

COLLEGE COUNSELING MANUAL

FlexSchool Class of 2020

“College is a match to be made, not a prize to be won.”

- *Frank Sachs*

Overview

FlexSchool is committed to helping students gain admission to colleges and universities that fit their intellectual and personal abilities, interests, and aspirations. In its efforts to educate, counsel, support, and advocate for students throughout the college process, the school is guided by the philosophy succinctly articulated by veteran college counselor Frank Sachs that “college is a match to be made, not a prize to be won.” In short, fit is far more important than perceived prestige.

Teachers, advisors, and the college counselor will help students navigate this process. As educators, they are responsible for guiding students knowledgeably, and ethically. Their work is grounded in a deep respect for the individual worth, talents, and dreams of each Flex student. During the process, they will help students clarify their values, assess their strengths, and identify their post-secondary goals and then provide them and their parents with accurate information and realistic guidance about colleges and the college admission process. In addition, the school provides colleges with information about FlexSchool academics and students.

At Flex the college counseling process, like the curriculum, is tailored to individual student needs. Nevertheless, since the college process involves rules and policies set by colleges and universities, significant portions of the process are dictated by other institutions. For most students this will mean conformity to standardized testing in company of juniors and seniors throughout the country on national dates set by the College Board and/or the ACT. By administering the PSAT in October of sophomore year, Flex provides an initial standardized experience with no negative consequences. The college counselor, in consultation with teachers and advisors, will help develop an appropriate testing schedule based on student strengths and the requirements of those colleges to which they seek to gain admission. These may include the SAT or ACT junior and/or senior year, SAT Subject Tests and AP examinations (when appropriate based on coursework). In every case, the significance or insignificance of standardized testing for individual students is determined by a student’s goals in seeking admission to specific colleges and is not dictated by Flex.

To help the college counselor understand students’ goals, juniors are asked to complete a college questionnaire and an autobiographical essay. In addition, parents are invited to complete a questionnaire about their expectations for their students’ immediate post-secondary

years. Once these documents are submitted, students and parents meet with the college counselor.

At the initial meeting, which should occur in the spring of junior year, students and the counselor review transcripts, extracurricular activities, standardized test scores, summer plans, and most importantly, academic and personal interests, dreams, and goals and develop an initial list of colleges that fit the student's profile and preferences. In addition, the college counselor will suggest strategies for the next steps, including researching colleges, visiting campuses, interviewing, and writing the college essay. Students can schedule follow-up contacts (through RingCentral, telephone, texting, email, and in-person meetings) with the college counselor during the remainder of the spring semester and over the summer. Students are encouraged to visit colleges over spring break and during summer vacation.

In the fall of senior year, students should continue to contact the college counselor regularly to refine college lists, finalize plans for standardized testing and submitting applications, and confirm teacher references. In support of student applications, FlexSchool writes a letter of recommendation for each student. Following the submission of student applications, the college counselor monitors the progress of each student's candidacy to ensure that admissions officers are aware of a student's unique qualities and accomplishments. As decisions arrive during late March, the college counselor will assist families in understanding and processing admission and financial aid decisions and in ultimately selecting the option that seems best. Again, the word process is important. The decision made in the spring of senior year applies only to the first semester of college. Careers, life partners, personal happiness—and even the undergraduate diploma that a student earns—are NOT weighing in this balance.

A Shared Responsibility

Everyone involved in the college admission process has responsibilities. FlexSchool's job is to help students get started, to help them build an initial college list, and to make educated guesses about students' prospects at specific institutions. In addition, Flex aims to help both students and the colleges to which they apply evaluate student accomplishments, talents, and potential. The competitiveness of college admission has changed significantly in recent years, and sometimes the School's estimates of a student's chances of admission at a particular school will not square with parents' expectations. The Flex college counselor will always be honest and direct, provide families with the best information possible, and make the admission process as transparent as possible in a process that is always reliant on last year's news.

Students are responsible for doing research, visiting colleges, and meeting deadlines. Students are expected to ask questions and to share the challenges they encounter. Students should track and respond to all college correspondence and keep the college counselor and/or their advisors informed of important communications received from colleges.

Parents also have responsibilities in this process. They should provide objective sounding boards as students think out loud about their options. They should be honest about discussing their expectations and parameters and be supportive during this sometimes difficult and emotional process. Mindful that parents have a high emotional as well as financial stake in a child's college plans, it is certainly understandable that they may have strong feelings about one school or another. At different times in the process, parents play the roles of coach, consultant, confidant, cheerleader, realist, and executive secretary. All are important. However, just as Flex cannot "select" a college for each student, neither should parents. In the end, students must own their college process.

The amount of information and the number of college options currently available to American high school students can seem overwhelming. There are, for instance, about 2,500 four-year colleges and universities in the United States (25% public), and for most students there are many that would offer an acceptable fit. Students may consider many options at the beginning of the process and then, with the help of the college counselor and their parents, gradually narrow the field.

Finally, few students can safely apply to only one college. Most students should apply to 8-10 colleges to ensure that a final list includes schools of varying selectivity. A good balance of "reaches," "possibles," and "likelies" is essential. Students should aim high but temper dreams with realism. The college counselor will aid in achieving this balance.

Deciding Where To Apply

The first step in developing a list of potential colleges is to define the criteria that will make a college a good match for a student. The list below outlines factors that are typically used by students and college counselors to define institutions that are likely to be good fits. However, everyone is different and students should prioritize their own criteria and take time to think about them both independently and in discussions with parents and teachers.

One rule is universal, however: A student should never apply to a college he/she would not like to attend. A "likely" college becomes meaningless if it is a place a student would "never attend." Likewise, it is thoughtless to apply to a far-reach college just to collect a prestigious acceptance if that acceptance might eliminate someone who would truly like to enroll. Here are some factors students should consider when researching colleges to find the best fit:

Academic Programs

For most students, the first concern is—and should be—whether or not the college has the academic program they seek. It is not sufficient that the college simply offers a subject or program; it is important to evaluate the strength of the program and the department (courses, faculty, placement of graduates, facilities, research and internship opportunities, etc.). It is also important to explore the core requirements for graduation—at some colleges, majors in quantitative subjects have hefty English requirements or English majors must take at least one

quantitative subject. For some students, this is irrelevant, but for others, it can be a reason to eliminate a college.

Many students do not have a clear idea about choosing a major when they begin their college search, and that is just fine! Many students entering liberal arts programs are undecided, and many more change their minds about their major during their first two years in college. In contemplating possible majors, students should consider their academic strengths and interests and tentative thoughts about future careers. Individual college websites are invaluable resources for researching majors. Most colleges post their catalogues on their websites, and those documents will normally outline requirements for the major (and minor), possibilities for interdisciplinary study and self-determined majors, distribution requirements, and faculty credentials.

Type of Institution

Large or small? Rural or urban? Public or private? Religiously affiliated or not? Research institution or liberal arts? Graduate programs or not? Coeducational or a single-gender college? Good questions to ask before beginning a college search.

SINGLE GENDER vs. COEDUCATIONAL

The advantages of coeducational institutions are obvious, and a majority of students opt for a co-ed environment. But it is also important to consider the advantages of the other alternative before making a final choice. For example, at a woman's college the institution's energy, resources, and facilities are devoted entirely to women. Career counseling is committed to placing women in the job market. Student leadership positions are all assumed by females. Research assistant positions with faculty go to women. All financial aid is assigned to women. There are very few all-male colleges left, but the ones there are have long traditions and dedicated, loyal alumni who provide excellent networking opportunities.

PUBLIC vs. PRIVATE

Although tuition at public universities is generally lower than at private institutions, financial aid may equalize this difference. Size, diversity among students and offerings, campus culture, residential programs, study abroad opportunities, administrative control, four-year graduation rates, and admission criteria are therefore important factors to consider when deciding between a public and a private college.

SIZE OF THE INSTITUTION

There are colleges with 500 students and others with 50,000. While the quality of a college is not determined by its size, student enjoyment of it may be. Here are some of the factors that may be affected by the size of the institution:

- Extent of course and program offerings; including study abroad
- Diversity of student body and faculty
- Faculty/Student ratio
- Class size, particularly in introductory courses
- Dependence on graduate teaching assistants
- Academic and social contact with students and faculty
- Availability and accessibility of facilities
- Involvement in leadership and extracurricular activities
- Campus culture and dependence on social structures (fraternities, sororities, etc.)
- Degree of personal discipline, independence, and initiative required of a student
- Classroom interaction or academic support
- Range of residential options

LOCATION

Another factor is location. Some settings fit one student better than others—urban, suburban, rural? What part of the country? How far from home? Attending a college in another part of the country or even abroad can significantly add to an educational experience, yet there may be important reasons to stay closer to home. Location may be unimportant to some students, but to others, it is critical. It is unwise to apply to a college or university in a place that sounds romantic, but is in an area the student has never visited. Furthermore, attending a college far from home may add significantly to college costs.

FACILITIES

The availability and condition of campus facilities should also be considered. The facilities in a particular academic area may reflect the strength of the program and the college's commitment to it. There are also practical considerations: an astronomy major will want an observatory; readily available practice rooms are a must for the music major. If living in a single-sex dorm is important, the college should have one. Looking at the libraries, information technology resources, the condition of the dorms and classrooms, and even the grounds are telling indications of a school's resources, priorities, and management.

SELECTIVITY

Understanding a college's selectivity relative to the applicant's qualifications is very important in making a realistic assessment of a student's chance for admission. While many college guides explicitly categorize colleges by their selectivity, rankings are often heavily based on average test scores, GPA information, and the acceptance rate (the percent of applicants admitted out of those who apply). These rankings, of course, do not tell everything about the quality of either

the college or its applicants. Highly selective colleges do not accept every applicant who presents perfect SAT scores. The college counselor can help students understand what each college is looking for in addition to academic qualifications and also evaluate when a college is just not a realistic choice.

The guidelines below may be helpful in determining selectivity in general:

- **Highly Selective** - In this group, about four-fifths are independent (private) colleges. In the past several years, however, more and more state-supported institutions are falling into this category. For instance, the Universities of Michigan, Virginia, California, and North Carolina are highly selective, particularly for out-of-state applicants. (In fact, most public colleges and universities have different and more selective admission criteria for out-of-state students.)

Because colleges in this group are well known and have more qualified applications than spaces, they are difficult to enter. To be considered for admission, an applicant must typically meet the following requirements:

- Have a well-balanced program of at least 20 academic courses. Colleges in this category expect students to pursue at least four of the five traditional academic disciplines - science, mathematics, English, history/social studies and foreign languages – through senior year and to be advanced in two or three areas.
- Earn grades in the A range in most subjects.
- Have good recommendations and a thoughtful, well-presented application.
- Give evidence of maturity, purpose, and desire to learn. Internships, independent study, employment, travel, and summer study are often evidence of these traits.
- Have test scores to support the classroom record.
- Show evidence of something other than study. A student may have a special interest in one or more extracurricular activities, have done volunteer work, or have an unusual talent or interest in an area that might intrigue the admission committee or benefit the college.

Within this category, there is a wide range of selectivity, from those institutions that accept fewer than 50 percent of their applicants to those that accept fewer than 10 percent. Schools that fall in the most highly competitive range (i.e., they accept under 20 percent of the applicant pool) are in the luxurious position of rejecting most of their applicants for seemingly trivial reasons. They annually reject applicants whose scores are perfect, whose grades have never fallen below an A- and who have a wealth of extracurricular activities and interests.

- **Selective** - This includes many institutions, 40 percent of which are public universities. The majority of private colleges in this group have between 1,000 and 10,000 students. Successful applicants ordinarily:
 - Have earned good grades (A's and B's) in at least 90 percent of all academic courses with no D's or failures. All colleges expect higher grades in the junior and senior years.
 - Demonstrate a serious desire to learn.
 - Have test scores in the top quarter to third of college-bound seniors.
 - Have contributed to some voluntary extracurricular activity at a leadership level.
- **Less Selective** - This group includes four-year and two-year colleges, many of which have exciting programs to offer, often in career-oriented programs. To be admitted a student should:
 - Have a particular talent or desire to pursue a specific area along with, or instead of, liberal arts.
 - Have at least a C average. Colleges in this category are most interested in the applicant's qualifications for the specific area of interest to which he/she is applying.

These colleges draw able, well-prepared students, many of whom continue study at the graduate level. However, these colleges are willing to give students with a strong desire and a reasonable record an opportunity to learn. Often colleges in this group provide strong guidance in selecting courses, making decisions, and adjusting to college demands.

- **Specialized Colleges or Programs** - For some students who have a specific talent and a strong desire to spend most of their waking hours developing this ability, it might be worthwhile to investigate special schools or colleges, such as Rhode Island School of Design, Juilliard, or North Carolina School for the Arts.

The College Visit

A campus visit for a tour, information session, and an interview is one of the most helpful ways of learning about a college. Not only does the visit enable students to see the physical setting and the facilities of the college, but often allows them to meet students, faculty, and staff.

Although many college admission offices argue that the best time to visit a college is when it is in session, for the sake of academics schedule summer visits are optimal. This is a good time to participate in campus tours and information sessions. It is also a more relaxed time to interview if such opportunities are available. Fall visits and open house programs can then be used for

more in-depth explorations of a few colleges. Absences for fall college visits should be kept to a minimum. It is always the student's responsibility to inform teachers of any intended absence and to make up any missed work.

College visits should be planned judiciously. Because college admission office appointment calendars fill up fast, fall appointments should be scheduled during the summer. Here are some tips on getting the most out of a campus visit:

- Call or email the admission office to request an interview and a tour of the campus. Many colleges allow students to sign up for an interview through their website.
- There may be times, particularly when the admission office is making admission decisions in February and March, that appointments are not granted. In this case, the opportunity for a tour and a group information session is usually still possible.
- If the college allows it, sit in on a class.
- To spend the night in the dorm, make arrangements through the admission office at the college. Fewer and fewer colleges offer overnight visits before students are admitted.
- Students with a special talent--e.g., in music, athletics, visual arts or dance—should arrange in advance to see faculty or coaches involved in their particular area(s) of interest.
- In touring the campus, pay special attention to the library, campus bookstore, housing units, dining facilities, grounds, recreational facilities, classrooms and laboratories.
- Read the student newspaper. Try to find other student publications—department newsletters, alternative newspapers, literary reviews. These can usually be found in the student union/center.
- Scan bulletin boards to see what day-to-day student life is like.
- Eat a meal or a snack in a college-run dining facility.
- Visit the student center. Talk with as many people as possible to get their impressions of the institution. Ask a student what he/she does on weekends. Listen to the college's radio station. Caution: One person's view is not the college's view nor is the weather that day necessarily the norm. The immediate conditions encountered on the visit should not overly prejudice a student's reaction to the college.
- Walk or drive around the community surrounding the campus.

The Interview

An admission interview can improve a student's chances; if the interview is conducted by a member of the admissions staff, that person will one day be reading the student's application and voting on his/her admission. However, many schools are now so overwhelmed by applications that the interview is no longer required or even recommended; in fact, some colleges no longer grant interviews. It is important to determine the interview policy at each of college the student plans to visit. Whenever possible, students should take advantage of any opportunities to interview. Interviewing provides an opportunity for students to signal their

interest in a particular college. Some colleges will also offer students the option of meeting with an area alumnus/a for an interview.

An interview provides students with an opportunity to:

- Ask questions concerning academic programs, study abroad, the social landscape, academic support, etc.
- Explain an academic challenge revealed on a transcript.
- Speak with enthusiasm about particular passions.
- Provide context for unusual choices made during high school (such as changing schools, dropping a core class, adding a particular extracurricular activity, etc.).
- Make a memorable, favorable impression.

General Rules of Thumb:

- Call colleges at least a few weeks in advance of a visit to inquire about interviewing. Many colleges fill their interview slots early, especially in the fall. Ask if it is possible to schedule an interview with the admissions officer who reads files from New Jersey/Connecticut.
- Even if a student cannot interview, be sure to stop by the admission office to pick up information, take a tour. Be sure to register with the receptionist; this is a simple way of “demonstrating interest.”
- Allow plenty of extra time to get to the interview. Tardiness does not contribute to a good first impression.
- Try to schedule the first interview at a safety school. This allows for some practice where the stakes are perhaps not as high.

Making a Good Impression:

- Be natural!
- In most cases, formal dress is not expected; students should appear comfortable, authentic, and respectful of the interviewer and the importance of the occasion. Maintain good eye contact.
- Be conscious of posture; sit up straight.
- Turn off cell phones. Put headphones away.
- Listen actively; try not to fidget, chew gum, look out the window, etc.
- Smile and show enthusiasm about the college.
- Answer with openness and honesty. Do not talk too much in response to a simple question, but also do not give one word or phrase answers to questions that call for a more thoughtful response.
- Most interviews last about a half hour, and most will cover a student’s interest in the college, academic background and interests, and extracurricular involvement in school and outside of school. Time will be left at the end of the interview to cover any questions

the student may have that have not already been answered. This is a lot to cover in a half hour. Do not be disconcerted if the interview is shorter than expected; sometimes this is more a reflection of the interviewer's style than of her/his judgment.

- Frame responses positively. When describing a challenging situation, focus on growth and lessons learned. Avoid blaming others.
- Speak with economy, specificity, and confidence; try to avoid slang such as "like," "you know," "cool," "umm"...
- Have ready two or three specific, intelligent questions about the college that cover information not readily available on the school's website or in its view book. Avoid obvious questions such as "Do you have a math requirement here?" Instead, look at current news and program information on their website and ask specific questions such as "I noticed that Dr. Bang just received a grant from NASA for his rocket fuel project; will there be an opportunity for undergraduates to work on this project?" or "In general, how are undergraduates chosen for research projects in the physics department?"
- Students who control the direction of the conversation stand out. Before going to the interview, students should think about what aspects of their candidacy they want to highlight and during the interview they should try to move the conversation in those directions.
- Again, be natural and act normal!

A Word for Parents:

College admission officers believe that where a student goes to college is mostly her/his own decision; they are generally not interested in speaking with parents beyond a quick hello and answering quick questions at the end of the interview. Do not expect to be invited in to the interviewer's office; remain in the waiting area during the interview. In the college process parents are their children's coaches; they belong on the sidelines, not in the game.

Sample Interview Questions:

1. Why are you considering this college?
2. What makes you think that this college would be a good match?
3. Where else are you applying and why?
4. What do you hope to major in?
5. What do you expect to be doing ten years from now?
6. How do you define "success?"
7. What have you liked or disliked about your school? What would you change?
8. How would you describe yourself to someone who did not know you?
9. What newspapers and magazines do you read?
10. What books not required for school have you read recently?
11. What television shows do you watch?
12. Tell us about your family.
13. How do you spend a typical afternoon after school? Evening? Weekend?

14. What extracurricular activities have you found most satisfying?
15. What are your strengths? Weaknesses? What has been your proudest achievement so far?
16. If you could talk with anyone living (or deceased) person, who would it be and why?
17. What events have been crucial in your life?
18. What is the most important thing you've learned in high school?
19. What mark do you feel you've left on your school?
20. What do you want to get out of your college experience?
21. What about you is unique? What could you contribute to our college community?
22. Talk about a significant challenge you have encountered.
23. Is there anything you'd like to tell us about your transcript?
24. What is your greatest passion?
25. How would your friends describe you?
26. If you had high school to do over again, what might you have done differently?

After the Interview:

It is a good practice for students to send a personal note or email to the interviewer thanking him or her for the interview. Emailing the tour guide a quick thank you is also appropriate. These are opportunities to give positive feedback on the visit, citing things about the college that impressed the student and deepened his/her interest in attending the college.

College Applications And The Admission Process

The Application Form

The application form is the initial step in applying to college. Most students today submit their applications electronically, and the Common Application is typically the vehicle they use. On August 1 rising seniors can register at <http://www.commonapp.org> to set up an individual account. The Common Application Deadlines and Requirements Grid (located under download forms) provides a helpful way to organize the various segments of an application. It is also a good practice to visit individual college web sites to make sure the information at the Common App. site is accurate.

The application form requests demographic data, family information, academic history, standardized test results, extracurricular involvements, work experiences, future plans, and academic and career interests. Most selective colleges also require an application essay of no more than 650 words and a supplement that may require one or more additional essays. These essays are read both for content and for spelling, grammar, voice, organization, etc. Most colleges also require an application fee ranging from \$25-\$75.

Colleges hope the application provides students the opportunity to express their interests, values, ability to write, and ability to think. Consequently, completing applications requires significant time and energy. Students should present their strengths without being boastful. Throughout the application, it is important that they be honest, thorough, concise, neat, and attentive to directions. Students should finish a draft of their application(s) well before the deadline for submitting it, leaving plenty of time for revision after consultation with the college counselor and/or advisor.

Remember that college applications are a student responsibility. It is critical that applications be done completely and filed on time. Setting preliminary deadlines in advance of official deadlines serves most students well.

Types of Applications

Early Decision (ED): When a student has a clear first-choice college, and the college is realistic based upon his/her record, it can be advantageous to apply via a binding ED plan. Selective colleges have recently admitted greater percentages of their upcoming freshman class through ED admissions. They have also increasingly utilized ED II plans. Students may apply to only one college under ED I, but if deferred or rejected under an ED I plan, may apply to another school under ED II. Whether accepted to a school under ED I or ED II, the student must enroll. Students may apply to other colleges (either Early Action or Regular Decision) while the ED application is pending, but once admitted under ED, must withdraw all other applications immediately. Most ED I deadlines fall on November 1 or 15, and colleges notify candidates by mid-December. Most ED II deadlines occur in early to mid-January with notifications sent in mid-February.

Early Action (EA): Early Action works just like Early Decision with the significant exception that it does not require a binding commitment to enroll if accepted. EA application deadlines are similar to ED deadlines, but accepted students have until May 1 to enroll. One or two very highly selective institutions have instituted Single Choice Early Action or Restricted Early Action (REA), a plan that limits students to just one early action application. Even though EA is not binding, most students accepted under an EA plan will attend that college.

Priority: Some colleges (mostly large public universities) have early deadlines for regular application. Students who apply by the priority deadline receive first consideration for admission and housing.

Regular Decision: This is the application round in which most students apply to colleges. Generally, regular decision deadlines range from January 1 to February 15. Most colleges notify regular decision applicants in late March or early April and require a commitment from accepted students on or before May 1.

Rolling Admission: Some colleges notify applicants on an ongoing basis shortly after receiving the application (4-6 weeks). There is no enrollment commitment required before May 1 under such a plan.

The Secondary School Report

Most applications include a secondary school report, which must be completed by the college counselor and the head of school.

The secondary school report includes:

1. The student's waiver of right of access to the information provided.
2. A brief identification of the student and the school and a description of the grading system.
3. A school profile to ensure that admission officers fully understand FlexSchool's academic program and environment.
4. A transcript of courses taken (grades 9-12) either at Flex or at previous high schools and the grades earned in each course. In most cases, the transcript that goes with the secondary school report will include grades earned through the first quarter of the senior year.

In accordance with FlexSchool policy, grade point average and rank in class are not reported to students or colleges. In addition, the school does not complete the personal qualities rating grid on the secondary school report.

Read the instructions on the secondary school report form(s) carefully. If applying via paper application, be sure to give the hard copy of the secondary school report form to the college counselor. **It is a student's responsibility to complete the student information section of this and all other forms handed over to others to be completed. Also, students should be sure to sign the waiver of access option.**

After Colleges Make Their Decisions, Students Make Theirs

Acceptance: Students should update their advisors and the college counselor about any and all decision letters or emails from colleges. Acceptances are exciting! In the midst of that excitement, students should take care to read all of the fine print, including making careful note of the reply date for responding to an acceptance. It is students' responsibility to notify all colleges where they have been offered admission whether or not they will accept each offer **no later than May 1**. No student may enroll at more than one college, and only one final transcript will be sent to a college for each senior. When students receive offers of admission from waiting lists, they must withdraw from the colleges at which they were earlier enrolled and enroll in the college that accepted them from its waiting list. If it is after May 1, the student may lose any deposit his/her family may have made.

Deferral Under Early Decision: If an ED application is deferred, it will be reconsidered in the regular applicant pool, and the student will receive a decision at the same time that regular applicants are notified. While it is possible that the outcome of an ED deferral could be a waiting list decision, most colleges try to make a firm decision (accept or deny) and avoid putting a student off yet one more time. Students who are deferred under ED are released from their binding commitments and are free to consider other offers of admission. (On rare, but increasingly more frequent, occasions ED applicants are rejected in the early round.)

Waiting List: Students who have been placed on a college's waiting list should discuss the advisability of staying on that waiting list with the college counselor and, if advised to do so, with the college, itself, before signaling their intention to remain on the waiting list. In most cases, colleges will not move to their waiting lists until after responses to their initial offers of admission are received on or shortly after May 1. They normally complete waiting list action by June 1.

Denial: If a student has been denied admission to a college, the decision is, unfortunately, final and ordinarily not subject to appeal. Remember: students who are denied admission are in the majority at highly selective and selective colleges.

Deferring Enrollment: Most colleges will allow students to defer enrollment for a year for the purpose of pursuing a special interest or experience. In general, students are expected to honor their commitment to matriculate at that college at the end of the "gap year" and not use the year to apply to other colleges. Students who have received financial aid offers must reapply for aid for the following year by the appropriate deadlines.

N.B. Colleges expect students to keep up their academic work through the end of their senior year. All college acceptances are contingent on the completion of the senior year at the same level on which the offer of admission was made. Colleges can rescind an offer of admission if the final transcript (sent by Flex in June) reflects significant deterioration of academic performance. Students are usually obligated to notify colleges of any significant disciplinary action during the spring semester.

Seven Factors Colleges Consider When Making Decisions

College admission decisions can seem capricious or random, but here is a straightforward analysis of what most colleges take into consideration when they evaluate an application.

1. The single most important credential in an application file is the academic record; colleges focus most particularly on the junior year and the first half of the senior year. Admission chances can be enhanced by showing improvement during this time, marking the student as being "on the way up." It is important to keep in mind, however, that college admission officers scrutinize the entire high school academic record. As they do,

they evaluate the strength of a student's academic program as well as the grades earned in that program.

2. Standardized tests required by colleges are important, even though an increasing number of colleges are making them optional. Catalogue and interview rhetoric notwithstanding, the vast majority of schools pay real attention to the SAT and Subject Test or ACT scores (when they are required) because they constitute an easy way of comparing students from a wide range of high schools and backgrounds. At highly competitive colleges the tests are often a discriminator among many highly qualified candidates.
3. When a highly selective university processes 20,000 to 30,000 applications, and accepts fewer than 15% of its applicants, scores take on added importance and become a tool to differentiate among similarly and highly qualified students. This is true to a greater or lesser degree at all competitive colleges that are not score-optional.
4. Extracurricular activities both at school and outside of school play a role in the admission process. Colleges frequently state they look for the unusual student who will make a significant contribution to the college's classrooms and community (often referred to as the "angular" student who helps to make a "well-rounded class"). Because 70 percent to 80 percent of all the candidates at competitive colleges can handle the academic side of things, colleges are often looking for that extra dimension—musicians, editors, actors, photographers, athletes and others with a well-developed talent that will enrich a college community. Students with superior ability in a specialized area receive careful consideration by the admission committee and sometimes by the relevant department(s) at the college.
5. The personal and supplemental essays are the most difficult aspects of applying to a college, and they can be critical factors in the admission decisions. Colleges read student essays very carefully. Essays that are bland, overwrought, sloppy, poorly organized, poorly written, or pretentious can hurt even a strong candidate's chances. Good essays bring an application to life through engaging topics, lively and lean writing, a strong and clear sense of voice, keen observation, and perceptive self-reflection. Students should carefully adhere to the application directions. If a college wants a 300-500 word essay, don't submit one that's 250 or 750 words long. Answer the supplemental questions succinctly, but directly. Avoid generic responses such as "I loved X College's courses/location/students/dormitories/field house." Be specific!
6. For most colleges, recommendations are an essential part of each applicant's file. The exception to this rule may be large public universities where written recommendations are either not required or not given as much weight as they are at smaller, highly selective private colleges. Colleges want recommendations to describe not only students' achievement and skills, but also their character, integrity, and patterns of growth. Well over 90% of all teacher recommendations are positive, so the ones that

play an important role in the selection process are those that show in detail that the recommenders know the student well and are willing to underscore in detail her/his potential in specific areas. Because of the small classes at Flex and the close working relationship between students and faculty, students will be particularly well-served by their teachers' recommendations.

7. Children of alumni/ae receive careful consideration at most colleges. The obvious reason is that any institution benefits immeasurably by having some students who represent a continuing tradition of loyalty and understanding (and annual support). A family tie does not guarantee admission, but "legacy" candidates are insured an extra look. If there is such a thing as two equal candidates, the legacy will probably have the edge. Remember, however, that legacy candidates must still meet a college's high academic and personal standards and often must compete against other legacies in the admission process.

At many colleges, on-campus interviews are very helpful to both student and college. For more information about interviews, see above.

Taking A Year Off

Some students are not yet ready to settle down to life at a university or college right after high school. One option is to take a year off, which is known as a "gap year." For most students, it makes sense to apply to colleges during senior year even as they explore potential gap year activities. There are numerous ways to spend a year off such as volunteer work, educational opportunities, and work options.