

**JUNIOR CLASS MEETING -- Monday, May 4, 2009**  
*Researching Selective Universities*

**I. DECISION – IN STATE OR OUT OF STATE ?**

**A. Start with the academic field in which you will major**

1. It is common practice for people to decide which university they will attend, and then go there whether or not that university is strong in the area in which they will major. ESPECIALLY for selective universities, which are expensive, it would make more sense to first consider whether a university is strong in the intended major field.
2. College Toolkit and, especially, Peterson's are excellent online programs for deciding whether a university is strong in an academic area. For both, proceed to the area of the program that allows you to search for universities by major. Enter your major into the dialog box. The universities listed will be strong in the academic area you are seeking.
3. Rugg's Recommendations on the Colleges is a very good text to determine whether a university is strong in the major you will be pursuing. A copy is available in the Senior Guidance Office.
4. Ultimately, a major consideration in your choice of college will rest in whether a selective university is sufficiently superior to a local university to justify the added expense.

**B. Cost differential**

1. When determining what a university costs, tuition is only one consideration. Room and board, books, transportation costs, cost of living in the area of the college, and recreation costs all factor into total cost. Fees imposed in addition to initial costs can be considerable at some universities; you should ask about such hidden costs when determining college affordability.
2. Part of the cost of attending an out-of-state university is a non-resident fee, and this fee is often well in excess of the local tuition fee. If considering an out-of-state college, be sure that you factor in non-resident fees. Every university has them.

**II. THE COMMON APPLICATION -- website is [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org)**

**A. WHAT IT IS**

**1. Single application for over 300 universities**

- a) Names of universities are posted on the Blue Wall and on the Common App website
- b) Common App universities are invariably selective universities.

**2. Ideal way to save time and effort both for you and teachers / counselor**

- a) Your Role - You fill out one application and submit it to guidance. When you want it sent to a university, your counselor photocopies it and sends it there together with other materials. *If you prefer, you can submit your materials online.*
- b) Recommenders' Roles - You will be required to have two teachers write "Teacher Evaluations" for you. It is a good idea to select one from humanities and one from math / sciences, though this is not required. The teachers submit their recommendations to Brother Harold, who photocopies them and submits copies to the prospective university, together with other materials.
- c) Counselor Role – Bro. Harold fills out the "School Report" and sends it to a university together with a copy of your transcript, a school profile, and teacher evaluations. At mid-year, Bro. Harold submits a "Mid-Year Report," which is a guarantee to the university that you are remaining positive in your grades and your attitude. If applicable, he also submits a "Final Report" at the end of the year for the same purpose as the Mid-Year Report.
- d) **NOTE:** Common App is theoretically set up for everything to be done online, including teacher and counselor submissions. At present, however, there are glitches in the programming to be addressed before everyone can submit online. Stay tuned for further details.

## B. WHEN TO USE IT

1. Use the Common App if you are submitting applications to more than one selective college.
2. Use the Common App if you have no choice – some universities, like Millsaps locally, accept only the common application. The university has no application of its own.

## C. HOW TO USE IT

### 1. On the Common App homepage, click on “Download Forms.”

- a) If you wish to complete your application online, locate the “General Information” area that appears below Download Forms.
  - i. IT IS **IMPERATIVE** THAT YOU TELL BROTHER HAROLD THAT YOU ARE DOING THIS BEFORE YOU BEGIN THE PROCESS.
  - ii. Click on the link applying online. Follow the directions from this point forward.
- b) If you wish to complete your application on paper, locate the “Forms” area directly underneath the “General Information” area. There will be a series of bulleted choices.
  - i. IT IS **IMPERATIVE** THAT YOU TELL BROTHER HAROLD THAT YOU ARE DOING THIS BEFORE YOU BEGIN THE PROCESS.
  - ii. Next to the choice “Application (student form) Only,” click on PDF. Print the form and complete it. Then submit it to Brother Harold. He will mail it to your chosen university, together with other materials required by Common App.
  - iii. Next to the choice “Teacher Evaluation Only,” click on PDF. Print two copies of this form, and give one to each of your teacher recommenders. Have teachers submit their completed forms to Brother Harold. He will mail them to your chosen university, together with other materials required by Common App.
  - iv. Next to the choice “Secondary School Report Only,” click on PDF. Print this form, and give it to Brother Harold. He will fill it out and mail it to your chosen university, together with other materials required by Common App.

### 2. Relevant terminology -- Most selective universities conduct two phases of admissions, an early phase and a regular phase. The nature of the early phase varies depending upon the university, but as a rule falls into one of three categories:

- a) *Early Decision* – You apply to a university early in the school year, usually in November or December. Your application is **BINDING**. If the university accepts you, **YOU MUST ATTEND THAT UNIVERISTY**. No one else is allowed to accept you.
- b) *Early Action* – You apply early, just like Early Decision, but the university’s decision is not binding. You can apply to other universities early and weigh offers.
- c) *Single-Choice Early Action (Also called Restricted Early Action)* – You apply to only one university early, and are not allow to accept any early offers except that one. But the acceptance is not binding. If the university accepts you early, then you can accept that offer, or you can apply to any other university during the Regular Decision phase. Furthermore, you can accept any of those offers if you wish.
- d) A good article summarizing this material accompanies this handout. A copy can be found in the Guidance section of the VCHS website, and it can be found at the website on the next line.  
**<http://www.collegeboard.com/parents/apply/college-applications/21342.html>**

**III. RESUMES** - Next year, you may be asking for letters of recommendation from any number of people. Any time you request a letter or recommendation from a teacher or other staff member, you need to accompany that request with a copy of your resume. A copy of a sample resume and other helpful materials accompany this document. As usual, they are also posted on the school website.

**Your friendly (most of the time) guidance counselor expects you to submit a copy of your resume for your files before the end of the school year.** If you do not submit one, do not expect your sometimes friendly guidance counselor to honor any request for a letter of recommendation until you construct and submit a resume.

#### **IV. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION**

##### **A. APPLICABILITY**

- 1) In Louisiana, only ULL and Northwestern require letters of recommendation.
- 2) For state colleges outside Louisiana, check the university website to determine if a letter of recommendation is required by that school.
- 3) Required by virtually all private colleges and universities

##### **B. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION** - when you request a letter of recommendation from someone, you are asking for a favor. **MAKE IT EASY FOR THAT PERSON TO DO YOU A FAVOR.**

- 1) **A request for a letter of recommendation should be accompanied by each of the following:**
  - a) A written statement indicating the following:
    - i) Purpose of the recommendation, e.g., college admission, scholarship, seeking an award ...
    - ii) Party to whom the letter will be written
    - iii) Applicable deadline(s)
  - b) A resume
  - c) Instructions regarding who receives the letter
    - i) If the writer will be mailing the letter – that includes Brother Harold -- you should include an addressed and stamped envelope with your request.
    - ii) If you require multiple letters to be mailed to the same address, see Brother Harold beforehand; the easiest way to proceed is to mail everything in a single envelope from the Guidance Office.
- 2) **Relevant sidenotes**
  - a) **A form for letters of recommendation is available in the tray on the wall directly to the right of Brother Harold's door. You do not necessarily need to use this form, but it definitely makes it easier for you to organize your materials.**
  - b) Do not ask Brother Harold or anyone else, for that matter, for a letter of recommendation on the run, between classes. Again, make it easy for others to do you favors. Be sure that you include all required materials when requesting a recommendation.
  - c) Allow plenty of time for a staff member to complete a letter of recommendation – a week and a half or more for a university recommendation, and three weeks for a major recommendation such as Gates Millennium.
  - d) It would be a very good idea for you to identify the people whom you would like to write letters of recommendation for you next year; inform them before school ends that you will be requesting their help next year. This gives writers time to construct something during the summer when time is not at such a premium. It also identifies you to your recommender as organized and polite, and makes a highly favorable recommendation more likely.
  - e) **MAKE SURE TO WRITE A THANK YOU NOTE TO EACH RECOMMENDER, A TASK THAT WILL TAKE LESS THAN ONE-TENTH OF THE TIME YOUR RECOMMENDER TAKES TO RECOMMEND YOU. WRITING THANK YOU NOTES IS A LIFETIME HABIT THAT YOU DEFINITELY NEED TO CULTIVATE.**

# EARLY ACTION VS. EARLY DECISION

<http://www.admissionsconsultants.com/college/earlydecision.asp>

## a) Early Action and Early Decision Admissions

It's hard to think of any aspect of college admissions that is more confusing than that of early admissions policies. Early admissions programs have become increasingly common, with approximately two out of three of the country's top universities and colleges offering some kind of early admissions program. However, the benefits and obligations involved in early admissions vary from one school to another. Adding to the confusion is the fact that different schools use similar language to mean completely different things. It is more important than ever for college applicants to make sure that they understand early admissions and early decisions options, in order to make informed decisions about whether or not it is in their interest to use them.

## b) Early Decision vs. Early Action

Early admissions programs can be divided into two categories: **early decision (ED)** and **early action (EA)**. **Single choice early action (SCEA)** programs are a particular kind of early action program.

ED and EA programs both involve an earlier application deadline than the normal admissions process does, and (as their names imply) earlier notification of admissions decisions. Accepted applicants enjoy several benefits. A high school student who already knows that she has been accepted to her top choice college can take chances she might not otherwise. She might take a challenging college-level course that she would pass on if she were worried that her spring grades might affect her college applications. Another advantage, of course, is that she and her family have more time to plan for her move to college, and to arrange financial aid and housing.

However, the most attractive aspect of early admissions programs is that colleges and universities tend to admit a significantly higher percentage of the early applicant pool than they do of the normal applicant pool – in other words, there is the possibility that your chances of being accepted as an early admissions candidate are better than they would be as a regular applicant. The most selective colleges currently admit 25% to 50% of their total students from the early admissions pool. In recent years, as many as 40% of freshmen at Ivy League schools have been early admissions applicants.

There is, of course, a catch to all this: the issue of binding decisions.

## c) Early Decision (Binding)

Early decision (ED) programs are usually binding. 'Binding' means that the applicant promises from the start that they will attend the school if their application is accepted. It is not an obligation to be taken lightly, since schools honor one another's binding decisions. If you renege on an early decision obligation to one school, it is unlikely that another competitive school will accept you. Students can seek release from an early decision obligation on the grounds of financial hardship, if the financial aid package they are offered is genuinely inadequate; however, the burden of proof in these cases is on the student. (By the way, an important drawback to early decision admissions is that they leave applicants with no leverage to negotiate a better financial aid package – the school knows you can't go anywhere else.)

Early decision applicants are expected to submit only one early decision application to one school. They can submit applications to other schools under normal application procedures, but agree that they will withdraw all those applications if they are accepted to the early decision school.

#### d) Early Action (Non Binding)

Early admissions programs which do not ask applicants to commit to attending if they are accepted are generally known as Early action (EA) programs. In our view, these are a better deal for most applicants. They give students the benefits of early notification without the obligations of early decision. Even if accepted, students are free to apply to other schools and to compare financial aid offers. **Single choice early action** (SCEA) programs specifically require students not to make EA applications to other schools, although they are free to apply elsewhere under the regular admissions round. In recent years, several of the country's most selective universities (including [Yale](#) and [Stanford](#)) have adopted non-binding early admissions programs.

#### e) Our Recommendations

Early admissions programs can be very advantageous to college applicants, depending on their profile and situation. A high school student who is sure of what school they want to go to, and whose junior year grades, extracurricular activities, etc., are strong enough to secure admission, can benefit from early admissions. However, we do **not** encourage students with any questions at all about their college preferences to seek a binding **early decision** from any school, regardless of how much better the statistical chances of acceptance may be under an early decision program. Keep in mind that you're not just being asked to indicate a school preference; you're being asked to forego all other options and to commit yourself to spending four years (and tens of thousands of dollars) at a particular institution. That's a big decision for anyone to make. It should only be undertaken with the best possible information and advice, and without undue deadline pressure.

Application Type	Binding?	Can Apply Early to Other Colleges?	Can Apply to Other Colleges Under Regular Admissions?
Early Decision	Yes	No	Yes, if not accepted
Early Action	No	Yes	Yes
Single-Choice Early Action	No	No	Yes

## RESUME WRITING

Whenever you ask someone to write you a letter of recommendation, you should provide a resume which spells out all pertinent information. Resumes are useful for other purposes as well, but the resume described here will be written for the purpose of college admission and/or scholarship application.

The information below is a sampling of information which might appear on a resume.

ACADEMICS: GPA, Class Rank, ACT/SAT scores

ADVANCED COURSEWORK: Honors, AP, college prep. Include year taken and course name.

ACADEMIC AWARDS AND HONORS RECEIVED: Name of award, what awarded for, when received.

COMMUNITY SERVICE PERFORMED: List in-school and out of school, nature of service and hours or service. Include positions of leadership and awards if applicable

EXTRACURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT: Athletic activities and clubs/organizations, including descriptions of activities if applicable. State positions of leadership and awards if applicable.

PERSONAL: Work Experience  
Travel Experience  
Supplemental educational experiences – workshops, summer programs, apprenticeships ...  
Special Talents  
Hobbies and Special Interest  
What you consider to be your areas of strength as a person and as a student

### **SAMPLE RESUME:**

***AUGUSTA WIND***  
**POST OFFICE BOX 3553**  
**ST. MARK, AZ 86511**  
**(927) 100 – 1000**  
**augusta\_wind2003@hotmail.com**

**EDUCATION:** St. Mark High School  
P.O. Box 65, St. Marks, AZ, 86512, (927) 200-2000  
Graduation: May 20, 2006  
GPA: 3.4  
Class Rank: 10 of 39

## **EXTRA-CURRICULARS:**

### **National Honor Society: 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>**

- Maintained 3.3+ GPA.
- Served as project chairperson for tutoring program

### **Volleyball : 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>**

- Team co-captain 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>
- District Champions, 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>
- State runners-up , 11<sup>th</sup>

### **Student Council: 10<sup>th</sup>**

- Served as secretary
- Chaired Float Decorating Committee for 2003 Navajo Nation Fair
- Assisted in Navajo Nation Special Olympics

### **Student Ambassador: 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>**

- Student chairperson of Freshman welcoming committee
- Assisted at Annual Fund Dinner

## **AWARDS:**

### **Most Improved in Volleyball: 10<sup>th</sup>**

### **Coach's Award in Volleyball : 11<sup>th</sup>**

### **Student of the Month Award: May, 2003 (10<sup>th</sup>) ; November, 2005 (12<sup>th</sup>)**

## **COMMUNITY SERVICE:**

### **St. Mark Catholic Church Youth Group: 2002 – 2005 (9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>)**

- Participated in Hurricane Katrina Relief Fund: 2005 (12<sup>th</sup>)
- Brought meals to shut-ins on weekends: 2004 – 2005 (11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>)

### **Students Against Drunk Driving: 2004 – 2005 (11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>)**

- Served as president of Window Rock, AZ, chapter – 2005 (12<sup>th</sup>)
- Spearheaded Red Ribbon Week – 2005 (12<sup>th</sup>)

## **SPECIAL ACTIVITIES:**

### **College Horizons: 2004 (11<sup>th</sup>)**

- Attended from June 25 - 29, at Haverford College, Cambridge, MA
- Gained valuable college entrance skills

### **Native American Dancing: 2003 – 2005 (10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>)**

- Danced at Red Rock Ceremonial Powwow (10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>)
- Danced at Navajo Nation Fair Powwow (10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>)

## **EXPERIENCE:**

### **Bank of America, Tse Bonito, NM : Summer 2005 (12<sup>th</sup>)**

- Served as file clerk

### **Assisted aunt & uncle at family restaurant: 2002 – 2004 (9<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup>)**

- Bussed tables
- Assisted in kitchen