

Exploration & Application: Key Things to Consider for Higher Education

Exploration

When researching potential colleges, youth should consider using the following steps:

- Create a list of all the potential institutions. Be sure to note the entrance criteria, including:
 - Minimum GPA (Grade Point Average)
 - Entrance Exam Scores and/or Requirements
- Prioritize the list of potential colleges. For each college, be sure to consider:
 - Does the school meet your criteria? (*see College Selection Criteria*)
 - Is the school a good match for your interests and qualifications?
 - Is the school a realistic option based on the entrance criteria (your GPA and test scores) and your personal and academic interests
- Review the list and then identify each school as a “reach,” “match,” or “safety” school. Organize the schools into these categories.
- Narrow down to the number you would like to apply in each group, and finalize the list of schools you will apply to.

Applications

Initiate the college application process for your preferred schools:

- Create a complete and detailed list of all required (and optional) application components.
Note:
 - What are the application requirements for each school (e.g. online application, test scores, fee, essay, recommendations, resume, etc.).
 - *Standardized Tests:* Does the school require standardized test scores? If so, what test(s) do you need to take? What is your plan for preparing and studying for the test? Are you going to take a prep course and, if so, which one? What is your target score? What score range do you need to meet the requirements of the schools you are applying?
 - *Essay:* In addition to your GPA and standardized test scores, essays are a very important part of the application. You should demonstrate what makes you uniquely qualified to attend the college or university, and how an education at that college or university will help you reach your academic and career goals. Make sure you explicitly answer the questions for each application.
 - *Recommendations:* Ask potential recommenders as far in advance of the deadline as possible. Provide a draft essay, resume, and any other materials that may be helpful in informing their recommendation. You will want to choose teachers and other recommenders that are very familiar with your academic capabilities.
 - Develop a timeline of application deadlines and outline showing when each component needs to be completed.

Exploration & Application, continued

Financial Aid

An important step in the application process (in the US) is applying for financial aid:

- Determine the total amount needed to finance your college education?
- Consider all types of financial aid (loans, scholarships, etc.)
- Make sure you complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) as soon as possible after it is made available and keep in mind the due date.
- Scholarships. Which scholarships are you eligible to apply for and what are the requirements? Create a list of all possible scholarships, and a timeline of due dates to monitor your progress.