with every application. The profile is designed to give the admissions counselors a better idea of how rigorous the courses are; they will also look at the nature of the school and the proportion of students who go to four-year colleges. Since we do not rank students, the counselors will most likely use the junior grade distribution information on the Profile in order to determine where you stand in the class. This way they can tell, for instance, that RPS tends to have a rigorous grading scale.

Colleges will also look for consistency or trends in your grades and curriculum. Have you been improving? Have you been challenging yourself with appropriately rigorous courses? Have you dropped in performance, stopped taking honors level courses, or dropped, for instance, your language or science course the moment you could? In general, colleges see high school as a time to gain a solid, broad educational foundation, not a time to specialize.

### Standardized Test Scores

Standardized test scores provide colleges with a national common denominator. Different high schools may present very different curricula, grading standards, student backgrounds, etc., and it can be very hard to compare these candidates. Scores help most when an applicant is from a school the admission officer does not know well - that little rural high school in central Kansas, or the inner-city Chicago public school which almost never has an applicant for his or her college. Private, selective colleges will primarily fold the scores into the whole picture - do they confirm what is already there; do they imply an "over-achiever" (high grades, low scores) or an "under-achiever" (low grades, high scores)? Most colleges require some scores; most require the SAT or the ACT. About 40 selective schools require the SAT Subject Tests as well - usually two, sometimes three - very often the Math I or II and another of a student's choosing. The ACT is a standardized test that has become a more popular option amongst RPS students in recent years. You can learn more about the SAT or ACT by going to their web sites at [sat.collegeboard.org](http://sat.collegeboard.org) and [www.act.org](http://www.act.org).

How should you view your scores when looking at college profiles? Colleges generally report the middle 50% of admitted or enrolled students. This range represents those students for whom scores won't generally either help or hurt their case. Scores above or below that range may help distinguish you (positively or negatively) from the rest of the applicant pool.

## Testing Optional / Test Flexible Colleges

As you are probably aware, standardized testing has come under increased scrutiny and criticism in recent years. The list of schools that have moved to de-emphasize the role of standardized testing in their admissions process gets longer every year, and at the time of this printing, includes the following institutions:

American University	Ithaca College	Sacred Heart Univ.
Assumption College	Hamilton College	Sarah Lawrence College
Bard College	Hampshire College	St. Lawrence University
Bates College	Hartwick College	Smith College
Beloit College	Hobart & William Smith	Stonehill College
Bennington College	Hofstra University	Susquehanna Univ.
Bowdoin College	Johnson & Wales	Temple University
Brandeis University	Lawrence University	Union College
College of the Holy Cross	Marist College	Univ. of Arizona
Connecticut College	Loyola University Maryland	Univ. of Scranton
University of Delaware	McDaniel College	Ursinus College
Denison University	Merrimack College	Wake Forest Univ.
Dickinson College	Messiah College	Washington & Jefferson Coll.
Drew University	Middlebury College	Wesleyan University
Drexel University	Mount Holyoke College	Wheaton College
Fairfield University	Muhlenberg College	Worcester Polytechnic Inst.
Franklin & Marshall	New York University	Washington College
Gettysburg College	Pitzer College	
George Mason University	Providence College	
George Washington Univ.	Univ. of Rochester	
Goucher College	Rowan University	

(For the most up-to-date list,  
see [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org).)

The vast majority of colleges still consider standardized test scores to be an important part of their process, and any college which requires scores will use them in its review of applications. In general, the larger the school, the more objective the admission criteria. At many large state universities, for example, a formula, based on scores and grade point average, will determine your decision (although cases on the edge may receive more personal attention). Large schools sometimes are not even able to consider essays and/or recommendations as a part of their review. At smaller, private schools, there may be a much greater sense of building a community, where personal qualities are very important. At these schools, recommendations and essays may be key factors *when making decisions among otherwise equally qualified applicants*. At very selective schools, virtually every applicant is likely to have impressively grades and strong test results. Not having strong scores may place you at a disadvantage, but having them only places you in a position to have the remainder of your application closely scrutinized.

As the admissions process continues to become more and more competitive, the standardized testing range is only a part of the story. Just because your scores fall in the middle 50% range of accepted students from the previous year, does not mean you will be accepted. Your entire file will be considered.

## The Application

The role of the actual application will also vary from college to college. At some larger colleges, the application is purely factual - biographical information, a transcript, and test scores. On the other hand, some of the most selective colleges may require three long essays, several short answer responses, and/or an extensive activity form. At any school, an application will be most positively viewed if it is neatly, carefully, and thoughtfully completed.

A school with personalized admissions wants to get clear a sense of YOU. They want to know about your intellectual qualities - beyond statistics - such as your initiative, curiosity, originality, participation in class and willingness to take risks as a learner. They want to sense if you're going to college to get an education or to get a degree. Will you be fun for the faculty to teach? Will you stretch yourself or just do the minimum to get by? They also want to know what kind of a community member you are. Do you get involved? Are you a leader? Do you commit to an activity and stick with it? Are you open to new ideas? Do you genuinely care about others? The same terms are important here, too - initiative, curiosity, originality, participation, questioning. How does a school find out about you? Part of this is your job - how carefully and fully you represent yourself on your application. It is important to include all major activities and explain any roles the college may not understand. It is also important to capture your individuality in your essays. You are the only person who knows all your strengths. This is not a time to brag, but it is also not a time to hide your accomplishments under a barrel. You need to find a way to let your "voice" be heard through the application process. The College Counseling Office will work with you as you prepare your applications to help you present your unique qualities and your strengths in the best possible manner.

## The School Recommendation

Representing your personal qualities is also the school's job. In the school recommendation, we try to highlight the distinctive qualities and special strengths in each student. Your college counselor drafts a recommendation which generally runs one to two single spaced pages. We will have compiled the necessary information from several different sources: quarterly teacher comments; grades and curriculum; forms you and your parents have filled out; interview notes; notes from meetings with you and/or your parents; and longer teacher comments submitted at the end of the year by each junior teacher. The final version of this detailed school recommendation is sent to each college to which you apply whether the school requires it or not. If your record or activities change significantly after the letter is drafted, it will be adjusted as needed. Teacher quotes are included in nearly all letters. Our goal is to create a letter which honestly and positively represents you, your performance, and your growth - personally and academically - while at RPS and, at the same time, anecdotally captures your individuality in a way that helps the admissions committee understand the special addition you would make to their campus community.

## Teacher Recommendations

Teachers see you in the classroom throughout the school year. This puts them in the best position to communicate to colleges your attitudes about learning, your intellectual growth, and your ability. Very selective schools will use teacher recommendation letters a great deal in distinguishing amongst many qualified applicants with excellent academic records. Teacher recommendation letters will also help college admissions officers understand you as a student and a person. Have you shown an interest in the subject, not just the grade? Do you take criticism well, and work hard to confront your weaknesses? Do you choose to do optional work? Do you risk trying approaches new to you? Are you an active force in class discussion? These types of questions will help the admissions committee determine whether you represent the kind of student they are looking for.

## Building A Class

Selective schools generally don't just admit a class - they build a class. This section, adapted from the handbook for John Burroughs School in St. Louis, helps to explain the concept.

The following are several excerpts from Scaling the Ivy Walls. In it, Greene and Minton capture the idea of the "Balanced Class."

"The objective of the admissions staff is to create a 'class'. This is a very subtle concept. If the objective were, as it is in France, let us say, to enroll only the top high school seniors according to academic brilliance, then all the selective admissions staffs would be doing is admitting the 750-800 SAT I types and competing with one another for potential Phi Beta Kappas.

But a class consists of just so many extraordinary brains, just so many of the very bright, many of the bright, and a few who have yet to shine at all, and into this academic mixture must fall a certain number of athletes, alumni children, minorities, writers, singers, orators, photographers, and so on.

There is no placement agency which can tell a candidate: 'This year Stanford is looking for an experienced coxswain. Dartmouth wants some female tennis players. Smith needs activities leaders.' So what happens is that candidates apply to several places and take their chances. They will never know necessarily just why they were accepted at one place and rejected at another.

An Ivy League college took a boy recently who was only on the waiting list of a much less selective college. The reason? He was a rower and the Ivy college needed oarsmen while the other had no crew at all.

What do admissions committees debate in their long sessions? Mostly about which of a middle group to admit when so many look about the same on paper: A boy who was number one in his class in prep school, middle 600 SAT I's, but not outstanding in an extra-curricular way; a hockey goalie with SAT I's in the low 600's; a potential concert violinist with SAT I's in the mid 500's.

Here is where balancing the class may determine many decisions. A check with the hockey coach determines that he already has more goalies than he needs. The concert violinist is definitely wanted by the music department even though no credit can be given for any instruction in playing the violin, since this is not a college of practical training. The #1 prep school boy may not be as impressive as the #10 boy in a large, urban high school with the same test scores who is a good singer and will be an addition to the glee club.

The real art of admissions comes in balancing the class."

## Helping Yourself

The above examples are clearly taken from a book discussing admission to the most selective schools. Your scores or grades may not be at this level, but the idea of balancing a class by choosing among qualified applicants to find those who bring qualities or skills needed by the school is true at nearly any smaller, private school as well. The challenge is that you won't be in the room, and so won't know what kind of balance your schools are trying to accomplish.

Because you will be competing against a group of other applicants over whom you will have no control, and within contexts that you may not ever understand, the best thing you can do for yourself in this process is to focus on those parts of the process that you DO have control over.

Can you keep an open mind? At the beginning of your search, especially, it is critical that you not limit your search to schools that you're already familiar with. There are over 3,000 four-year institutions of higher learning in this country, and you owe it to yourself to give schools a chance to win you over.

Can you dedicate significant time to your college search? The more campuses you visit and questions you ask, the better prepared you will be both to "make your case" and to finalize your decision. The more revisions your essays undergo, the stronger they'll be.

Can you be honest with yourself and your family about your hopes and desires as you head into the college process? If there are restrictions on your search, whether academic or geographic, it's best if everyone involved is aware of them from the start.

Can you overcome your resistance to "blowing your own horn?" Despite living in a culture that teaches us that it is often inappropriate to tout our own strengths, the college application process requires you to be able to articulate your strengths to an interested audience.

Can you commit to meeting the deadlines established by both the RPS College Counseling office and the colleges and universities to which you're applying?

Finally, can you vow to yourself that the work you do on your applications will be of the highest caliber? Even in those instances in which you are not accepted, you want to be able to look back with pride on your efforts and say, "I gave it my best shot; I did everything I could!"

**Your goal, at the end of the day, is to have**

**NO REGRETS**

**about the pieces of the process that you had control over!**

## FINANCIAL AID

Financial aid programs at colleges and universities across the country are constantly evolving. In some cases, the changes are so swift that students, parents, counselors, and even financial aid experts are unable to keep up. However, there is money available for those who qualify. The difficulty lies in finding the proper source offering the most appealing package. Families who cannot make a final decision without a complete financial picture must file the forms as early as possible. We suggest that students plan on filing their FAFSA (and PROFILE, when appropriate) as soon as possible; the FAFSA now goes "live" in October.

Most colleges are "need-blind" in their admissions process. They prefer to make admissions decisions independently of any financial aid considerations. If a school's financial situation prevents them from being "need-blind" in their assessments of candidates, they are typically up front about that. You are not likely to know which a college does. If finances are likely to be a critical component of your final decision, we encourage you to apply for aid. Some schools will not consider students for assistance in subsequent years if they do not apply for it as incoming freshmen (even if they do not actually qualify for aid as freshmen).

Many colleges do offer aid based solely on academic excellence, but most aid is granted on a need basis. Merit scholarships vary from college to college. Also, some colleges are becoming inventive with privately funded loan programs for parents. The main rule of thumb in financial aid is to investigate each college thoroughly.

### Forms

1. Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): Completion of this form is required for federal and state assistance. The new FAFSA goes "live" in October of each year, and should be completed online at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>
2. PROFILE: Also sometimes called the "CSS Profile," this form is also available at <http://student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile> and will be required by many colleges, particularly private ones.
3. IRS 1040: Many colleges will ask that you submit information from your parent or guardian's most recent 1040 tax return and perhaps the previous year's as well.
4. Institutional Form: Many colleges have their own supplementary form which they use in conjunction with one or more of the above.
5. Certification of Finances: Students who are not citizens of the United States should expect to also fill out a Certification of Finances form which will help assure that colleges are aware of the resources they intend to draw on in order to support their college education in the US.

### Types of aid

1. Grants & Scholarships: These monies are an outright gift based on financial need and/or a talent.
2. Loans: Federal Programs include the Perkins Loan, Stafford Loan, PLUS, and SLS. Some of these are need based and some are not. Perkins is distributed by an individual college and the others are usually applied for through a local bank. However, the Government is beginning to distribute the Stafford through colleges, so check. New Jersey also offers an excellent loan program for resident students.
3. Work-Study: Work-study is a part-time on-campus job during the school year. How much you earn depends on how much you work.

### Other Sources

Besides the well-publicized state and federal programs, many local and private organizations offer assistance. These are not always easy to find, but a little research can pay off. Also, the College Counseling Office has a number of resources for your use to research opportunities.

## Standardized Testing

### THE SIX MAJOR TYPES OF TESTS

- PSAT/NMSQT - Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (College Board)

Given in October at RPS to all sophomores and juniors. Similar to SAT I. Useful as an indicator of SAT I scores and /or test practice. The junior year test is the basis for some merit scholarships. Source of some college mailings.

- SAT (College Board)

A three-hour test, plus the essay (which we recommend students go ahead and complete). The SAT has only one reading section and one writing section—the math section is divided into a calculator portion and a no-calculator portions. The sections will always be in the same order. The test will be 3 hours, plus the optional essay. The exact breakdown, in order, looks like this:

Reading: 52 questions, 65 minutes

Writing and Language: 44 questions, 35 minutes

Math: no calculator—20 questions, 25 min; with calculator—38 questions, 55 min

Optional essay: 1 prompt, 50 min

Colleges and universities use the SAT as only one of many factors in making admission decisions. The most important factor is high school grades earned in a challenging roster of courses. The best preparation for the SAT—and for college—is for students to take challenging academic courses and to read widely and write often. The SAT I may be taken with extended time by students with documented and identified learning disabilities. See your point person if you have any questions about this.

- SAT Subject Tests (College Board)

One-hour tests measuring knowledge or skills in a particular subject and ability to apply that knowledge. Up to three tests may be taken on one test date. A few selective colleges require up to three tests, and some will require specific tests for everyone, such as Math IC or IIC, or specific ones for students applying for certain majors. Students may not take SAT Subject Tests on the same day they take an SAT Reasoning Test.

- Practice ACT - A practice test made up of retired exams. This is offered in school to all Rutgers Prep students, and will include English, Reading, Math, and Science sections.

- ACT - American College Testing Assessment (ACT)

Includes tests in four areas: English: 75 questions, 45 min

Math: 60 questions, 60 min

Reading: 40 questions, 35 min

Science: 40 questions, 35 min

Optional writing: 1 prompt, 40 min

Four subscores plus a composite average score are reported. Some students may find that they see better results on the ACT than on the SAT (and vice versa), so students are encouraged to be strategic in their test selection. As with the SAT, the ACT may be taken with extended time by students with documented learning disabilities.

- AP - Advanced Placement Tests (College Board)

Typically APs are three-hour examinations based on full-year college level course in high school. They are given once a year in May and used both for college credit and for placement. A few colleges accept a "3"; many others require a "4" or "5", and most vary by department. The College Board maintains a list of AP credit policies, which you can access via the "Additional Links" section of the RPS College Counseling webpages.



## FINISHING THE PROCESS

If students have followed the process in the preceding pages closely and have properly selected colleges, they will receive some offers of admission. The last step is to formally decide which institution to attend. Although it is helpful to inform the College Counseling Office of your first choice as early as possible, final decisions do not need to be made until late April (unless you applied and were offered admission through a school's early decision plan). However, all the thinking needed to make the decision of where to spend the next four years cannot be done in one week. Spend time over the course of many months having discussions with your parent(s), college counselor, faculty, and friends.

On or before May 1st

Write each of the colleges to which you have been accepted stating your intentions for the coming year. You should tell one and only one you will attend.

Second Semester

The College Counseling Office will forward a mid-year transcript to every college to which you have applied in early February and a final transcript, in June, to the one college you are planning to attend. If you are placed on a waiting list or are a marginal candidate, decisions may be delayed until after additional grades are available. In all cases, colleges will expect stable or improved academic performance from accepted students during their final semester of high school.

## ROADBLOCKS: How to avoid them in your College Process

Being aware of self-inflicted roadblocks in the process can help you fully utilize opportunities and resources. Below are some examples of ways we have seen students create roadblocks in the past that may have stunted their ability to move forward in the process. It may be conscious or unconscious, but being aware of your actions and choices and how those are impacting the process can be helpful. Are your thoughts and words matching what you expect of yourself in the process? How committed are you to putting the time and energy into a process that will have a significant impact on your happiness for the next four years and on your long-term future?

**“This process is so stressful. I am paralyzed and can’t move forward.”**

Solution: Ask yourself, “Is this how I would treat a course or an activity?” How can you break down the work so that it is more manageable? Who can help you with that? Do you think you will experience this level of stress at another time in your life and how can you learn from this?

**“I already know where I want to go and found a school I love, so why bother with the rest of my list?”**

Solution: Ask yourself, “Why am I fixating on one school when there are 3,000 in the country that I could be exploring?” Are you really doing your best search by NOT exploring other schools?

**“What’s the big deal if I apply the day before the deadline?”**

Answer --Two words: Hurricane. Sandy.

**“What if I am not accepted to any schools?”**

Solution: Remind yourself that College Counseling works to help you build a list, and prepare applications so that this will not happen.

**“I am uninterested in the ‘likely’ schools my point-person has suggested.”**

Solution: Make an appointment to have an open discussion about why these schools don’t fit your criteria. You may be pleasantly surprised by some new ideas and suggestions.

**“My friend didn’t like that school, so I am not interested in researching it.”**

Solution: Ask yourself: “Do I like everything my friend(s) like? Exactly the same clothes? Music? Books? Activities? Is it possible we could have a difference of opinion on this?”

## 12 Questions for LGBTIAQ\* Students (and their allies) to consider during a college search process

1. Of the many factors you will take into account as you research colleges (e.g. academic reputation, social climate, career resources, geography, size, selectivity, financial aid), how important are sexual identity issues?
2. To what extent do you expect to be dependent upon your school's resources?
3. What resources exist in the communities surrounding the school you are considering?
4. Does the school's non-discrimination clause include the LGBTIA population?
5. Does the school extend equal benefits (e.g. health care coverage) to its LGBTIA employees? (This matters not only because it is a measure of the school's commitment to equity, but also because it will affect the makeup of the staff and faculty of the institution.)
6. Does the school have active on-campus LGBTIA groups and activities?
7. Does the school include LGBTIA groups and perspectives in its literature?
8. Does the school have any financial aid that is specifically targeted at LGBTIA students?
9. Does the school support a paid staff person who is a resource person for the LGBTIA community?
10. Does the school's curriculum include courses that address the LGBTI experience?
11. Can you get in touch with openly LGBTI staff or students at the school(s) you're considering?
12. Does the school you're considering have an active LGBTI alumni / ae group?

**FINAL NOTE:**  
**ASK QUESTIONS, BE STRONG, DON'T SETTLE!**  
**MAKE SURE YOU'LL HAVE A GREAT COLLEGE EXPERIENCE!**

\* lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, and questioning

## Class of 2018

### College Application Activation\* Deadlines

If the college's application deadline is Oct. 15 it must be activated by **Oct. 2**

If the college's application deadline is Nov. 1 it must be activated by **Oct. 16**

If the college's application deadline is Nov. 15 it must be activated by **Nov. 1**

If the college's application deadline is Dec. 1 it must be activated by **Nov. 15**

If the college's application deadline is Dec. 15 it must be activated by **Dec. 1**

If the deadline is any day in January it must be activated by **Dec. 1**

\*ACTIVATION is the term we use at RPS for the process by which students formally inform the College Counseling Team that you have **completed** and **submitted** your part of an application (or applications), so that we can start working on sending the transcript, teacher recommendations, and school letter of support. **Your part comes first**, and should be reviewed by your point person in College Counseling before you hit "submit"!

EARLIER IS BETTER. If you can complete and activate an application before the required deadline, do so! Submitting your materials early gives your teachers more time to polish their recommendations, and also gives the counseling staff more time to review your work for errors and finish their letter of recommendation. Submitting materials early also helps give college admissions officers with the impression that you are focused and "on the ball."

TESTING IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY. RPS does NOT report standardized test scores to colleges/ universities. Colleges will only accept scores that come directly from the testing agencies, so please make sure to send your scores via the College Board and/or ACT.

ALSO, PLEASE NOTE: We strongly recommend that EVERY student apply to at least one school that offers an "early action" admissions option or releases its application decisions on a "rolling" basis. There are many schools that will fulfill this requirement... students, please see your counselor if you need some help brainstorming!

ALL OTHER APPLICATIONS are due  
into the Upper School Office by 1-12-2018.  
(January 12, 2018 is the last day  
the Upper School Office will accept  
application activations, regardless of college deadlines.)