

## College application FAQs: Students ask, counselors answer

### **Do I have a better chance of getting in if I apply early?**

This can vary from school to school and year to year and may depend on the applicant pool at the school to which you are applying. Check to see what percentage of students in the previous graduating classes at your high school were admitted as Early Decision to a specific college. Are you qualified to apply for Early Decision? If you are, and this is a school you really wish to attend, then apply for Early Decision.

### **How much time should I give my teachers to write letters of recommendation for me?**

Teachers should always receive a minimum of two weeks' notice before the postmark date. Be sure to ask in a way that allows a teacher to decline comfortably if he or she does not have time to do an adequate job. For example: "Do you feel you know me well enough, and do you have enough time, to write a supportive letter of recommendation for me?" Give the teacher a stamped envelope addressed to the college, along with any recommendation form provided by the college.

### **How many times should I take the SAT®?**

Some students are satisfied with their SAT scores the first time they take the test. Others believe they will benefit from taking it a second time. Most students will take the SAT in the spring of their junior year and the fall of their senior year. There is no evidence that taking the test more than twice results in significant score gains for most students.

### **My SAT scores are very low, and my grades are very high. Will this affect my chances of admission?**

While SAT scores are an indicator of success in college, admissions staff look at many different factors when making a decision about whether to admit a student. One of the main things they are looking for is to see if your high school academic profile indicates that you have the potential for academic success on their campus. What kind of courses have you taken? Have you taken rigorous courses such as honors or AP® courses? Have you taken AP Exams so that there are scores to indicate how you may perform in a college-level course? That said, you should always check with the college or university you are applying to if you have questions on their score use policies.

### **My parents don't make a lot of money — will colleges hold this against me?**

Colleges should tell you whether they have a "need-blind" admission policy. Those that do never consider ability to pay as an admission requirement. Other schools, which are "need conscious,"

## College application FAQs: Students ask, counselors answer (page 2)

may consider ability to pay, but only for a very small proportion of the admitted group. My advice is always: Don't worry about this.

### **How can I improve my chances of getting in from the wait list?**

If a college is your first choice, let the college know that — although the college may not ask for this information. Write a letter to the director of admission expressing your continuing strong interest and updating the admission office with any new information that enhances you. In addition, you may wish to ask your counselor to make a call on your behalf. Many colleges keep track of these kinds of contacts, and students who are enthusiastic and persistent will get looked at first. Colleges want to admit students off the wait list who will accept the offer of admission.

### **Do colleges really care about your senior-year grades?**

Absolutely! Many colleges will not make a decision until receiving seventh-semester grades. They expect to see a performance that indicates you are ready for college-level work. The college at which you make your enrollment deposit will ask for a final transcript at the end of the senior year. (Admission letters often say something like, "Your admissions is contingent upon your , continued successful performance.") It is not at all rare for a college to withdraw an offer of admission when grades drop significantly over the course of the senior year. (I have a folder full of copies of these letters.)

Answers provided by Mary Lee Hoganson, a former counselor at Homewood-Flossmoor High School, Illinois, and Nadine K. Maxwell, a former coordinator of guidance services for Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia.

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