

# College 101

**A Guide to Understanding  
the College Application Process**

**Canaseraga Central School  
Guidance Office and Counseling Center**

**Now is the time to begin thinking about your future. If you are interested in attending college after high school, there is a process which you need to be aware of.**

**Upon first inspection, the college application process can seem like a daunting one. Upon further review though, the steps needed to get you into the right college are not as bad as they seem.**

**This guide was created specifically for you; a college-bound student, as well as your parent/guardian. In it you will find useful information about how to take on this big step in life.**

**Everything from how to select a college, to financial aid, to college entrance exams is found within these pages. You will also find helpful checklists and sheets that were created to help parents and college-bound students make good choices. The checklist for a college visit will help to answer questions about specific campuses. The budget form will help you and your parent/guardian prepare for the financial responsibilities that come with attending college.**

**Congratulations. By holding this guide in your hand, you have made the decision that further education can be instrumental to success in life.**

# Tips for Beginning Your College Search

Adapted from *Your College Search 2000*

- **THINK** about what you want to do and where you want to be.
- **READ** all you can: campus web sites, catalogues, viewbooks.
- **MAKE** a list of colleges that really interest you.
- **VISIT** campuses; ask questions.
- **NARROW** your list by asking yourself: What's most important to me? (Remember that what's best for your neighbor, best friend or cousin may not be what's best for you.) Consider: location, distance from home, size, academic opportunities, campus atmosphere, sports, cultural/social opportunities.
- **APPLY.** Complete admission and all financial aid applications. Watch for deadlines!

**When choosing a COLLEGE consider the following.....**

1. Location
  - a. close to home or far away
  - b. small town or city
2. Size of school
  - a. small (100 – 2,500)
  - b. medium (2,500 – 7,500)
  - c. large (7,500 +)
3. Type of school
  - a. technical/private institutions
  - b. community/private 2 year schools
  - c. colleges/universities 4 year schools  
public or private  
commuter or resident
4. Costs
  - a. tuition
  - b. room and board
  - c. books
5. Financial Aid – Know Deadlines!!
  - a. scholarships
  - b. grants
  - c. loans
  - d. work-study
6. Single sex vs. Co-ed
7. Specific extracurricular activities
  - a. clubs
  - b. music/art/ theater
  - c. radio stations
  - d. newspaper/yearbook
  - e. student government
  - f. sororities/fraternities
  - g. religious groups
8. Athletics
  - a. intercollegiate sports
  - b. intramurals
9. Competitiveness
  - a. highly competitive
  - b. moderately competitive
  - c. somewhat competitive
10. Supportive Services
  - a. personal
  - b. career/placement
  - c. developmental courses
  - d. health services
  - e. disabled services
11. Ratios
  - a. men to women
  - b. professors to students
  - c. residents to commuters
  - d. computers to students
12. Transportation
  - a. to local surroundings  
airports/bus stations  
stores (clothes/food)
  - b. private vehicles
13. Calendar
  - a. semester
  - b. trimester
14. Meal Plans
15. Summer session
16. Policy on credits taken
17. Religious affiliations

## GETTING INTO COLLEGE

After evaluating your needs, skills, interests, and career goals, you should begin to analyze information regarding colleges.

- What are the requirements for admission (SAT/ACT scores, high school courses, high school grades, etc.)?
- What are the application deadlines for early decision and regular application?
- What will colleges look at when they consider your application?
  1. Academic preparedness
    - Courses taken in high school
    - Challenging courses your senior year
  2. Academic performance
    - Trends in grades in all high school courses
    - Good grades in courses related to college program
  3. SAT and/or ACT scores
  4. Other factors
    - Extracurricular activities
    - Letters of recommendation (teacher, school counselor, etc.)
    - Campus interviews
    - Volunteer activities
- Consider applying to two to five colleges

## THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

Colleges will require:

1. Application and application fee (\$15-\$80). Make sure you check on-line. Many colleges wave fees for on-line applications.
2. High school transcript; which can be obtained from the Guidance Office.
3. SAT and/or ACT scores. Some schools do not require these for admissions.
4. Recommendations from teachers, school counselors, etc.
5. Other requirements may include a campus interview, an audition, a portfolio, and/or personal essay.
6. You will need to complete the FAFSA (completed by Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>). Many colleges also require a copy of your parents Federal Income Tax Return.

## ***SAT and ACT College Entrance Exam Information***

### About College Entrance Exams

National college entrance exams are required by many colleges and universities for admissions or placement consideration. Results of these entrance exams are only one of several criteria used by colleges in making admissions decisions.

### The Traditional Process in College Entrance Exam Testing

- In the fall of the junior year in high school, students take the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT). This test is given in October, at Canaseraga, and all juniors are encouraged to participate. This test serves as a practice test for the SAT and offers scholarship opportunities for students who perform well. The results are usually available in December and provide students with valuable information regarding their strengths and weaknesses on the areas tested. Fee waivers are available for qualified students. Generally, if a student is eligible for the free or reduced lunch program, a fee waiver for this test will be approved.
- In the spring of the junior year, students register to take the ACT (American College Test) and/or the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) on any of the available national test dates. The tests are not offered at Canaseraga. When registering, make sure you select a testing location nearby. The scores from these tests will be requested by the colleges to which a student has applied and are also sent to the Guidance Office to be included in the student's file. Fee waivers are available for qualified students. Generally, if a student is eligible for the free or reduced lunch program, a fee waiver for this test will be approved.

## SAT vs. ACT: How do the Tests Compare? (From princetonreview.com)

What is the difference between the SAT and ACT? They're both standardized tests and they both factor into the college admissions process. To learn about the differences between the two tests and how they compare, take a look at the chart below.

	SAT	ACT
When is it administered?	Seven times per year	Six times per year
What is the test structure?	<b>Ten-section exam:</b> Three Critical Reading, three Math, three Writing, and one Experimental. The Experimental section is masked to look like a regular section.	<b>Four-section exam:</b> English, Math, Reading, and Science Reasoning. An Experimental section is added to tests on certain dates only, and is clearly experimental.
What is the test content?	<b>Math:</b> up to 9th grade basic geometry and Algebra II. <b>Science:</b> none. <b>Reading:</b> sentence completions, short and long critical reading passages, reading comprehension. <b>Writing:</b> an essay, and questions testing grammar, usage, and word choice.	<b>Math:</b> up to trigonometry. <b>Science:</b> charts, experiments. <b>Reading:</b> four passages, one each of Prose Fiction, Social Science, Humanities, and Natural Science. <b>English:</b> stresses grammar.
Is there a penalty for wrong answers?	Yes	No
How is the test scored?	200-800 per section, added together for a combined score. A 2400 is the highest possible combined score.	1-36 for each subject, averaged for a composite score. A 36 is the highest possible composite score.
Are all scores sent to schools?	<b>Yes.</b> If a student requests a score report be sent to specific colleges, the report will include the scores the student received on every SAT taken.	<b>No.</b> There is a "Score Choice" option. Students can choose which schools will receive their scores AND which scores the schools will see.
Are there other uses for the exams?	Scholarship purposes.	Scholarship purposes. Certain statewide testing programs.
Best time to register?	At least <b>six weeks</b> before the test date	At least <b>four weeks</b> before the test date
Need more information?	<b>The College Board</b> <a href="http://www.collegeboard.com">www.collegeboard.com</a>	<b>ACT, Inc.:</b> (319) 337-1000 <a href="http://www.ACT.org">www.ACT.org</a>

## TIPS FOR THE CAMPUS VISIT

**The most valuable asset of the college selection process is the campus visit. Going site-unseen to a college is a recipe for disaster. Remember, this is where you will call home for the next two to four years!**

1. Request an appointment with the Admissions Office by phone, letter, or email.
  - At least one week in advance
  - Request a campus tour (see attached evaluation sheet).
  - Request to meet with a faculty member, student, career counselor, coach.
  - Ask about financial aid, or ask to meet with someone from the Financial Aid Office.
2. Write questions to ask during your visit. (see attached sheet with suggested questions)
3. Have information about your academic background and accomplishments available.
4. Arrive on time.
5. Allow yourself enough time to explore the campus.
  - Library
  - Dining halls
  - Resident halls
  - Academic facilities
6. Plan your visit when school is in session, if possible. An empty campus when school is on break is not what you will see day in and day out.
7. Initiate conversations with students. They can often tell you a great deal about the pluses and minuses of the college.



## QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN SELECTING A COLLEGE

1. What are the **admissions requirements** for my program of study?
2. Are **SAT or ACT scores** required for admission?
3. What if I don't have a good **high school average**?
4. Are **letters of recommendation or an essay** required for admission?
5. When will I know if I've been accepted?
6. How many students attend the college?
7. What is the student/faculty ratio?
8. What is the average class size?
9. What kind of **academic advisement** is available?
10. Is **credit given for college classes** taken while in high school?
11. What do I do if I need **extra help** in classes?
12. Can I live on campus? What are the **residence halls** like?
13. Can I choose a specific residence hall? A roommate?
14. Will I need a **car**?
15. What **meal plans** are offered?
16. Are **health services** available on campus?
17. What kinds of **social activities** are available?
18. What **intercollegiate/intramural sports** programs are offered?
19. What is the average **cost** to attend for one year?
20. Is **financial aid**, including scholarships, available?
21. Are **jobs** available on campus?
22. What is the **placement rate** for my major?

## FINANCIAL AID

College is expensive. The cost to attend any sort of post secondary education has increased considerably in recent years.

Students need to consider all financial aid resources. The belief that student or parent's income will prohibit you from getting financial aid is a myth. Financial aid is available to almost all students.

### *Types of Financial Aid*

- **Loans** – An educational loan is money that must be paid back to the lender, with interest. Loans make up the majority of financial aid.
  1. Student loans include Stafford and Perkins
  2. Parents can take out Parent PLUS loans
  3. Private loans
  
- **Scholarships** – Educational scholarships are money that does not have to be repaid. To be eligible for scholarships students generally need to meet certain criteria like maintaining grades, etc. The Guidance Office at Canaseraga puts together a scholarship packet for seniors comprised of local scholarships.
  
- **Grants** – Grant money is also financial aid that does not have to be repaid.

### *The FAFSA – Fill it Out!!*

- The first, and most important step in making yourself eligible for financial aid is to fill out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). Without this completed form, you will not be eligible for any federal or state financial aid including Stafford loans, Perkins loans, Pell grants, etc.
- Students are strongly encouraged to file on-line. To do so, you will need a student PIN (personal identification number) and a parent PIN.
- The FAFSA may NOT be submitted prior to January 1. As soon as possible after that though, the FAFSA should be completed and submitted to be eligible for the most financial aid.

## COMMON MISTAKES

1. Losing sight of your primary reason for going to college. Putting too much emphasis on trivial factors. You may love college football, but that is not a reason to look at the University of Texas, Notre Dame, etc.
2. Letting the choice happen instead of taking charge of your own planning. Letting friends influence your decision. Letting someone decide for you.
3. Applying to colleges that you really have no interest in attending. College applications can cost upwards of \$80. If you have no real interest in a school, it's best to leave it off your list.
4. Procrastinating. Waiting too late to apply to colleges and/or completing financial aid forms.
5. Expecting to attend college for free.
6. Expecting to find one college that is perfect in every way. Compromising is the key. Look at what's important to you.
7. Not discussing your plans and frustrations with your parents (and/or your guidance counselor who may help you to approach your parents with concerns.)

# **TIMETABLE**

## **SOPHOMORE**

### **FALL**

- Select challenging academic classes
- Take PSAT in October

### **SPRING**

- Practice good study habits
- Begin college exploration. Stop in the Guidance Office.

## **JUNIOR**

### **FALL**

- Take PSAT. Even if you took it last year.
- Take ASVAB test. This interest inventory can help you gauge what you are good at and different careers.
- Meet with college representatives and military recruiters.
- Register for the SAT and/or ACT.

### **SPRING**

- Develop initial list of colleges for further investigation.
- Begin collecting information about colleges.
- Register for the SAT and/or ACT.
- Take SAT and/or ACT.

### **SUMMER**

- Take time to visit colleges.

## **SENIOR**

### **FALL**

- Meet with guidance counselor to review graduation requirements and begin post high school planning.
- Finalize list of potential colleges.
- Note any application deadlines.
- Register for second SAT and/or ACT.
- Ask teachers, counselors, and employers for letters of recommendation.

### **DECEMBER 1**

- Recommended deadline for SUNY schools.

### **JANUARY**

- Deadlines for many colleges.
- Attend financial aid presentation at school.
- Stay on studies. Colleges do look at final transcripts.

### **SPRING**

- Find a summer job to help defray college expenses.