

Section 1: Introduction

At HCS, we understand that students take different paths after they graduate. The majority of HCS graduates go on to some form of post-secondary education or training. Therefore, the Counseling Department felt that it would be helpful for students and parents/guardians to have a comprehensive written guide that outlines the college search and application process.

The Hamilton Central School College Planning Guide is designed to help both students and parents/guardians navigate the college application process. The process of applying to college is about planning, preparation and patience. The information in this guide will be most relevant to students at the beginning of their junior year. When this process begins it will vary from student to student. Some families choose to begin the college search process as freshman and sophomores, while others may delve into the process in the junior year.

For an overview of the timing of the college process at HCS from freshman through senior year, see [*Appendix 1- HCS College Timeline*](#).

One of the ways we deliver information to our families is through our annual College and Financial Aid night which is held each fall. We invite junior and senior students and parents/guardians to come for an informative evening centered on college admissions and financial aid. We typically have admissions representatives from a private college and a SUNY college and a college financial aid officer who present on these topics. In addition our school counselors will walk families through the HCS college application process.

The Counseling Department guides and supports students as they navigate the college search and admission process. This guide is a supplement to the direct and personal support given by our school counselors through individual and group meetings, discussions and presentations.

We hope this guide is helpful to our HCS families even if you have navigated this process before.

Section 2: Beginning the College Search

You may be wondering how to begin. One of the most important things you can do is to ask yourself some questions that only you know the answers to.

Take time to think about what matters to *you*, what *you* want, and how to take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead. Think about the following questions and discuss them as a family:

- *What are my goals and values with respect to my education?
- *What are my personal and academic strengths and weaknesses?
- *Why do I want to go to college?
- *What do I want from college? (What talents/interests would I like to develop? What new things would I like to try in college?)
- *How do I learn best? What kind of learning environment am I looking for?
- *What degree of academic challenge is best for me? What balance of study, social life and activities do I prefer?
- *What college setting are you most interested in? Urban? Suburban? Rural?
- *How involved do I want my parents/guardians to be in the process of applying to college?

Keep in mind that your answers to these questions may change over the course of the process, but your answers at this time will give you a baseline from which to work. They will help guide you in your thinking about what type of college you might want to visit, apply to, what questions to ask, and help you ultimately choose a college that is the best fit for you.

Parents/guardians: It is also important that you think about some of these questions and discuss them as a family:

- *Are there geographic, financial or other constraints that should be addressed with your child at the onset of this process?
- *How do you envision being involved in the process? Are you and your child's expectations the same?
- *Do you have specific expectations of where and what type of colleges you want your child to attend?

The college search process can be a time of parents/guardians and their child to connect with each other. Communicate, support, make suggestions, and help your child plan, encourage self-exploration, and listen to your child when their opinion may differ from yours. Your child's independence, self-awareness and confidence can grow as you go through the college search and application process!

Section 3: College Visits

Your junior year is a great time to begin compiling a list of colleges that you want to visit. The goal is to create a list of colleges based on your current academic standing and your answers to the questions in section 2.

College Search Factors

In addition to the questions you considered in section 2, please read through the list below for more detailed factors to consider when beginning your search process.

Major/Career Goals

- What are your areas of academic interest?
- Double majors/minors?
- Special programs (conservatory, nursing, ROTC, etc.)

Size

- What is your preferred size? (college visits may help with this!)

Location/Transportation

- Specific region?
- Urban, suburban or rural?
- Nearest city, airport?
- Cars on campus?
- Public transportation?

College Type and Setting

- 4 year/2 year/Community College?
- Private/Public?
- Military Academy?
- Co-ed, male, female?
- Religious affiliation?

Housing

- Do you want to live on or off campus?
- Percentage of students who live on campus?
- What types of housing options are available? (learning communities, fraternities, single sex living, substance free, etc.) Housing specifically for freshman?

Admissions Selectivity

- What is your GPA? Standardized test scores?
- Do you want Early Action, Rolling, Early Decision options?
- How does this fit into your balanced list of colleges? (“reach,” “good match” and “safety”)?

Academic Environment

- Who teaches courses, especially to freshmen?
- Average class size?
- Is it important that the college offer an honors program?
- Are there any unique classes/travel abroad/co-op opportunities you are interested in?
- Are academic support services available?
- Are there career planning services available?

Student Life

- What is your ideal ethnic mix/diversity?
- Female/Male ratio?
- What activities and/or athletics are you likely to participate in?

Admissions Requirements

- SAT and/or ACT, SAT subject tests, GPA?
- Essays/Letters of Recommendation?
- Interview requirement?
- Test optional schools?
- Required high school courses?

College Expenses/Financial Aid

- How much will it cost? Include tuition, room and board, application fees, deposits.
- Books, additional fees, travel costs to home?
- In-State vs. Out of State tuition?
- How important is the availability of financial aid?
- Need-based, merit based scholarships?

College search websites offer opportunities to narrow a list of colleges based on specific search criteria (geographical area, size, 2 year/4 year, major, etc.)

Please see [Appendix 2](#) for a list of websites that are useful in the college search process.

College Websites

Looking at individual college websites is a great way to find detailed information about each school. Since admissions requirements and deadlines vary from school to school, they are also important resources to use when looking for specific admissions requirements for each college (check out the undergraduate admissions pages!). College websites will include many pictures of the campus, and most will offer a virtual tour. Colleges are also required to have a net-price calculator on their webpage, which will help you to estimate the cost of attendance. You can also use the website to complete an online form requesting additional information from the college and to be put on the college's mailing list.

College Visits/Open Houses

It is important to have some form of contact with each college you are considering. This typically begins during the junior year (and in some cases earlier). Some, *but not all*, colleges have begun to include demonstrated interest as one of their many considerations for admissions. Contact with an Admissions Representative can be done in numerous ways including: meeting with admissions representatives in the HCS Counseling Office, college fairs, contact through the website, and on-campus visits.

- **Admissions representatives** meet with students in the Counseling Office throughout the school year (but primarily in the fall). These visits are advertised on the counseling department website, on the daily bulletin, in the English 12 classroom, and in the counseling office. Students who are interested in meeting with an admissions representative should get a pass from his/her teacher and be prompt! If a student is interested but unable to attend, he/she should see the school counselor who will get information from the college and alert the college of the student's interest.
- **College fairs** are held throughout the area and throughout the year. Typically college fairs are open in the day and in the evening. Students and their families have the opportunity to talk with admissions representatives from the colleges in attendance, express interest in the college, and get information from each college. We take all juniors to the National Association for College Admissions Counseling annual college fair in Syracuse in the spring of each year. We highly recommend that all juniors attend.
- **On-Campus Visits** are highly encouraged and recommended if at all possible. For students who are having a difficult time deciding what kind of college they may be interested in, college visits can be a great starting point. We have many types of colleges right here in the Syracuse area: private, SUNY, community, vocational, etc. The colleges in this area also vary in size. Exploring the colleges in this area can give you a feel for the type of college and setting you may be most interested in.

For students who know which colleges they are interested in, a college visit can help you and your families get a better sense of the college community, location, and experiences available to you. You will be able to see what kind of "vibe" you get from the college.

Formal visits are visits that are documented in some way through the College Admissions Office. They can be in the form of an official college tour, overnight stay, classroom visit, open houses, and personal or group information sessions. Open houses are typically scheduled in both the fall and spring semesters and dates are published on college websites. Open houses typically include a tour of the campus, admissions and/or financial aid presentations, and an opportunity to meet with faculty from each department. Contact the Admissions Office or visit the website to schedule a visit.

Informal visits are visits that are not scheduled through the Admissions Office. They may include a visit or overnight stay with a family member or friend or an impromptu drive through a college campus.

Tips:

- With both kinds of visits, it's a good idea to check out bulletin boards, newspapers, and other places that give you an idea of what activities are going on campus. Don't hesitate to ask college students questions- they are usually open to offering opinions. It's also a good idea to take a look at the cafeteria and drive through the area surrounding the college.
- If possible, it's best to visit colleges when they are in session to get the best feel for what the atmosphere is like. If that is not possible visits are still a good idea, even if classes are not in full swing. Typically HS winter and spring breaks are a good time.
- If you are planning college visits, don't try to schedule more than 2 (or 3) per day...you will likely be tired at the end of the day and may not give your last visit your full attention.
- Be open to colleges that may not have been on your original list. As you visit colleges your list of what you are and aren't looking for will become clearer.
- Make a good impression (but still be yourself)! If meeting with someone from Admissions, look presentable, ask for contact information (if you are still interested in the college) and consider sending a thank you note.
- Develop some specific questions that you plan to ask all colleges. You can use our "**Questions to Ask...**" handout in **Appendix 3** for a list of questions to consider. Also, feel free to ask questions specific to each college.
- Go as a family if possible and compare notes afterward. Students: let your parents ask some questions too!
- It's a good idea to compare the colleges you are visiting. You can use our **College Comparisons** handout in **Appendix 4** as a starting point.

Section 4: Your College List

Your Final List

After completing a college search and (hopefully) having the chance to visit a few colleges, it is time to begin creating your final list of colleges that you will apply to. We recommend applying to a minimum of three colleges. In addition to finding a school that is a good fit in terms of your academic, extracurricular and social needs, it is critical to include a range of schools in terms of selectivity. A balanced list includes colleges that fall into three categories: reach, good match, and safety schools.

Reach Schools: A reach school is one where your academic credentials (grades and SAT/ACT scores) fall in the lower end, or even below, the school's average range for the cohort of students accepted the previous year. Reach schools are long-shots, but they should still be possible.

Good Match Schools: A match school is one where your academic credentials (grades and SAT/ACT scores) fall well within the school's average range for the most recently accepted class. There are no guarantees, but it's not unreasonable to expect to be accepted to several of your match schools.

Safety Schools: A safety school is one where your academic credentials (grades and SAT/ACT scores) exceed the school's range for the average freshman. You should be reasonably certain that you will be admitted to your safety schools.

*All of the schools on your final list of schools to apply to should be colleges that you would truly be **happy to attend!**

Please see Appendix 5 for Reach Match and Safety criteria.

In addition to admissions criteria, it's a good idea to think about financial aid when creating your list of safety schools - make sure there is at least one school that you know your family can afford on that list. However, don't let the cost of attendance deter you from applying to a particular college. Often, private colleges with a higher cost of attendance also have more financial aid and scholarships to award. Don't hesitate to contact the financial aid offices of the schools you are interested in!

Section 5: Standardized Testing

Many, but not all, colleges require students to submit standardized test scores as part of the application. These may include the SAT, ACT, and SAT Subject Tests. Understanding the testing requirements and the process involved will hopefully make the experience as stress-free and successful as possible. Keep in mind that it is a student's academic achievement, (rigor of high school courses and GPA) and not test scores that is the most important factor in college admissions.

There are an increasing number of colleges that do not require standardized tests for admissions. A list of these colleges can be found on www.fairtest.org. For specific information on a college's requirements please visit its website.

The Digital SAT

The Digital exam is a standardized test widely used for college admissions in the United States. The exam length is approximately two hours. It will include two sections (Reading and Writing, Math) with a break in between. The total score ranges from 400-1600 with a possible 200-800 on each the Reading and Writing and Math sections. The optional Essay is scored separately. For more information, please go to: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat?navId=gh-sat>

The Digital PSAT/NMSQT

The PSAT/NMSQT is a practice for the SAT and is geared toward juniors. This test also serves as a qualifying test for the National Merit Scholarship competition. We recommend that ALL juniors take the PSAT, which is administered at HCS in the fall of their junior year. Students sign up for the test in the Counseling Office. Like the SAT, the PSAT/NMSQT is made up of a Reading and Writing Test and a Math Test. Total scores range from 320-1520 with a possible score of 160-760 in each section.

To find out more about the PSAT/NMSQT, please go to:

<https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/psat-nmsqt-psat-10/inside-the-test>

ACT

The ACT is a standardized test used for college admissions. It consists of four sections—English, Math, Reading, and Science—plus an optional writing test. With the exception of the writing section, the test is entirely multiple choice: the math questions have five answer choices and the others all have four. For each section of the ACT, you'll get a raw score, which is the number of questions you get right. That is then converted into a scaled score between 1 and 36. **The composite score is simply the average of your four section scores** (the writing is left out because it's optional). Total test time is 3 hours and 30 minutes or 4 hours with the option Writing Section.

For more information about the ACT, please go to: www.actstudent.org.

PreACT

The PreACT is a practice for the ACT and is geared towards sophomores. We recommend that ALL sophomores take the PreACT, which is administered at HCS in the spring. Students sign up for the test in the Counseling Office. Like the ACT, the PreACT is made up of four sections—English, Math, Reading, and Science. It is 1 hour and 55 minutes long and there is not an essay option for the PreACT. Total scores range from 1-36 just as the ACT is scored.

To find out more about the PreACT, please go to:

<https://www.act.org/content/act/en/students-and-parents/class-of-2021.html>

Questions to consider when thinking about standardized testing:

1. What tests should I take?

We recommend that students consider taking a practice SAT and a practice ACT. These can be found online or in the HCS Counseling Office. Taking these practice tests allows the students to compare test content, question style, and format. When taking the practice tests be sure to adhere to the time limits set for each section. When students decide which test they are most comfortable with, they should register to take that exam. Since the current version of the SAT is new as of March 2016, at this time we are still advising students to take both the SAT and ACT *with* writing until we have a better understanding of whether the colleges prefer to have students test with or without the writing section (which will be based on how each college plans to use the writing score).

2. When should I take the SAT/ACT?

We recommend that students take the SAT or ACT in the spring of their junior year. This allows students the opportunity review their scores and determine if they wish to test again in the fall of their senior year. The SAT/ACT are offered many times during the year, but they are not offered every month or over the summer. Make sure to check the website when planning your testing. *Please note that students can begin taking the SAT Subject Tests as early as their sophomore year. We recommend taking the exam soon after completing the coursework in that particular subject.

3. How should I prepare for the tests?

Students can prepare for the SAT and ACT by taking practice exams and utilizing online tools through www.collegeboard.org and www.actstudent.org. If students have taken the PSAT 10 or PSAT, they can login to their CollegeBoard account to use free personalized SAT study tools (geared specifically to each student based on their individual test results) through Khan Academy. Additionally, there are some hard copies of practice test available in the Counseling Office and resources available for purchase through the CollegeBoard and ACT. Colgate University also runs an SAT prep course each year (January-May) called *Let's Get Ready*. This program prepares students for the May SAT. For more information about how to register for the *Let's Get Ready* program, please stop by the Counseling Office.

4. How do I register for the tests?

Students are responsible for their own registration for the SAT, SAT Subject tests, and ACT. Registering is done through www.collegeboard.org or www.actstudent.org. Hamilton is not a test site, but there are nearby testing centers at other local high schools. Test sites fill up so plan ahead to register early. Make sure you will be able to get to the testing site on the time given Saturday morning. Students will sign up for the PSAT 10 and PSAT/NMSQ in the Counseling Office at HCS. Registration fees are listed on the respective websites. If the fees are a financial hardship, you may be eligible for a fee waiver. See your school counselor for more information.

*Note that you cannot take the SAT and the SAT Subject Tests on the same day. You can take up to 3 subject tests on a test day.

5. How do I receive and send my scores?

It takes approximately two to three weeks to receive your scores from CollegeBoard. The ACT takes approximately three weeks, and can take an additional two weeks for the writing section to be scored. Some colleges, but not all, require official test scores. **Students are responsible for sending their SAT and/or ACT to the colleges of their choice.** Scores are sent through www.collegeboard.org or www.actstudent.org. It can take up to 10 days (from the time they are officially available to you) for scores to arrive at a college, so plan carefully based on the due dates for your colleges. Scores are also listed on student transcripts, unless otherwise requested. Super Scoring: Many colleges have a practice of “super scoring” a student’s test scores. This means that they take the highest score for each section from across the test dates submitted. Therefore, it is often advantageous to send all of your test dates to a given college. Some colleges are test optional. Students can choose to omit testing information from their transcript if applying to a test optional college.

6. How do I get my accommodations on these tests if I have an IEP or 504 plan?

Testing companies sometimes allow for accommodations, such as test read or extended time, based on information provided about the student, accommodations plans, or special needs. Students with IEP/504s are given a consent form during their sophomore year and asked to return it to the Counseling Office. Specific paperwork must be filled out in order to get approval for an accommodation from the testing board. Accommodations can take up to 3 months to be approved, so students should plan accordingly and turn in the necessary paperwork ahead of time, to give the counselors ample time to process the request.

* Please note that accommodations must be approved by the CollegeBoard and are not guaranteed. *

Section 6: The College Application Process

HCS College and Financial Aid Night

A great way to learn more about the college admissions and application process is to attend the HCS College and Financial Aid night, which is held each fall. We typically have admissions representatives from a private college and a SUNY college and a college financial aid officer who present on these topics. In addition our school counselors will walk families through the HCS college application process.

More Than Just a Numbers Game

The college application is your opportunity to present yourself to colleges that you are interested in. Colleges look at a variety of factors when evaluating your application. It's true that college admissions is about more than just your GPA and SAT/ACT scores. Our students are so much more than their grades and test scores! *However* many colleges use these academic credentials as a starting point. Admissions decisions involve many factors, and they are not always obvious. College Admissions Offices at each school will be happy to tell you what factors they consider in the admissions process.

Items typically submitted to colleges for the admissions process:

*College Application

* Supplemental Materials including:

- Standardized test scores (if required-some colleges are test optional)
- Official HS transcript
- Teacher recommendation
- Counselor recommendation
- Personal statements and essays
- Other items such as an art or music portfolio or writing sample (if required)

Useful Information for submitting applications:

School Code (CEEB Code): 332240

School Address:

Hamilton Central School
47 West Kendrick Ave
Hamilton, NY 13346

Counseling Office Phone: 315-824-6327

School Fax: 315-824-6324

The Hamilton Central School College Application Process

School Counselors go into the senior English class during the first or second full week of school to discuss the college application process in detail with seniors. Students who are attending BOCES meet with the counselors in a large group during the first or second full week of school as well.

The Common Application (Common App)

The Common Application (more commonly referred to as the Common App) is an online application which allows you to apply to many colleges using the same basic form. It includes a standard application that is completed one time and is available to send to multiple colleges. Please note that in addition to the standard application, many colleges that accept the Common App may require additional supplemental information (such as an additional essay). Even while using the Common App it is important to keep track of admissions requirements that vary from college to college.

* Not all colleges accept the Common App. Colleges that do not, have their own institutional applications. Forms and directions can be found on each college's website.

To Access the Common App:

To access the Common App you must create an account at www.commonapp.org. Once you have created an account you will be able to add the colleges that you attend to apply to and begin to complete the application. While completing the application, be sure to save the information as you go. You can always update and edit your list of colleges.

Warning: DO NOT create more than one Common App account. Doing so can result in significant difficulties with your application process. Keep track of your login information and if needed, follow the prompts given if you forget your username or password.

Information included on the Common App:

- Biographical information
- Extra-curricular activities
- List of honors and awards
- Senior year course load
- Standardized test scores
- Essay
- Supplements: Additional forms specific to the college if required by the college, art/music portfolios that are uploaded to the Common App

The State University of New York Application (SUNY APP)

The SUNY app is an online form through which you can apply to any SUNY school in New York State. It is a standard form that you complete once and is then available for you to send to multiple colleges within the SUNY system. Some SUNY schools also accept the Common App

and do not typically have a preference as to which you use to apply. To access the SUNY app, you must register at <https://www.suny.edu/applysuny/>. Once you've created your account, you can add the college to which you want to apply to and start to complete the application. Be sure to save your changes as you go along.

Information included on the SUNY App:

- Biographical information
- Extra-curricular activities
- List of honors and awards
- Senior year course load
- Standardized Test Scores
- Essay
- Supplements: Additional forms specific to the college if required by the college, art/music portfolios that are uploaded to the Common App

College Applications Fees

Colleges often require a fee when you submit your application. These fees vary and may be as high as \$90 per application. Plan ahead and find out what the application fee is for each college you intend to apply to. When applying online you can pay online with a credit card or mail a check. For students for whom the application fee is a financial hardship, a fee waiver may be available. Please see your school counselor for questions about college application fee waivers.

Submitting Your Application

Most applications are submitted electronically using the Common App, SUNY App, or individual college websites. If you are submitting a paper application, you may mail it on your own or submit it to the counseling office along with appropriate payment.

Please note: The submission of applications is done separately for each college. There are clear instructions for this on the Common App and SUNY App websites and you can ask your school counselor for assistance if needed.

Please Note - If you have any information that is personalized for a particular college- be careful before you submit your application. There are strict limits and guidelines about what can be changed within the Common App and you do not want to mistakenly send information to one college with another college's name in it!

Please refer to Appendix 6 for details on Completing the College Application.

When a student has finished all components of their application and is ready for the Counseling center to submit our pieces, an application processing form (referred to as the "green sheet") must be filled out and handed in. The form serves as a checklist to both families and the Counseling Office to assure that all necessary materials are sent to colleges in a timely fashion.

Please refer to Appendix 7 to see a copy of the Request for Application Processing

PLEASE NOTE: We require that students submit their green sheets to the counseling office at least one week prior to submitting their application to the college or 1 week prior to their application deadline (whichever comes first). We process MANY applications and this 1 week window allows us the necessary time to gather and double check all materials necessary.

*It is also important to note that the Counseling Office is closed during the mid-winter break in December - January. Therefore, applications with a deadline of January 1st will need to be processed prior to the HCS break.

Materials Sent by HCS Counseling Office

After a green sheet is submitted to the Counseling Office, HCS counselors will send the following official materials to the requested college(s).

- Official transcript with *unweighted* GPA. HCS GPA is calculated on a 0-100 point scale.
- SAT/ACT scores. These are listed on all student transcripts UNLESS otherwise requested by the student. If a student does not want scores listed (for test optional schools) or only wants specific scores sent to colleges, they should request the score to be removed in writing on the green sheet. Please remember that some colleges require official scores to be sent directly from the CollegeBoard or ACT. It is the student's responsibility to know which colleges do not accept scores listed on the transcript.
- Counselor recommendation
- Teacher(s) evaluations
- HCS Profile
- College transcript (if desired) If a student has taken a college class and wants the Counseling Office to send a transcript to the college they are applying to, they must give us official copies.
- Other supplemental materials: writing sample, art/music portfolio, etc. if provided to the Counseling Center.
- Resume- optional can be sent if student wishes.

Since there are many components to the application, make sure to leave yourself plenty of time to complete it. Do not expect to finish an application in one sitting. Also, be sure to leave time for adequate proofreading and checking the accuracy of everything you submit. It's a good idea to have a parent, counselor, or teacher proofread your application before you submit it to the college.

Colleges have different admission requirements and deadlines vary greatly too. **It is the student's responsibility to be aware of these specific requirements and plan accordingly.**

Refer to [Appendix 8, the HCS College Application Organizational Chart](#), to help keep track of requirements and deadlines.

Admissions Options

When you apply to a college in the fall of your senior year, you may have a choice about which type of application to submit. These options affect the deadline for submission, the date you will receive notification about admission, the date by which you must notify a college that you will attend, and in some cases, it may determine what other applications you are allowed to submit to other colleges.

Regular Decision:

- You apply to the college using the regular deadline (this is typically in early to mid-January).
- You can apply to more than one college
- Admissions decision is typically received in March or April
- You typically have until May 1st to decide if you wish to attend the college
- Possible outcomes (these vary by college): admit, waitlist, deny

Rolling Admissions

- Applications are reviewed on a “rolling” or on-going basis. Applications are reviewed by the college as they are received.
- You typically receive your admission decision as early as a few weeks after the receipt of the application.
- It is best to submit your application as soon as you have decided to apply to the college, as spots, programs, and housing fill up quickly.
- The decision to attend the college does not usually have to be made until May 1.
- Possible outcomes: admit or deny

Early Decision (ED):

- Applications are due to the college by a specific deadline which is typically between early November to mid-December
- You receive your admissions decision in 4-8 weeks
- Early Decision is BINDING which means that if you are accepted to the college you must commit to attend it. Often students, parents, and school counselors are required to sign a statement on the application agreeing to this policy.
- If admitted you must withdraw any applications you may have submitted to other colleges.
- Some colleges have begun offering an ED 2 deadline which is typically in early January
- Possible outcomes (these vary by college): admit, deny, defer to regular admission, waitlist

Considerations for ED: If accepted you are committing to enroll at that college. The decision is binding and you must withdraw applications from other schools. This is a significant decision and not one that should be taken lightly or used solely as a way to try to get a better chance of

being admitted to certain colleges. We recommend that you be ready to continue to work on other applications in the event that you are not accepted to your ED school.

If the financial aid package is insufficient you will be allowed to nullify the ED agreement, but depending on when you receive the financial aid package, you may not have much time to submit other applications. Therefore, you should also consider financial implications and talk with the financial aid office if needed before applying to a college through the ED process.

Advantages:

- An ED application is one way to demonstrate your strong interest in a college, letting them know that it is your first choice
- Assuming that the college is a good match for you and your academic credentials applying early *may* give you a slight advantage in the admissions process.

Disadvantages:

- If you change your mind, you have already entered into a binding agreement
- You will not be able to compare financial aid packages from other schools that you may have otherwise been accepted to.
- You must still have other applications ready to go in the event of a deferred decision, denied admission, or insufficient financial aid package.

Early Action (EA)

- Applications are due by a specific early deadline, usually between early November and mid-December.
- If admitted early, you are not committed to enroll at that college and can choose to apply to other colleges.
- You typically receive your admission decision 4-8 weeks after the application deadline.
- The decision to attend the college does not usually have to be made until May 1.
- Possible outcomes (these vary by college): admit, deny, defer to regular admission, waitlist

Early Action Unrestricted

- You are free to apply to more than one college with early admission options at the same time.

Early Action Restricted

- You are not allowed to apply to other colleges with early admission options at the same time.

Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP)

- Provides supportive services and financial aid to New York State residents attending private colleges and universities in New York State.
- Students must be educationally disadvantaged. This is a student who otherwise would not be accepted as a student under the college's normal admissions standards.
- Students must have been a New York State resident for at least one year preceding your term of entry.

- Students must economically disadvantaged. (Must meet guidelines. Visit <http://heop.org/guideline/> to view eligibility criteria.
- To apply, request an application from the college you are applying to. Many schools require that you apply for February 1st of the year you intend to begin. This date varies at each campus. Plan to apply as early as possible.

Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)

- Designed for students who need special academic assistance as well as financial support.
- Provides access, academic support and financial aid to students who show promise for succeeding in college but who may not have otherwise been offered admission at public New York State colleges. (SUNY)
- Requires specific admissions considerations
- Qualify as economically disadvantaged according to guidelines. Please go to <https://www.suny.edu/attend/academics/eop/> to view eligibility criteria.
- Be a New York State resident for at least 12 months prior to enrollment.
- To apply, request an application from the college you are applying to. Some schools have specific deadlines for this program.

Checking the Status of your Application

It is very important that students check to make sure the colleges to which you are applying have received all of the components of your application. Do not assume that all materials have been received. For both SUNY and Common App, students can track the status of their application and application materials. Many colleges allow you to check the status of your application on their website. If you cannot find how to track your application status, contact the college's Admissions Office.

Section 7: The College Essay

This section was prepared in part by using the thoughts of John C. Conkright, Dean of Admissions, Randolph Macon College, Ashland, VA .

Many colleges require that an applicant submit an essay or personal statement as part of the college application. It is designed to highlight your special interests or experiences, values, attitudes, and expectations of the future. The essay is a way for the Admissions Office to get to know YOU! It can help to distinguish you as an individual and make you stand out from other applicants. The essay can also help the college assess your critical thinking and writing abilities.

In order to avoid anxiety regarding your college essay it is best to begin drafting the essay sooner rather than later. The summer between junior and senior year is an ideal time to begin brainstorming ideas for essay topics. HCS seniors will work on their college essays in the senior English classes.

The Common Application, SUNY app, and many other institutional applications are often available for the next year's applicants beginning August 1st. At that point, you can preview the essay questions. Make sure that you are aware of the essay requirements (including any supplemental essays) for each college that you are applying to. As always, the best source of information for admissions requirements, including essay requirements, is the college's website (look at the office of Undergraduate Admissions).

Regardless of whether you are writing an essay to meet the requirements of the Common App or for a college's supplemental requirements, here are a few suggestions about the best way to approach your topic:

- Narrow your topic and try to be as specific and illustrative as possible.
- The easiest topic to write about is you. No one knows more about you than you. Since one important purpose of the essay is self-revelation, this is not a time to be shy or modest, though you should also be sure to not exaggerate.
- Do not be afraid to write about something you think is a little different. A unique topic or approach is often refreshing to the college admissions staff who have been reading applications all day.

Once you have completed your essay it is VERY important to proofread your essay and double check your work. It's a good idea to have an adult (family member, teacher, and counselor) proofread your essay as well. However, be mindful of *over* editing! Remember, the essay should be a reflection of yourself.

While you can type the essay directly into most online applications, it is best to type the essay in a word document (or other word processing application) and cut and paste or upload it into the application.

Please Note: If you have any information that is personalized for a particular college- be careful before you submit your application. There are strict limits and guidelines about what can be changed within the Common App and you do not want to mistakenly send information to one college with another college's name in it!

Section 8: Letters of Recommendation

Teacher Recommendations:

Teacher recommendations are an important part of the college application. They allow the colleges to gain insight into your character and work ethic as a student. Additionally the letters allow the admissions representative to gain detailed information about your growth as a learner and allows for an explanation of any anomalies. The number of teacher recommendations required varies from college to college, but two teacher recommendations tend to be the norm. Be sure to give your teachers ample time when asking them to write you a letter of recommendation. Extra time allows teacher to compose meaningful and well thought-out letters. It is important that at least one of your teacher recommendations is from a core subject area teacher (English, Math, Social Studies, Science) and that the recommendations are from teachers who have taught you recently.

Counselor Recommendations:

Counselor recommendations are a required part of most college applications. The Counselor Recommendation provides a comprehensive picture of your academic, social and extracurricular contributions to the Hamilton community. The statement may also include an explanation and clarification of any special circumstances in your background that affected your academic achievement or attendance. Counselors request that students fill out a student self-assessment to gain a better understanding of each individual student. *Please see Appendix 9 for a link to the self-assessment.* Be sure to give your counselors ample time when asking them to write you a letter of recommendation. Extra time allows counselors to compose meaningful and well thought-out letters.

Other Recommendations:

Students often ask other adults who know them well to write letter to submit to colleges. Some examples of these adults include coaches, employers, priest/pastors, or a supervisor from an organization you volunteer for. You should never have a family member write you a letter of recommendation. Be sure to give the person you are asking ample time to write the letter in order to allow them to compose a meaningful and well thought-out.

Section 9: Financial Aid

The cost of college is a major consideration when navigating the college application process. College costs extend beyond tuition and also include, room and board, textbooks, miscellaneous fees, travel, etc. These can add up to be over \$60,000 per year (yes, you read that correctly!) depending on the college. While colleges are required to report their total costs on their website, you will not know what the actual cost of attendance will be until after you complete the financial aid process and receive your award package.

* If you are interested in a college that may seem financially out of reach, do not rule it out based solely on advertised cost of attendance. It is better to first see what the financial aid package from the school is able to offer and then decide if the college is a feasible option financially.

Financial aid can be in the form of scholarships and grants which do not need to be repaid, and loans, which do need to be repaid. Aid can be need-based (determined by the total cost of attendance and a family's ability to pay) or merit based (determined by a student's achievements academically, artistically, athletically, etc.)

The main sources of financial aid are:

- The Federal Government
- New York State (TAP)
- Colleges and Universities
- Private sources such as foundations, corporations and banks
- National and local scholarships and awards

NEVER pay money for a scholarship search service or to be considered for financial aid!

For more information, please visit www.hesc.ny.gov

Though many families may initially find the process daunting, applying for financial aid is very manageable if you complete forms on time, stay organized, and ask questions when you have them.

Financial Aid from Colleges and Universities

From a cost perspective, there are several things to consider when choosing which colleges to apply to. Cost of tuition/attendance is certainly an important factor. It is also important to know much financial aid a college awards and the way that they meet financial aid (need based vs. need blind). Sometimes colleges with a high cost of attendance are still affordable because of the amount of financial aid they are able to award. We suggest that you look for the following information about each college's financial aid process:

- Does the college have "need blind" or "need aware" admissions?
- Does the college meet full need?

- What is the average financial aid package offered to students? What percentage of students receive financial aid?
- Does the college give merit based scholarships or grants? Do you need to apply for them?
- What are the colleges other resources for financial aid?
- Is a particular award carried over for all four years? Do you need to reapply for it?

HCS College/Financial Aid Night

A great way to learn more about financial aid options for college is to attend the HCS College and Financial Aid night which is held each fall. The workshop provides an overview of the financial aid process including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the College Scholarship Service Profile (CSS Profile).

Financial Aid Applications to be Completed

FAFSA: The **Free Application for Federal Student Aid** is the financial aid application that is completed by prospective U.S. College students to determine their eligibility for federal student aid. You can complete this application online and find more information at www.fafsa.ed.gov .

CSS Profile: The College Scholarship Service Profile (CSS) is a financial aid application used mostly by private colleges allowing students to apply for aid. This form is required by many colleges and universities (but not all), it helps them award nonfederal student aid funds. The form is available online and can be completed after October 1st. You can complete this application online and view a complete list of schools using this application at <http://css.collegeboard.org/>.

Institutional Financial Aid Forms: Please note that colleges may also have their own financial aid form to complete. For a complete list of requirements for each college, contact their Financial Aid Office or visit the financial aid section of their website.

Financial Aid Timeline

Fall-Winter of Senior Year:

- October 1st is the first day that the **CSS PROFILE** may be filed.
- Early to mid-fall families should plan to attend the HCS College and Financial Aid night which will offer valuable information about both topics.
- After changes to **FAFSA** filing options, families can now file the FAFSA beginning in December. Families are able to use tax information from the previous year and will be required to integrate IRS tax form to FAFSA.
- Be sure to look at deadlines associated with submission of financial aid materials. Each college's financial aid office will have information available about their required forms and timeline.

Spring of Senior Year:

- Research and visit colleges to which a student receives an acceptance of admission
- Review the college acceptances and financial aid packages.
- Contact a college's financial aid office to discuss any questions that you may have about the financial aid package offered.
- Complete HCS award applications (usually mailed home in March) to be considered for local scholarships.
- When a student decides which college he/she will attend, notify that college of your commitment and submit any financial deposit that may be required. Most colleges will require this notification *and* deposit by May 1st.

Ten Things You Should Know About Financial Aid

This list is based on "In a Rocky Economy, 10 Steady Tips About Student Aid" an article by Beckie Supiano from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

1. **Every student should apply for financial aid.** Regardless of family income or citizenship every family should apply. Families who think they will not qualify for need-based aid at the time they apply should still complete the required financial aid forms by the required deadlines. You never know when your family circumstances might change unexpectedly. If a family's financial situation changes during the course of the year, the financial aid office may not be offer any aid if forms have not by submitted by the required deadlines.
2. **Deadlines matter.** Students have to apply for aid each year and they must do so on time. Colleges have different deadlines- be sure to give yourself sufficient time to collect the information you need, complete the forms and submit them to the institution in time to meet their deadline.
3. **Check each College's Financial Aid Application Requirements.** All colleges require the FAFSA and some require the CSS PROFILE. State grants and outside scholarships may also require additional paperwork. It is important to check each college's website to see what forms you will need to submit when applying to that college.
4. **Understand what your Expected Family Contribution (EFC) will be.** When you apply for need-based financial aid a calculation is done to assess how much your family can contribute towards your child's education for one year. This is called your Expected Family Contribution. Your EFC may vary slightly from college to college and knowing your EFC will help you to understand your eligibility for need-based aid. The EFC is an index of the family's ability to pay for college and will help determine how much financial aid you are eligible for. Beginning with the 2024-2025 school year FAFSA, opening in December 2023, the EFC will be replaced by the Student Aid Index, or SAI.
5. **Be aware of what is included in the cost of attendance.** This figure includes not only tuition, fees, and housing, but also indirect costs such as books, supplies, and transportation. The *actual* cost of these items will vary from student to student.
6. **Eligibility and need aren't always the same.** A student may meet the criteria for a particular grant or award but the college may determine that the student doesn't demonstrate the level of *need* to receive the aid/award. Eligibility and need aren't always the same.

7. **Need-based aid and merit aid are different.** Merit aid is awarded by the college and is almost always tied to academic performance or some specific circumstances that the college selects. Need-based aid is awarded solely on a family's demonstrated financial need as documented in the financial aid application materials.
8. **There are different forms of aid.** Students can receive federal, state, and institutional aid. Aid can come in the form of grants, loans, or work. Financial aid offices can, and do, view loans as a form of aid.
9. **Award letters vary.** The format of financial aid packages and letters will vary from college to college. Be sure to review each package carefully and pay attention to details such as whether the aid is renewable from year to year or if there are academic (or other) requirements that must be met to continue to receive the aid.

Section 10: National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

The NCAA provides comprehensive information about the recruitment of student-athletes and provides many resources. Visit their website at www.ncaa.org for information for student-athletes and their parents about the requirements for playing athletics at Division I, Division II and Division III schools. Please see *Appendix 10* for Academic Eligibility Requirements for Division I and Division II schools.

Section 11: Making Your Decision

Although many people will help in the college application process, the final decisions should be yours.

If you applied to college through an Early Decision or Early Action program, you will probably hear back from your college four to eight weeks after submitting your application.

If you applied through a Rolling Admissions program, you may hear as early as a few weeks after submitting your application.

If you have applied through the Regular Decision process, you will usually hear back from colleges sometime in March or April.

The outcomes of these decisions can be as follows:

Admit: Congratulations! You have been admitted to the next year's class, and the only information you may still need before you can make a choice is what kind of financial aid package you have been offered.

Defer: If you applied Early Decision or Early Action your admission decision may be deferred to Regular Decision. This means you're qualified, but the college wants to compare your application to that of other applicants in the Regular Decision applicant pool. If you have just begun to improve your academic record, they may want to be sure that you are continuing this upward trend through the winter. The admissions office will let you know if there is additional material that you need to submit (such as 1st marking period or mid-year grades). It is important that you submit other applications at this time.

Deny: If your admission is denied it means that the admissions committee cannot offer you a place in the incoming Freshman class. It does not necessarily indicate that you're unqualified or that you have been lacking in some way as an applicant, it means that they had to make difficult decisions about the places that they had to offer to that particular class.

Waitlist: If you have been placed on the waitlist, it means that you may be admitted to the college at a later date once the college has heard from its accepted students and determined whether there is additional space in the incoming class. Waitlist decisions are typically made by the college after the May 1st deadline for accepted students. Some colleges may still be contacting applications on the waitlist as late as July and August.

If you have been placed on a waitlist, you will need to follow directions carefully to be sure to let the college know if you wish to remain on their waitlist and continue to be considered for admission. You will still need to accept admission at a college to which you have been accepted and submit a deposit by May 1st. This deposit is typically non-refundable.

Remember that waitlists can be very long and that their usage depends on the number of admitted students who enroll. This is unpredictable and can be frustrating and varies from year to year. It is important that your waitlist school is a backup plan and that you submit a deposit to a school that you are excited about attending.

Making a final choice at the end of this long process can be difficult.

Things that may help:

- Compare financial aid packages. College can be costly and financial considerations are very important!
- If you haven't yet done so, make every attempt to visit the college enrolling. If possible attend the admitted students program or visit the college. If you have not yet been able to visit, now is the time to do so!
- Make sure you follow directions after your admission. Check the student portal for the college (if available) and keep checking your email. You don't want to miss any important information!
- Fill out **Appendix 4-College Comparison Worksheet**- It will give you a visual record of the pros and cons for each school as you think about your priorities.
- Have ongoing discussions with your family and school counselors, both of whom can help with the decision.

Deferring Admission for one year:

Most colleges will allow you to defer your admission for one year, but you need to check each college's website or call to confirm this. If you decide to defer your admission, make sure that it is for a worthy purpose. Be in touch with your college and your school counselor to talk about your options.

Don't forget to let the HCS Counseling Office know which college you will attend!

Section 12: Options other than college: What if college isn't right for me at this time?

Gap Year: A gap year is an experiential semester or year typically taken between high school and college in order to deepen practical, professional, and personal awareness. Options during a gap year may include, travel, internships, work, volunteer work, or academics (a post-graduate year) Students should still plan to apply to colleges during their senior year, as most colleges will allow you to defer admissions for a year. You will need to check with each college's website or call the admissions office to confirm this. Talk with your school counselor to talk about your options.

For more information on gap year options check out the following websites:

<http://usagapyearfairs.org/>

<https://thinkingbeyondborders.org/programs-for-gap-year-students/>

<https://www.teenlife.com/category/gap-year/>

<http://www.americangap.org/>

Military: Another option is to join the military, attend a military academy, or participate in a ROTC program. Like any post-secondary path, choosing a military path requires a great deal of research and reflection. If you are interested in the very selective military academies, (US Military Academy, US Naval Academy, US Air Force Academy, US Coast Guard Academy, US Marine Academy) the process begins in junior year. You should talk with your school counselor early on in the process to make sure you are on track.

If you want more information about how to choose among the military branches, visit:

<http://usmilitary.about.com/od/joiningthemilitary/a/choosing.htm>

Employment: Some of our students are interested in going directly into the field of work that they are interested in. School counselors can help seniors to create resumes and complete job applications to help to plan for a smooth transition into the workforce.

Glossary

ACT	A college entrance examination which measures aptitude and skill in 4 areas- English, Mathematics, Reading and Science- plus an optional writing test.
AP test	Advanced Placement test- a CollegeBoard test taken by high school students usually at the end of AP coursework. Many colleges give college credit for these CollegeBoard sponsored exams if students earn a high enough score (as determined by each college).
Associate Degree	Degree granted by a college for a program earned in 2 years.
Bachelor Degree	The Bachelor of Arts, Science or any other Bachelor degree granted by a college or university for a program that typically requires four years of full-time study.
Certificate Program	A qualification earned from short-term specialty trainings.
CollegeBoard	The organization that creates and oversees the administration of the PSAT's, SAT's, SAT Subject tests, AP exams and offers the CSS PROFILE
Common Application	A universal application accepted by hundreds of institutions across the country. Each year the form is released in August.
Common Application Supplements	Supplemental forms used by colleges that accept the Common Application. These supplemental forms allow colleges to request and gather other information that is not part of the Common Application.
Community College	A 2-year public college offering Certificate Programs and Associate Degree Programs. Students can begin their higher education at a community college and transfer to a four year college.
CSS PROFILE	A financial aid form, different from the FAFSA, required by many private colleges and universities that helps them award non-federal student aid. The form must be completed online at the CollegeBoard website.

Early Action	Under Early Action (EA) a student applies in early November or December and will have an admissions decision within four to six weeks. EA is <i>not</i> binding and if accepted, a student is not bound to enroll at that college and may choose to apply to other colleges.
Early Action Unrestricted	Students may apply to more than one college with an “early” designation
Early Action Restricted	Students may apply to only one college under an “early” application Process
Expected Family Contribution (EFC)	The result of a calculation that is done to assess your family contribution when you apply for need-based financial aid through the FAFSA or CSS PROFILE.
Fee Waiver	A fee waiver allows students to apply for college without paying the college application fee. Students who may qualify for a fee waiver should speak with his/her school counselor.
FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid- a financial aid application that all prospective U.S. college students who want to be considered for financial aid <i>must</i> complete and submit to determine eligibility. Unlike the CSS PROFILE, this is required by <i>all</i> colleges and universities.
Gift Aid	Grants and scholarships are often referred to as gift aid because they do not have to be repaid. Grants and scholarships can come from a variety of sources including the college, private organizations, federal and state government.
GPA	Grade point average- HCS computes GPA on a 0-100 scale and is <i>unweighted</i> . All credit bearing courses with the exception of Physical Education are included.
IEP	An Individual Education Plan is developed for students who qualify for Special Education services. The plan is developed by the HCS Committee on Special Education.

NCAA	The National Collegiate Athletic Association regulates athletes and athletic programs for over 1,200 colleges and universities. Institutions participating in the NCAA must adhere to specific requirements regarding recruitment, academics, and scholarships.
National Merit Scholarship	National academic competition for scholarship awards open to all eligible high school juniors taking the PSAT.
Need Aware Admissions	A family's ability to pay for college <i>may</i> a factor in the college's admission process
Need Blind Admissions	A family's ability to pay for college is not a factor in the admission Process
PreACT	A standardized test given by ACT. This exam is a practice for the ACT and takes about 3 hours. It is given right at HCS and it is strongly recommended that all Sophomores at HCS take the exam when it is offered in the spring. The scores for the PreACT do not go on your transcript and are not sent to colleges.
PSAT	A standardized test given by the CollegeBoard. This exam is a practice for the SAT and takes about 3 hours. It is given right at HCS and it is strongly recommended that <u>all</u> juniors at HCS take the exam when it is offered in mid-October. The scores for the PSAT do not go on your transcript and are not sent to colleges.
Regular Decision	The regular decision process allows students to apply to more than one college by each college's regular admission deadline. Deadlines are typically in early winter, around January 1st or 15th. Admissions decisions from regular decision are usually received between March and April.
Rolling Admission	Colleges that offer rolling admission do not have a set deadline that applications must be submitted by (though there may be priority deadlines). Application processions is rolling, or on-going. Once a student applies, the Admissions Office begins to process the

application and an admissions decision is typically received a few weeks later.

SAT Reasoning Test

A standardized test, offered through the CollegeBoard, which is widely used in the college admissions process.

SAT Subject Tests

Standardized test, through the CollegeBoard. These differ from the SAT Reasoning test in that they are 1 hour exams on a particular subject. Student can sit for as many as three SAT Subject tests on an SAT Administration day. It is important to check which tests are offered during each SAT administration since not all Subject Tests are offered each month. Some colleges may require students to submit scores from SAT Subject tests (in addition to the SAT Reasoning tests) for admission to the college or to a particular major.

Transcript

HCS's high school transcript is document that shows final grades, final exam and Regents exams for any high school credit bearing course. Also shown are the student's cumulative GPA. As a service to families, and in an effort to avoid extra fees when submitting college applications, standardized test scores are listed on the transcript unless students request for them to be removed. Colleges may still require an official score report to be sent to represent standardized test scores.