



GOOD HOPE COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL

COLLEGE COUNSELING HANDBOOK

2016-2017

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Welcome to the College Counseling Handbook! The college admission process is an important part of 11th and 12th grade at Good Hope Country Day school. The main goal is to help students identify, apply, and secure admission to colleges, universities or post high school programs that will meet their needs, nurture their talents and interests, and appropriately challenge them. The College Counseling Office seeks to empower students to make reasoned and informed decisions, to be forthright, to advocate effectively for themselves, to follow a schedule and meet deadlines, and to employ strong organizational skills throughout the process. The College Counseling Office will provide timely information, counseling and support to help each student develop the necessary skills to complete each phase of the college process successfully.

All juniors participate in College Prep class in the Spring semester, as well as attend college awareness events including the Alumni Panel, Junior/Parent Night, college fairs, guest speakers from our community and college representative visits to our campus, throughout the year. Individual counseling meetings with Ms. Thatcher are scheduled in the Spring, but may be held at any time at the request of the student, their parents or the counseling office. Opportunities at school for students to learn more about college and the application process are many and it is also encouraged that students and their families take the time to visit college campuses when traveling off-island.

Early in the Fall semester of senior year, students will begin completing applications in College Prep class. After guided and individual research of colleges in Junior College Prep class and throughout the summer, seniors are ready to refine their college list, consisting of schools which they determine to be a good fit and with a balanced range of options. It is important that seniors investigate the colleges they are most interested in to determine best-fit while creating their final list. The recommended list should include 6-12 colleges ranging from reach, target, and highly likely (safety) schools.

- Reach schools are those where the chance for admission is significantly less than 50% and/or where competition is so keen that it is difficult to predict the chances for even the strongest student
- Target schools are those where the chance for admission is about 50/50
- Highly likely (safety) schools are those where the chance for admission is strong
- *Please remember that a student should be happy to attend every school on their list, regardless of which category it falls under*

You are encouraged to use this handbook as a resource for information regarding the college process. Please contact me with any questions or to schedule a meeting at any time.

I look forward to working with you!

Ms. Thatcher

For self-knowledge, understanding, and development, the process of applying is very valuable in its own right, and the attitude with which students and their parents approach the process is important. If applications are regarded merely as a means to an end, they may well become tedious, ominous, annoying and anxiety provoking. If, instead, each step of the procedure is considered as useful and informative in its own right, then the process can be enlightening, enriching, and enjoyable. Maintaining a positive attitude can help make the process successful and satisfying.

"Know thyself," the ancient Greek aphorism, is both a challenge and an invitation. If a student is to attend their "best-fit" college, then it must be their choice and not that of a parent, teacher, or friend. It follows that if the (final) decision is to be an independent one (after much collaboration with family, counselor and other mentors) then the student must have a clear idea of their personal and academic qualities, their needs, and ambitions.

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER

When creating their college list, students should consider the criteria that are most important to them, such as size, location, programs, diversity, opportunities for research and study-abroad, cost, on-campus activities, sports, etc. Not every school on their list will offer these in their entirety or to the same degree, but if the majority of a student's benchmarks can be met, then they will have an easier time choosing their school from those they are accepted to. This is where research, communication and campus visits, if possible, are invaluable. Websites, blogs, alumni, family, faculty and community members, and college representatives are some of the resources students can access for information about the colleges they are interested in. Having an idea of what you are looking for in a college (i.e. *knowing who you are*) will guide your search; please remember that your criteria—and therefore your list—*may be very different from your peers*.

Other important factors to consider are standardized test score requirements (SAT/SAT Subject tests/ACT) and AP exam test policy at your colleges. Many colleges are changing their guidelines on standardized test reporting; many are becoming test-optional (student chooses to submit scores or not), while others accept "super-scores" (the best score in each test category from any given test date). Many colleges are also moving toward allowing students to self-report their test scores during the application process, requiring official scores from the testing agency *only* after being accepted and committing. These options can influence a student's decision to apply to a college or not.

If a student has taken AP courses and tests, it is important to know how your colleges will use those test scores: will they give you college credit for scores, thus allowing you to begin college with an advantage of time and credit hours (tuition dollars) and, if so, what must those scores be? Or, does your college allow you to take higher level classes as a freshman because of your AP scores, but does not offer college credit for them? Some colleges do not accept AP scores for credit or course opt-out (they may still require you to take Freshman English, or Eng. 100, for example) regardless of the score earned on your AP exam.

Having AP classes on your high school transcript does indicate rigor and a desire to challenge oneself, both of which colleges like to see. Thorough research of your colleges will yield the necessary information to help guide your decisions. Of course, the policy about test scores may not influence your decision to apply to your favorite college at all!

SAT/ACT Exam dates

- SAT test dates: Oct. 1; Nov. 5; Dec. 3; Jan. 21; Mar. 11; May 6; June 3
- ACT test dates: Sept. 10; Oct. 22; Dec. 10; Feb. 11; April 8; June 10
- SSAT test dates: Nov. 12; Dec. 10; Feb. 11; Mar. 4 (not school-wide)
- PSAT test date: Oct. 19 (10th-11th)
- ASPIRE test date: Oct. 19 (9th)

AP Exam dates:

- Spanish Language and Culture: Tuesday, May 2
- Computer Science A: Tuesday, May 2
- English Literature and Composition: Wednesday, May 3
- U.S. History: Friday, May 5
- Computer Science Principles: Friday, May 5
- Calculus AB: Tuesday, May 9

HIGH SCHOOL TIMELINE

ALL-YEARS

- **Course Selection**—Take challenging courses in high school, focusing on the core academics: English, math, science, history, and world languages. Rigorous courses that go beyond the minimum graduation requirements will make you a more impressive applicant and can even earn you college credit while in high school (AP courses)!
- **Focus on your grades**—Your high school transcript is considered one of the most important parts of your college application, and good grades, beginning in 9th grade, will distinguish you from many other applicants.
- **Explore and commit to extracurricular and leadership activities**—Freshman year is a great time to try several different extracurricular activities to see which ones are most interesting to you. Once you decide what you like, dedicate more time to fewer activities in order to become deeply involved.
- **Find summer volunteer opportunities/jobs/internships**—Summer is a great time to earn extra money for college while exploring different career fields.
- **Begin an ongoing dialogue with your parents about how to pay for college**—Start discussing ASAP, both in terms of why you want to go to college and how you're going to pay for it. That way, you and your family will be comfortable with the topic when it's crunch time in 11th and 12th grade.
- **Start saving for college**—Even if you can only put aside a few dollars each month, every little bit helps, and creating a college savings account makes the idea of going on to higher education much more real.

JUNIOR YEAR

- **Take the PSAT**—Take the PSAT as a junior to practice for the SAT and to qualify for the National Merit Scholarship program.
- **Prepare for the SAT and/or ACT**—Use Method Test Prep or other test prep resources (e.g. Khan Academy, XXX, etc.) to prepare for the SAT and/or ACT at the start of junior year, and plan to take each test at least twice. Continue preparing throughout your junior year.
- **Learn more about colleges**—In addition to the work you will do in College Prep class, use online search tools, attend college fairs, speak with college reps, and ask friends already in college for their thoughts on different colleges to begin formulating an opinion of where you want to go. Continue this process throughout junior and senior year.

- **Take the SAT and/or ACT**—Take the SAT and/or ACT for the first time in the spring of junior year. Most students do better their second time, so plan to test again in the spring of junior year or early fall of senior year.
- **Make a list of target colleges**—Identify 10 to 15 colleges of interest with the goal of having several schools at varying levels of selectivity: some "safety," some "match," and some "reach" options. Continue updating this list throughout junior year and at the beginning of senior year, culminating in a "final list" of 6 – 10 colleges you will apply to.
- **Search for traditional scholarships**—Once you are midway through your junior year, it's time to begin searching for more traditional scholarships that are specifically made available to students in their senior year of high school. Continue searching throughout junior and senior year.
- **Take SAT Subject Tests**—SAT Subject Tests, which are required for some colleges, are best taken immediately after you've taken the relevant class and while the material is still fresh.
- **If possible, visit target colleges**—If possible, travel to top target colleges the summer after junior year to meet the admissions representatives, tour the campus and sit in on a class or two. Check individual college websites for details on info sessions, tour times, and interview opportunities. *Make an appointment with the admission representative for the Virgin Islands, coaches, if applicable, and a financial aid officer, if possible. Speak to students you see on campus and ask them questions that you won't get answered on the tour!*
- **Determine the application deadlines for each of your target schools**—Early Decision and Early Action applications are typically due in October/November of your senior year, while most regular admissions applications are due between January 1 and March 1. *Be certain to know these dates for your schools!*
- **Begin drafting college application essays**—Senior year is very busy, so the summer after junior year is a great time to begin college application essays.
- **Identify potential teachers to provide recommendation letters**—During the summer after junior year, begin identifying potential recommenders. These should be teachers from your core classes (math, science, history, English, or world languages) who know you best. Prepare a few bullet points for your teachers, explaining why you chose them as recommenders. Request letters of them in Naviance, followed by a face to face ask.
- **Outline your financial aid plan**—Use the financial aid calculators found on individual college websites, also known as net price calculators, to determine how much your family will need to contribute for your college education. Create a list of all the financial aid options you plan to pursue along with the deadlines for each.

SENIOR YEAR

- **Take the SAT and/or ACT**—If you feel like you can improve on your initial SAT and/or ACT results, take the tests for the second (or third) time in the fall of senior year.
- **Revise college application essays**—Once senior year begins, have your application essays proofread by your counselor, teacher or other mentor and then make any revisions and prepare final drafts.
- **Ask for letters of recommendation**—At least a month prior to your first application deadline, confirm with your recommenders their willingness to write on your behalf, *reminding them of your earliest deadline*.
- **Early Decision/Early Action**—Inform Ms. Thatcher of any plans to apply to apply ED or EA, and make an appointment with her to review the process and obligations associated with such applications.
- **Begin preparing for your interview**—Research the colleges where you plan to apply, identify those that may offer/require interviews, and begin practicing for the interviews with Ms. Thatcher, Mr. Loya and the mock interview committee.
- **Submit the FAFSA and the CSS PROFILE** —The FAFSA, the main determinant of federal financial aid, including work-study jobs, can now be submitted beginning on Oct. 1, 2016, using your 2015 tax returns. Certain schools require the CSS PROFILE to qualify for institutional aid, and it is usually due early. *Missing the CSS Profile deadline will eliminate your chance to receive institutional aid in your freshman year.*
- **Ensure official SAT and/or ACT score reports are sent to early application schools**—In addition to your application forms, letters of recommendation, essays, and other requested materials, your early decision application will require you to go to the College Board (SAT) and ACT Student (ACT) websites to send colleges your official test score reports.
- **Go into admissions interviews confident**—Interviews for some early action/decision schools happen in the fall, but don't stress out. You've done your research and had a mock interview; now it's just about having a conversation!
- **Receive response on early applications**—Most applications submitted through early programs will receive a decision by mid-December. If you submit your financial aid forms on time, you should receive an estimated financial aid package as well. If you receive a deferral, speak with Ms. Thatcher.
- **Submit regular decision applications**—Generally, colleges have regular decision due dates sometime between January 1 and March 1 of each year.
- **Ensure official SAT and ACT score reports are sent to regular decision schools** - In addition to your application forms, letters of recommendation, essays, and other requested materials, your regular decision application will require you to go to the College Board (SAT) and ACT Student (ACT) websites to send colleges your official test score reports.

- **Receive decision on regular applications**—Regular decision applicants typically receive an accept/reject/wait-list response in March or April. Speak with Ms. Thatcher about any waitlist decisions you have received.
- **Compare financial aid packages from multiple schools**—Once you are accepted, colleges will offer a financial aid package consisting of grants along with suggested loans and work-study.
- **Consider a financial aid appeal**—If your family's financial circumstance has changed, or if a college's financial aid package does not meet your need, reach out to the financial aid office ASAP to appeal the offer.
- **Submit your enrollment deposit**—The National Decision Day, the day when students must commit to the college of their choice, is May 1. After informing your college of your decision to attend, please inform the other colleges you were accepted to that you will not be attending, thus opening up space for other students who may be on the waitlist for that school.
- **Complete ongoing enrollment paperwork for your college**—Once you've decided on a college, you will receive updates regarding orientation, scheduling, housing, etc. Complete all paperwork by the necessary deadlines.
- **Conduct work-study job search**—Coordinate with the financial aid office to identify work-study options. Finalize your job search the summer before college begins or in the fall of your college freshman year.
- **Scholarship search**—Throughout your senior year, you should be searching scholarship websites (fastweb.com; cappex.com; scholarships.com, etc.) and applying for local scholarships as well.