

Coral Reef Senior High School – Home of the Barracudas



COLLEGE HANDBOOK

How to Learn About, Get In, Pay For and
Start on Your Post-Secondary Adventure!

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INTRODUCTION

It is never too early to start thinking about the future. The more one does during their early years to hone academic skills, discover passions, and gain knowledge about colleges and their admission criteria, the better prepared that student will be when the time comes to decide which path to take to secure a bright and promising future.

There is no real mystery to what colleges and universities look for in a student's college application. First and foremost, colleges want to know how well a student has prepared him/herself for the rigors of college work which can be learned through a student's high school transcript. Every course taken in high school tells the story of the student's preparation and journey toward college. The ease or difficulty of the course work, the types of electives, and the types of co-curricular or academic elective credits a student's transcript contains, such as journalism, creative writing or psychology - help to tell the story of how well prepared a student will be for the major of study or type of college or university one is applying to for admissions. Depending on the type of college or university, particular courses will also better prepare students for certain majors or special programs of study such as engineering, music, architecture, etc.

WHAT ARE THEY LOOKING AT?

The first component in the college admissions review process is the difficulty, or rigor, of the student's choices of course work. After reviewing the level of rigor in the student's course program, the admissions staff will consider the grade received in each course. The grade should be an indicator of how well a student understood the material and if s/he fulfilled all the course requirements including completion of all assignments.

Another criterion used for admission at most colleges and universities is how well students perform on standardized tests. Admission officers try to determine a student's readiness for college through the SAT Test (aptitude test) which currently has 2 components: Critical Reading and Mathematics, and an optional Essay Test or the ACT (achievement test) which has 5 components: English, Mathematics, Critical Reading, an Essay Test, and Science. Please note that the ACT measures what a student has learned in school, it is more of a curriculum or content driven exam. The new SAT while still more of an aptitude test that evaluates reasoning and verbal abilities, has expanded to now measure what they call "real world" math and knowledge. Art schools, music schools, and music conservatories usually rely on portfolios and auditions to determine the same thing; readiness, preparation, and potential.

Once an admissions office has gained a fairly good understanding of the student applicant through the transcript and standardized test scores, portfolio, or audition, its readers will turn to the student's extracurricular accomplishments. When reviewing this section of the application, they look for patterns that reveal the student's passions, commitment, and growing leadership and/or leadership potential. Over the years, consistency of choice and follow-through help others understand where one's true abilities and commitments lie. Consistency with extracurricular activities also helps one build self-esteem and gain leadership and maturity through one's growing skills, knowledge, and continued efforts over time. These are all attributes colleges seek in their applicants - students who can bring special talents, leadership, and interests to their

communities. Therefore, it is important to choose one's extracurricular activities wisely and to weed out activities that one isn't that committed to or interested in continuing in college and beyond. Each choice, whether it is in sports, music, drama, clubs, volunteerism and service, or just the type of summer activities and hobbies to which one devotes ample time, tells more about who one is, what motivates that person, and what might be a good path of future study.

Coral Reef Senior High School (CRSHS) puts a great deal of energy toward preparing graduates to apply to a four-year college or university. As most 4-year college admissions decisions are based on similar criteria, CRSH aims to help its graduates build strong academic profiles and resumes.

General admissions criteria include:

- Grade point average (GPA),
- Strength of course selection and curricula...the more rigorous & challenging the courses on your transcript, the better for admissions
- Standardized test scores such as SAT, ACT, AP/IB, SAT Subject tests
- Class rank or percentile,
- Extracurricular activities (sports, clubs, community service, etc.),
- Special talents and awards,
- Personal qualities, demographics, special circumstances,
- Teacher and counselor recommendations,
- Personal statement/essays, and if required,
- Interview, portfolios, and/or auditions.

In order to create an optimal high school transcript, to prepare for standardized tests, and present an appropriately positive extracurricular resume, CRSHS gives students tools that will allow them to open as many doors of opportunity as possible after graduation. In addition, CRSHS's CAP Advisor, Ms. Gilman, is available to all students and parents to discuss 2-year & 4-year college planning, career exploration, financial aid, scholarships and the college admissions process. She also offers College Info Nights, CRSHS's College Fair in the fall, individual appointments, email blasts & updates and more. Ms. Gilman is available to meet as many times as needed with students and parents, individually or together, and encourages them to come by her office (open at lunch with no appt necessary) and/or make a scheduled appointment via email.. CRSHS offers this College Handbook as a guide with the hope that our Barracuda families will find the information and resources useful during the journey toward college.

STANDARDIZED TESTING

The **PSAT** is given to sophomores and juniors in October during the school day at CRSHS. This year's PSAT administration will take place on Wednesday, October 11th. The ninth and tenth grade administrations are used ***exclusively for practice***. The eleventh grade results serve as the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMQST), which is owned and operated by the National Merit Foundation and co-owned by The College Board. **Only the junior year score is used for National Merit consideration.** Scores range from 20 – 80 in each of three sections. National Merit Semi Finalists' total scores range from about 219 – 240 each year. Juniors must sign up to take this exam with our testing coordinator, beginning about mid-September. There are a limited number of fee waivers available for juniors on free or reduced lunch.

SAT Exam - This 3 hour exam, without the essay & 3 hours & 50 minutes with the essay one of the biggest goals in changing the SAT was to make sure it's highly relevant to students' future success. The new test is more focused on the skills and knowledge at the heart of education. It measures:

- What you learn in high school
- What you need to succeed in college

The same habits and choices that lead to success in school will help you get ready for the SAT. The best way to prepare for the test is to:

- Take challenging courses.
- Do your homework.
- Prepare for tests and quizzes.
- Ask and answer lots of questions.

It is still recommended that students take the SAT exam for the first time in the spring of the junior year and again in October or November of the senior year, depending on their chosen schools' admissions deadlines. Ideally, for most college admissions, all testing should be finalized by the end of December in a student's senior year. Scores range from 200 – 800 in each of three sections. Not all colleges use the writing section score.

SAT Subject Tests - There are nearly 20 tests offered in major academic disciplines. In addition to the SAT Reasoning, many competitive colleges (about 50 in number) require two or sometimes three SAT Subject tests, which are an hour in length. Students may take up to three on any designated date. Please note that all tests are not administered on all dates. Subject exams should be taken as soon as possible after AP courses. Math 2 should be taken after Pre-Calculus. If you are considering highly selective colleges, it is recommended that you take two or three Subject exams by June of the junior year. They may be taken again in November or December of the senior year. Teachers are in the best position to advise students on which tests they are best prepared to take. All Subject Area testing should be finalized by the end of December in the senior year.

ACT (American College Testing Program) - The ACT is another standardized college entrance test given several times a year. The test consists of four sections (ranging from 35 to 50 minutes) and measures achievement in four areas: English usage, mathematics usage, reading comprehension, and science reasoning, and is curriculum based. There is also a 30-minute writing assessment. CRSHS advises students to sit for this optional section and to check the requirements of the colleges/universities they are considering before registering. All colleges accept the ACT. Highest possible score is 36 per section.

AP - Advanced Placement - These approximate three-hour examinations are based on a full-year college-level course in high school. Scores range from 1-5. These AP exams are administered at absolutely no cost to our CRSHS students enrolled in the AP level course of that given subject.

The PERT – This is the Post-Secondary Educational Readiness Test, administered for placement purposes at many 2-year state or junior colleges if an applicant does not have SAT/ACT scores or if their SAT/ACT scores do not meet the requirement for college readiness. This is a computer based test students can take and receive results from immediately. Please visit www.mdc.edu/testing_information/testprepCPT.asp for more information.

THE COLLEGE SEARCH

“Fit” is a very important consideration in a student’s college search – finding colleges that are a good match for you based on your interests, abilities, values, aspirations, and preferences both social and academic. Therefore, the first step in developing a good college list is an honest self-assessment.

Here are some questions and other points you might ask yourself to help determine your priorities and selection criteria.

- What are your academic interests, as well as your strengths and weaknesses?
- How do you learn best in large or small classes?
- Do you like to contribute to discussion or listen anonymously to lectures?
- What activities out of class matter most to you?
- Are you political, religious, artsy, preppy, or _____ kind of person?
- How important is the name and prestige of an institution?
- What type of social and cultural environment best suits you?
- Do you want diversity in your college or a more homogeneous campus?
- Where do you want to live for the next 4 or more years? (city, country, East Coast, Midwest, etc...)

The Student’s College Search Criteria

• **Size:** Do I want the anonymity of a large school versus the personal attention from professors at a smaller school? Think about the learning environment in a lecture hall of 400, where you might be able to go through four years without being called on more than a few times; as opposed to the smaller **class size**, even seminar classes at small schools, where your participation is expected. It is much easier to have a big impact on life – and be involved - at a smaller school, since you will be better able to know the administration and many of the other campus leaders personally. At large schools, meetings will be announced, but unless you seek them out, clubs and organizations won’t come to find you.

• **Weather:** Can I live through wind, snow, rain, and sleet – in a word: weather?

We don’t really have that in South Florida, so this is an important question if you are considering leaving the area or the state.

• **Location:** Have I visited a school in a suburban or rural area, so that I know what it means to distinguish between urban, suburban, or rural campuses?

• **Programs:** Am I looking for a specialized school? (Engineering, music, fashion design)

• **Co-Curricular Activities:** Do I want to attend a school with a strong sense of campus community? Big-time sports can make you feel like you belong the minute football season begins. Do you like the tradition that goes along with big-time sports programs? Or are you trying to find

a school with an orchestra, an award-winning student newspaper, political demonstrations, or important guest speakers?

- **Academic Atmosphere:** What environment suits me? Tense or relaxed, competitive or geared to individual progress, high or low academic expectations, opportunities for recreational and cultural activities to supplement academics, honor systems and academic discipline codes.

- **Graduation in 4 years:** Is it important to you to graduate in four years? You may not know that the norm for colleges to quote graduation statistics is now *six years*, as in “We graduate 65% of our students in 6 years.” It is possible to graduate in four years. Be sure to find out how many students do that at the school you are considering.

- **Social Structure and Campus Lifestyle:** Is a residential campus important?

This is an especially important question for students planning to attend out-of state colleges. Weekend social life, on and off campus, types of entertainment favored by the students, fraternities and sororities, and system of student rules are all important factors in the daily life of a student.

- **Position in the incoming class:** Do you want to be one of the better students at the school, or do you want the challenge of working extra hard to keep up with the top 25%? Would you consider entering an Honors program at a somewhat less competitive school in order to get the best education possible at a large school in a smaller group experience?

- **Calendar:** Is the school’s calendar important to you – semesters or quarters?

- **Your Own Priorities:** Think about the dozens of other things that you might consider: athletics, performing arts, distance from home or relatives, cost, public/private, religious affiliation, specific programs, and interdisciplinary majors. Size, location, and curriculum are all readily observable and easily described and compared. Far more difficult to assess and compare are the many factors that contribute to the feel of a campus, both academically and socially. Therefore, if at all possible, a visit is recommended at some point before committing to attend a college.

Once you have determined your priorities and search criteria there are many resources to help you find colleges and learn more about them. Students may take the many surveys available in *College Match – A Blueprint for Choosing the Best School for You* by Steven Antonoff and then consult his *College Finder. The Fiske Guide, Ruggs, 40 Colleges That Change Lives*, and other college guidebooks are also good choices. You can check them out from the Miami Dade County’s Public Library System or purchase them at area bookstores or online at www.amazon.com. Or go online and use one of the many college search engines available. One of the most useful places to find good matches, based on your personal profile and criteria, is on the College Board website, using their Big Future tool.

TYPES OF ADMISSION

Early Decision (E.D.): Early Decision means you must submit an application in November and the college will give you a decision by mid-December. As stated in the contract you will have signed, if admitted as an EARLY DECISION applicant, you *must attend that college, and you must withdraw all other applications*. There is a Financial Aid exception that will allow you to withdraw, however with the earlier release of the FAFSA this year, this may not prove necessary. There is

no room for doubt – EARLY DECISION is a binding contract which may only be made with one college.

Early Action (E.A.) refers to a *non-binding* early admission program. Students admitted under this program are not committed in any way, and may, if they wish, file admissions applications to other colleges. Colleges that have “**Single Choice Early Action**” (**S.C.E.A.**) programs do not allow candidates to apply to other schools during the early action period only. However, once they receive EA (Early Action) decisions (mid-December), then applicants are free to apply elsewhere, if they so choose.

You should be aware that if you file an application as an Early Decision or Early Action applicant to some schools and are denied admission, you may not apply again to the same school for the same admissions year as a regular admissions applicant. *IT IS VITAL TO READ EVERYTHING CAREFULLY!*

Rolling Admissions: With rolling admissions, the admission application is reviewed as soon as the file is *complete*. The college notifies the student of its decision within a short time, usually four to six weeks. Due to the increasing competitiveness of college admissions, it is a good idea to ***apply early*** to these colleges.

Open Admissions: Some colleges do not practice selective admissions and offer admission to all students who apply. Generally, there are no admission deadlines for colleges that follow this policy. The community/state colleges are an example of this type of admission.

THE COLLEGE ESSAY AND PERSONAL STATEMENT

Many selective colleges put a great deal of emphasis on the college essay or personal statement since so many of their classes requires a significant amount of writing. A well written essay can tip the admission decision in the applicant’s favor; a poorly executed essay can do the reverse. For most seniors, the essay is truly the only part of the *application process* where they still can affect the admission outcome.

Basic Tips for the Essay Portion

- Answer the whole question.
- Speak directly to the topic.
- Be sure to follow directions as to length and format.

Admissions officers want to find out

- What makes the writer tick?
- What kind of person s/he is
- How much intellectual promise one has
- How well s/he thinks and writes
- What excites or motivates the applicant

Show Don’t Tell...Let Them HEAR Your Voice

- Instead of describing what you are like, let it come across in the essay. The essay should reveal who you are.
- Rather than listing the accomplishments that appear elsewhere in the application, let your character and personality shine through.

- Tell a story that only you (the writer) can tell. (If you come from a troubled background that has shaped you or have done something truly distinctive, write about it.)
- Readers look for persuasive essays. An offbeat or unique point of view about the question posed will make for an interesting essay.
- They want to know that you light up a classroom and make significant contributions to your classes and to scholarship.
- Diligence alone is not enough...

Slice-of-Life Essays

- Help the admissions officers understand your character better and shed light on factors in your background that have influenced what kind of person you are.
- Concentrate on one incident that sheds light on your personality.
- Take a small, seemingly insignificant incident and elaborate upon it
- Make it come alive.
- Use language with which you are comfortable. The reader should clearly hear the student's voice...while ALWAYS displaying your very best writing skills.

A Final Word about the Essay

- Give it the "So what?" test. Read your essay as if you are an admissions officer trying to learn more about you. Would they finish your essay and say "So what?" Be sure you have *shown* that you will make a unique and valuable contribution to their school.
- Make sure the essay is about you, not someone else.
- Ask someone you trust to read your essay and determine if your intended message/theme comes across. Consider a parent, teacher, counselor or adult friend. Discuss improvements with them.
- Proof it again and again looking for spelling and grammar errors. Don't rely only on spell-checkers.
- Follow the college's specific instructions for getting your essay to them, as it won't always be the same.
- When you cut and paste an essay into an online application, keep suggested length in mind. Although you may be able to attach a too-long essay, the finished product may be cut off when it reaches the admissions office. For example, the University of California's 600-word essay will be truncated at 630 words.
- If it is uploaded or sent via some other electronic method, check to be sure it was successfully transmitted.

FINANCIAL/MERIT AID

Almost everyone can receive *some kind* of financial assistance ***if you apply early!!!***

- Institutional Aid from the college or university can be awarded to students with "special talents" the school is looking for in the incoming class.

- Students with “A” averages who apply to schools where there are mostly “B” students (Another way to look at it is this - apply to colleges where academically you will be in the top 25% of the class, not the middle 50% or the lowest 25% of the class.)
- National Merit Finalists (based on PSAT scores)
- Star athletes
- Students whose family income is less than \$60,000 (amount may vary by institution)
- Underrepresented students (African Americans, Hispanics, or Native Americans) who apply to schools where they will be at least in the middle academic range for that college.

Of course, ***to receive financial aid you must apply for financial aid.*** Many colleges require that you apply even if you are interested only in a merit-based (versus need based) scholarship or loan. To apply for financial aid, your parents will have to fill out one or more financial aid forms. You must meet each college’s financial aid deadlines. Check with each college. For Early Decision and Early Action, deadlines can be as early as October of the senior year.

There are three main financial aid forms...

The most important one is the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**. It will now be available after October 1st of your senior year. And it will be referred to as the PPY – Prior Prior Year FAFSA because students and their parents will be utilizing the income/tax info from the 2015 year to file the 2017-2018 FAFSA, allowing students and parents to see what they may be eligible for from the federal government in the form of aid. The FAFSA form is available online at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>.

The FAFSA is *automatically* reviewed for:

- **Federal Pell Grants:** Unlike a loan, a Federal Pell Grant does not have to be repaid. Generally, Pell Grants are awarded only to undergraduate students who have not earned a BA or professional degree. The maximum amount of the award is \$5,550 per year.
- **Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG):** A FSEOG is for undergraduates with exceptional financial need and gives priority to students who receive Federal Pell Grants. The FSEOG does not have to be paid back. The maximum amount varies upon financial need and eligibility.
- **Federal Work-Study:** The Federal Work-Study Program provides jobs for undergraduate and graduate students with financial need, allowing them to earn money at a campus job to help pay education expenses. The total Federal Work-Study award depends on when you apply, your level of need, and the funding level of your school.
- **Federal Perkins Loan:** A Federal Perkins Loan is a low-interest loan for both undergraduate and graduate students with financial need. Your school is your lender, with government funds, with a share contributed by the school. You must repay this loan to your school. The maximum loan amount is \$4,000 per year.
- **Federal Stafford Student Loan:** These loans may be subsidized or unsubsidized. Subsidized loans are awarded based on need, and interest does not accrue until after you have completed your studies. Unsubsidized loans are not based on need and start accruing interest during your studies.
- **Federal PLUS Loan:** These are loans available to parents of dependent students.

The second financial aid form students will complete is the FFAA – The Florida Financial Aid Application. This application is used to evaluate students for the state’s Bright Futures Scholarship Program and, working in conjunction with the FAFSA, applicants will also be evaluated for eligibility for need based grants from Florida such as the Florida Student Assistance Grant (FSAG) and the Florida Resident Access Grant (FRAG). This application also opens December 1st of each year, to fund that year’s graduating seniors. It can be found at www.floridastudentfinancialaid.org.

Once you have filed your FAFSA form, it will be processed and a **Student Aid Report (SAR)** will be emailed to you. If there are corrections to be made, make them at once and resubmit the form as instructed. Remember that accurate figures from completed income tax returns are necessary.

The third form you *might* be asked to fill out is the **CSS/Profile**. This is a financial aid form used in addition to the FAFSA by *some* private colleges. If the school you are applying to is listed on the CSS Profile registration form, then you must fill it out. Go to www.collegeboard.com to complete your personalized Profile application. The site opens October 1st. It is not free, so be sure to fill out the registration form and send in the correct payment well in advance of January 1st. The fee can be waived based upon the applicant’s answers to some of the need based questions on the application. Individual forms customized for each college will be sent to you so that you can file them during the same time period as the FAFSA. For complete financial aid information, go to www.fafsa.org.

Scholarships

Most large scholarship awards come from the college’s and/or universities’ institutional funds and students are automatically considered for these awards based upon their GPA and test scores upon application...**ANOTHER REALLY IMPORTANT REASON TO GET THOSE APPLICATIONS FOR ADMISSIONS DONE EARLY!** A great site to work with to begin seeing early on what colleges will offer a student of your caliber is www.raise.me. Get on this site, create **AND MAINTAIN/UPDATE** your profile and “follow” those schools that are of interest to you and watch the money roll in...\$50 for an “A” in Alg 1 in some schools, \$150 in others, \$500 for a 4 on an AP exam, \$200 for a community service project...it all adds up fast!!!

There are thousands of outside scholarships, however, that range from very small amounts (\$25) to very substantial (\$10,000+). Most of these scholarship applications will ask for an essay. Ms. Gilman will happily email her monthly Scholarship Bulletin and intermittent updates to all those students who **regularly** check their Coral Reef High gmail account!.

Here are some additional ideas for researching scholarships:

- If your parents work for a large company, be sure they check with their Human Resources office to see if scholarships are offered to children of employees.
- If you belong to an ethnic group with an active club, they may offer scholarships. Call and find out.

- Local chapters of civic organizations such as the Omega Nu, Rotary, Eagles, Elks, etc., all offer some type of scholarship. Call the local offices and ask.
 - Watch for announcements and advertisements in the local newspaper. Many organizations decide to offer a scholarship and simply tell the local press.
- Whatever you do, **stay away from the scholarship scam artists**. If you are not sure if a scholarship is legitimate, ask Ms. Gilman.

THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

First and foremost, remember the mantra, “start early” and “stay organized.” Use an Application Check Sheet to keep track of the different tasks you need to do as you begin applying to colleges. In addition, there is a list of steps you can begin as early as junior year listed below. By taking action early to set up the frame work for the application process. Coral Reef Senior High School’s goal is to have every college-bound senior ready to submit their college applications in November, especially for those planning to apply early decision or early action. Early submission almost always works to one’s advantage, especially for colleges and universities with rolling admission.

Things to remember:

- Keep close track of all deadlines: a) create a calendar or spreadsheet with tasks and deadlines, and then b) check things off as you complete each task.
- Be sure to spell your name exactly the same way on all your application materials, SAT or ACT registration, and any correspondence to colleges. If you use a middle name or initial, use it every time on every form. Colleges might set up different files for a student if they use different variations of their name.
- Keep a copy of everything you send in, including online applications and other written and email correspondence.
- Ask the College Board or ACT, or both, to send your scores to the colleges of your choice. The registration fee includes up to four reports. For additional score reports, you will be charged a nominal fee. Allow at least three weeks for regular delivery of scores. This is your responsibility, not CRSHS’s. The colleges require official scores, *sent by the testing agencies*.

Set Up a College Admissions Email Account

If you don’t have one already, set up an email account to use SPECIFICALLY for college admissions...AND CHECK IT REGULARLY! Avoid user names that an admissions officer might find silly, inappropriate or immature.

Review Your Online Persona

Examine your information on Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat, Twitter and/or other social networks. Consider updating or deleting content that might not be viewed favorably by college admissions officers. Be careful what you tweet, post, tag...More and more admission officers (and employers!) are checking out applicants’ social media sites!

Keep a College Admissions Notebook

Set up a separate college notebook (a black and white composition notebook works well) for user accounts, passwords and other information.

Test Preparation

Register and prepare for the ACT, SAT, and SAT Subject Tests. At CRSHS all sophomores take the PSAT in October and all Juniors are strongly encouraged to do so as well for National Merit Qualification as well as more practice. Junior year take either or both an ACT and SAT test in the spring and then, if applicable, two to three SAT Subject exams in June after you have finished your AP Exams.

Once you have seen your results determine if you need to improve your scores by studying over the summer. If you decide to retake an exam senior year, it is a good idea to register as soon as possible for a test date in October or November as, ideally, all standardized testing for college admissions should be completed by December of your senior year.

College Representative Visits to CRSHS

Ms. Gilman will regular email an update of what colleges are visiting CRSHS along with a google document juniors & seniors may complete to sign up to attend. Space is often limited on these visits based on room/location availability and it is the responsibility of the student to once again check their Coral Reef Senior gmail account to print out the pass to attend these informative visits.

Register for the Common Application in August

Nearly 400 colleges and universities accept the Common Application. Last year almost 1.4 million applications were submitted online via the Common App. If any of the schools you are considering use the Common Application, set up an account in August between your junior and senior year. Write down your user name and password in your College Admissions Notebook. Download the appropriate forms, including short answer and essay topics. After you register, you can complete the application at your own pace, revising and saving your work as you progress. Keep in mind that many schools that accept the Common App also require or suggest supplementary essays and forms.

(Some schools even have additional counselor forms you need to have signed and mailed with your application).

Most state schools have their own on-line application on their college's homepage under admissions. There you will find all the requirements and criteria for admissions to their college of university.

Applying to UF...Create Your Coalition "Locker" & become familiar with it.

If you need letters of recommendation, forms filled out by CRSHS faculty or staff, and official transcripts sent on your behalf, ***you must complete the online request forms.*** Transcripts can be sent to some schools electronically and there is no charge for this. Other schools require a paper, hard copy transcripts. There is also a questionnaire/Brag Sheet of sorts students must complete prior to requesting letters of recommendation from their counselors.

Personal Statement

The primary essay in the Common Application is called the personal statement. You'll need to choose among six topics. Your essay should be between 250 and 1000 words.

Most counselors suggest 500 words. Ms. Gilman has numerous Personal Statement and College Essay tools that can help and will gladly send them to you via email or make copies available.

Research and Visit Colleges

If you are still working on your list of colleges, make sure you have good resources to narrow your choices. Attend local college night programs and College Fairs, visit schools in person and online,

and spend time perusing college guidebooks in the library and Counseling Office in addition to viewing college websites.

Complete Your “Resume” and “Brag Sheet”

You’ll find this list of activities and achievements is extremely helpful for applications, interviews, and also for your counselors and teachers to use in writing your letter of recommendation.

READY, SET, GO!!!!

- Review your college list to make sure it includes a balanced mix of Reach or (-25% chance of getting in), Possible or Target (50/50 chance of getting in), and Likely or Probable (75% + chance of getting in) colleges.
- Confirm with your Guidance Counselor that you are on track to meet all graduation requirements.
- Make sure that all required documents are complete (Brag Sheet, Community Service, Resume, etc...).
- Review your transcript to make sure everything is correct.
- Be sure to schedule follow-up appointments with your guidance counselor to keep your college application process moving forward efficiently and to update the counselor on any changes to your college list, awards and accomplishments, etc...

Review and Finalize Your College List – Decide about Early Decision, Early Action

Many counselors suggest one to three “long-shot” schools, where admission is possible but not likely due to their selectivity and or size, three to five “Possible” schools, where you are well within the range and there is a good chance of acceptance, and two to four schools where you are “likely” to be accepted. With increased competitiveness for college admission, many college counselors no longer use the term “safety” schools, referring to them instead as “likely admission” or “target” colleges. Update your schools and decide if you want to apply to a college Early Decision (binding) or Single-Choice Early Action (restrictive).

Create A College Application Spreadsheet

A master tracking document can help you stay on task. It can also be instrumental in avoiding missed deadlines, a last minute rush and unnecessary stress. Your spreadsheet can be maintained on a computer (Excel, Word, Google Docs) or handwritten. Determine the decision plans and options (early decision/early action/rolling/regular) for each college you are considering. Clarify and include deadlines, requirements and submission dates. Determine and include essay, application, financial aid application, interview, recommendation, testing (including SAT subject tests) requirements and deadlines for all schools you are considering. Ms. Gilman has a wonderfully generic spreadsheet that can be customized for any student and she is more than happy to send it out upon request.

Request College Recommendation Letters from Teachers

Ask your teachers about writing a favorable letter of recommendation for you. Typically, you only need **two** letters, possibly more. Some selective schools would like to see: one generally from a

Math or Science teacher and one generally from an English, History, or Foreign Language teacher. Speak with your teachers as early as possible. Many teachers receive a number of requests and limit the number of students for whom they write letters. Provide each teacher with a recommendation form, a copy of your college admissions resume and/or your Brag Sheet and a stamped, addressed envelope for any school that is **not** a Common Application school. Follow up with recommenders to confirm letters of recommendation have been completed and please...make sure to thank them for their time and effort.

Brainstorm, Write, Review, Edit and Polish Your Application Essays

Most competitive colleges require at least one essay. Consider your options about how you can best portray yourself. Usually it takes several drafts to compose a high quality essay. Be sure to invest the time and attention that this important part of the application deserves!

Complete Your Applications, Supply Related Information, and Follow-up

Carefully review and proofread application materials and submit electronically. For colleges that require or suggest an interview, schedule it well before the deadline. Follow up with colleges to be sure that all portions of the application have been received: high school transcript, standardized test scores, application/essays/ supplements, letters of recommendation, counselor recommendation/art portfolios/DVDs. Many colleges have an “application status check” function on their web portals, and many colleges will alert students if parts of the application file are missing. If they send you instructions to set up an account to check your status, do so immediately and record your user name and password in your Admissions Notebook. Check your status periodically to make sure all application materials have been received. Remember the turnaround time can be up to 6 weeks for processing.

Test Scores

Send ACT/SAT scores to colleges on your final list. Send and also put your AP Scores in a college folder for college registration. Send ACT/SAT scores and transcripts well before the deadline to avoid a late fee. This is your responsibility, not the school registrar’s responsibility.

Research and Apply for Financial Aid & Scholarships

Check your CRSHS gmail account regularly. Keep a timeline with scholarship deadlines and specific requirements. Collect financial-aid information and learn about the FAFSA and CSS Profile. Complete the FAFSA and CSS Profile (Private School Financial Aid Form), as appropriate. The CSS Profile can usually be submitted as early as September (with estimated income tax information) while the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) becomes available on January 1st.

DECISIONS AND FOLLOW-UP STEPS

The time has come for you to make some important decisions and to finalize some important steps of your next journey. First and foremost, read all documents you receive thoroughly from each college, while paying close attention to the next steps you need to take and about each deadline.

Admitted Student Day - Many schools hold an “Admitted Student Day” in April so that you can visit the school with other admitted students before you make your final decision by May 1. If this is the case, make sure to talk to students and teachers at the institution that share your interests and teach the subjects you will be taking. Try to get an insider’s view of what it would really be like to attend.

The Financial Aid Letter - Read through each financial aid letter carefully. You will want to compare financial aid offers. Your award letter will outline the various types of financial aid you have been offered. Each letter will be unique to that particular institute and should include such things as student and parent loans, grants, scholarships (this may include an additional award available through application), work study, etc.... If you have been admitted to more than one college, your final choice may come down to the financial aid offer. Inquire if the awards are renewable and not just a one-time incentive to get you to enroll. Remember that you do not have to accept every part of the financial aid offer. You may want to accept the grants, scholarships, work study and student subsidized loans (the government pays the interest while you are still in school) and not the student and parent unsubsidized loans (they don’t). Find out the terms of the loans, the interest rate, when you have to start repayments, how much you will owe by the time you graduate, the monthly repayments, and how much the loan will increase after your first year. If you are awarded grants or scholarships, find out if they are renewable, what happens if you win an outside scholarship, and what stipulations such as minimum GPA may apply? If you are offered work-study, ask if a job is “guaranteed”, how jobs are assigned or found on the campus, how many hours per week will you be expected to work, what your hourly wage will be, and how you will be paid (pay check, student account, or credited to your tuition bill).

Waitlisted - If you are wait-listed by your first-choice school and decide to accept the waitlist offer, you **must** also accept a spot at one of the schools where you were admitted often with a deposit...a small price to pay for a big peace of mind! When accepting the waitlist offer, let the admissions office know immediately in writing. Include any achievements or new information that wasn’t on your initial application in this letter/email. Emphasize your strong desire to attend the college and make a case for why it’s a good fit both ways. Request another interview if possible and finish high school strong by staying involved in sports, clubs, and other activities as well as your academics. If you do eventually get offered a spot off the waitlist, let the other school know you want to withdraw your acceptance. You will forfeit the small deposit at that school, but the guaranteed spot is well worth the money.

What If You Don’t Get In Anywhere – This might happen...and sometimes a closed door can lead you down a better path. Sometimes when students only apply to extremely selective schools like UF, UC Berkeley, NYU, UM etc...they find that they must redirect their search or consider some alternative paths and/or options. Initially, ask the college for an explanation for the denial especially if you have met all the admission criteria. It could be an error on their part. If an appeal is warranted find out the college’s procedures and make the appeal. If an appeal is a long shot, talk to your counselor about other good fit schools whose deadlines haven’t yet passed. Some schools are on a rolling basis and may still have spots available for freshmen applicants. Use the College Search option College Board to find schools that are still accepting applications. There are other options you should consider...

Community/State Colleges and Honors Programs - Consider attending a Florida Community/State College most offer Transfer Agreement Guarantee (TAG) opportunities as well as Honor Transfer Programs that may have agreements with some very selective schools. The Honors College at Miami Dade College has agreements with over 64!!

Decision Made, Now What?

Once you have made your decision as to which college and financial aid offer to accept, you must complete, sign, and return the form with a deposit by the deadline. Don't miss the date; this could lead to loss of your spot or a penalty fee. Most deadlines are **May 1**, but note carefully the reply date in your acceptance letter. Many schools will allow you to make the deposit on-line. Be sure to call the school if you have any questions.

In addition, please remember to send a *No Thanks Letter* to **all** the other colleges that admitted you. That way, they can give your place to another candidate who really wants to attend that school.

Example:

Dear (name on your admittance letter),

I am writing to let you know that I must decline your offer of admittance.

I have decided to attend (name of college you have accepted) instead.

Thank you for admitting me. It was a true honor.

Sincerely,

The next step is to take care of any loan paperwork. If you accept student loans as part of your financial aid package, you will need to fill out the loan application forms before the start of the semester. Make sure you understand your rights and obligations as a borrower.

Tips: Remember to contact the financial aid office at the college or university right away if your family's financial status changes due to the loss of a job, displacement, illness, etc.

THE DETAILS OF THE DECISIONS – HOUSING, MEAL PLANS, ORIENTATION & REGISTRATION

Housing - Where you will live is a major consideration. If you are going to live on campus you will receive a housing packet. Pay close attention to the instructions and deadline for the deposit. The packet includes information about the different dorm options (single-sex, substance-free, special-interest or "theme" housing, roommate questionnaire and room options (singles, doubles, suites), resident rules, a list of items to buy for your room, and much more. Once you have been given the name and contact information of your roommate(s), make contact. It is a good idea to share expenses for the refrigerator and microwave combo many schools rent.

Tip: For your second year, consider applying for a job as a Resident Advisor (RA) position to pay for your housing on campus.

Select a Meal Plan - Most colleges offer a choice of different meal plans. Typically they are based on how many meals per week you will eat on campus. Find out the different options and if you can speak to some experienced college students about the best plan at the school.

Orientation & Registration - Bring copies of any AP and SAT Subject Exams you have taken for placement purposes and exemption from certain placement exams. AP Grade Reports are sent in July to the college or university you designated on your answer sheet, to you, and to your high school. Each report is cumulative and includes grades for all the AP Exams you have ever taken, unless you have requested that one or more grades be withheld from a college or canceled. To request that your score reports be sent to colleges, call (888) 308-0013 on or after July 3. Most AP Grade Reports are sent by mid- July. Some reports take longer to process because of problems with identification information or the late arrival of materials from the testing location. Contact AP Services if you have not received a grade report by September 1.

Give Thanks Where Thanks Are Due - Don't forget to thank all those who helped you during the college application process such as your teachers, counselors, coaches, scholarship sponsors, and ***especially your parents.***

Last but not least...

- Request your final transcript be sent by CRSHS to the college you will be attending.
- Schedule a physical exam plus any necessary vaccinations required over the summer.
- Sign up for a pre-orientation program if your college offers one. These tend to be Outward Bound Type trips designed to form new relationships outside the classroom.
- If you go to a state college or university they may offer several orientation days so sign up as soon as you know your availability.
- Set up a bank account with your parents, if you do not already have one.
- Find out if you will need to take any placement exams for math, English or foreign language and when they are being held. Many colleges will exempt you if you have scored in a certain range on a SAT or AP exam.

STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFERENCES AND/OR ADHD

Many students with learning differences and/or ADHD have received accommodations during high school. They might be tempted to “go it alone” in college, but there are dangers to doing so. First, it is important to make sure that accommodations are approved and in place, even if the student does not take advantage of them. Once the school term begins, there is very little time before midterms and major papers are due. Should the student discover that help would be needed; accommodations cannot begin immediately upon request. It can be a long period of time - a semester or a full academic year - before all paperwork and evaluations are in place. A second reason you do not want to avoid utilizing assistance at college is that students will be missing one of the most important lessons college has to offer: how to find and use help. This step toward becoming an independent learner is crucial to success in college, and students with learning differences would be well advised to get all the assistance available at the beginning of the college experience.

No college has the right to ask an applicant if he/she has a disability. However, there may be very good reasons to self-disclose, such as:

- Grades in classes such as math or English were consistently lower than other classes.

- The disability was identified at a certain point in high school and grades improved dramatically once the student began receiving accommodations.
- The student was unable to pursue a high level of study in a certain subject, such as foreign language, due to the disability.

There are three categories of assistance provided by colleges:

- **Structured Programs:** Colleges with structured programs offer specific programs for students with LD/ADHD that go well beyond mandated services.

These services might include special admissions procedures, specialized and trained professionals, compensatory strategies, one-on-one tutoring, additional fees, compulsory participation, and monitoring.

- **Coordinated Services:** Colleges with coordinated services offer programs for students with LD/ADHD that might be somewhat involved with the admissions decisions and might include voluntary participation, services beyond those that are mandated, low or no fees, and less structure.

- **Basic Services:** Colleges with basic services comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, but rarely have specialized LD staff, do not have monitoring, and are totally dependent on student advocacy.

The student with LD/ADHD must take these steps when applying to college in order to be eligible for services:

- Self-disclose the LD or ADHD
- Request accommodations
- Submit current and appropriate documentation

The colleges will then exercise their right to independently examine the documentation and identify the services they feel are reasonable and appropriate.

Colleges highly recommended for students with Learning Differences or ADHD:

- Curry College, MA
- Hofstra University, NY
- Landmark College, VT (Serves only LD/ADD population)
- Linfield College, OR
- Lynn University, FL
- Mitchell College, CT
- Regis University, CO
- University of Arizona SALT Program, AZ
- University of Denver, C

RESOURCES FOR COLLEGE BOUND STUDENTS

Most Popular Links

- www.princetonreview.com - all sorts of college information
- www.collegeboard.org - The SAT test plus all sorts of testing and college preparation information

- <http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/> - Federal Student Aid Site for students, parents and counselors
- www.finaid.org - Student aid resource site
- www.students.gov - student gateway to the US Government
- www.ed.gov – U.S. Department of Education, search for student aid resources by state
- <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/scholarship/index.shtml>–Federal Trade Commission, avoid scholarship scams - don't pay!

Personality and Career Assessment

- <http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg/> - Bureau of Labor & Statistics, link your favorite subject in school to a possible career
- <http://www.princetonreview.com/careers-after-college.aspx> - The Princeton Review Career Test
- <http://www.jobtrainingclasses.net/> - Vocational Programs available through Miami Dade County Publics School's Adult Education Program

Reading Lists for Students

- <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/yalsa.cfm> – Young Adult Library Services Association, outstanding book lists for the college bound
- <http://www.collegeboard.com/parents/plan/hs-steps/21276.html> - From The College Board, 101 great books for the college bound readers

Search for Colleges

- <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/> - National Center for Education Statistics, links and searches to colleges and universities
- <http://www.petersons.com/> – Peterson's, find colleges by degree programs of interest

College Rankings

- <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges> - US News & World Report rankings

Two Year College Resources

- <http://www.communitycollegereview.com/> – Community & Junior College profiles

Military Careers

- <http://www.todaysmilitary.com/> - Military (general)
- <http://www.army.mil/> - Army
- <http://www.navy.mil/> - Navy
- <http://www.uscg.mil/> - Coast Guard
- <http://www.marines.com/> - Marines
- <http://www.af.mil/> - Air Force

Virtual Tours

- <http://www.ecampustours.com/> - virtual campus tours
- <http://www.campustours.com/> - virtual campus tours
- <http://www.campusview.com/> - collection of on line view books
- <http://www.collegiatechoice.com/> - non promotional videos of colleges

Going Away to College

- <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/plan/college-success/9763.html> – From The College Board...a checklist to make sure you have everything you need
- <http://www.forbes.com/2009/11/30/college-student-finances-personal-finance-banks-credit-unions.html> – From Forbes...the smartest checking accounts, credit cards, and more...

What are my Chances at This School?

- <http://www.go4college.com/>
- www.collegedata.com/cs/promo/promo_calcods_tmpl.jhtml
- www.princetonreview.com/college/research/articles/find/MatchReachSafety.asp

Testing Calendars

- <http://sat.collegeboard.org/register/sat-dates> - The SAT test dates & deadlines
- <http://www.actstudent.org/regist/dates.html> - The ACT test dates & deadlines

About the Different Tests

- <http://collegeapps.about.com/od/standardizedtests/tp/sat-act.htm> - Comparison between SAT & ACT for college admissions
- <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/about.html> -From The College Board, information about AP testing
- www.collegeboard.com/prof/counselors/apply/12.html - Sat Subject Test Requirements at different schools
- <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/clep/about.html> - From The College Board, learn about the CLEP (College Level Examination Program) program
- <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/psat/about.html> – From The College Board, learn about the PSAT...the Preliminary SAT

Test Prep Resources

- <http://www.testprep.com/> - by Stanford Testing Systems
- <http://www.testprepreview.com/> - a wide array of free practice tests
- <http://www.vocabulary.com/> - fun ways to improve your vocabulary

Scholarship Search

- <http://www.scholarship.com/> - finding scholarships
- <http://www.fastweb.com/> - Financial Aid and Scholarship Search
- <http://www.collegeboard.com/> - College, Career, Scholarship Search
- <http://www.wiredscholar.com/> - SallieMae site for financial aid
- <http://www.collegepayway.com/> - tools for planning to pay for college

Financial Aid Calculators

- www.finaid.org/calculators/ - financial aid calculator
- www.act.org/fane/index.html - calculator on the ACT website

Financial Aid Links

- <http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/> - Federal Student Aid Site or call 1-800-433-3243 (TTY 800-730-8913 for hearing impaired)
- <http://www.finaid.org/> - Student aid resource site
- <http://www.students.gov/> - student gateway to the US Government
- <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/> - online FAFSA application

For Minority, Low-Income, First Generation Students

- www.finaid.org/otheraid/minority.phtml - minority aid site
- <http://www.edonline.com/cq/hbcu/alphabet.htm> - historically black colleges
- <http://www.educacionsuperior.org/> - education information in Spanish
- <http://www.yesican.gov/> - White House initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans
- <http://www.yosipuedo.gov/> - Spanish version of same site as above
- <http://www.hispanicfund.org/> - Hispanic resource for college aid
- <http://www.uncf.org/> - United Negro College Fund
- <http://www.aimd.org/> - American Institute for Managing Diversity
- <http://www.aihec.org/> - American Indian Higher Education Consortium
- <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/index.html?src=mr> - Department of Education/Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs
- <http://www.black-collegian.com/> - the Black Collegian
- <http://www.hillel.org/> - Jewish resource for colleges
- <http://www.gmsp.org/> - Gates Millennium Scholars Fund
- <http://www.hsf.net/> - Hispanic scholarships
- <http://www.hacu.net/> - Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
- <http://www.ibhe.com/> - Journal of Blacks in Higher Education
- <http://www.qem.org> - Quality Education for Minorities
- <http://www.nativeculturelinks.com/education.html> - Tribal Colleges, Native Studies Programs, and Indian Education

Students with Disabilities

- <http://www.ahead.org/> - Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)
- <http://www.add.org/> - Attention Deficit Disorder Association
- <http://www.chadd.org/> - Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorders
- <http://www.ldanatl.org/> - Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA)
- <http://www.ldresources.com/> - Learning Disability Resources
- <http://www.nclid.org/> - National Center for Learning Disabilities
- <http://www.fcsn.org/> - Federation for Children with Special Needs
- <http://www.ldonline.org/> - Learning Disabilities Online
- <http://www.nifl.gov/> - National Adult Literacy & Learning Disabilities Center