

Weston High School, Department of School Counseling

Fifteen Things You Can Do to Get Started Now

1. Make ...take the time to think about yourself and what you would like out of your education beyond high school. There are very few times in your life when you can plan your future like you can in the college selection process. Communicate with your parents about limits to your search (geographically, monetary, big school or small etc.) Make time to think about this stuff.

2. Register for the SAT's or the ACT's. Taking the test in January or March creates the most options. Students who take these tests earlier tend to be the most prepared students. *You are not behind if you have not taken any standardized tests yet.* If you will be applying to the most selective schools, you may need to register for the SAT II's in May or June. You have some time to make that determination. Check some of the schools you are interested in, or check with your school counselor.

3. Spend some time thinking about teacher recommendations from your junior year teachers. Start thinking about your teachers differently. Should you be sharing more of yourself? Put some effort into the non-academic side of the relationship, especially if you have a teacher in mind that you would like to write on your behalf. It is not too late. Which teacher have you allowed to know you the best?

4. Check out the websites of schools you are exploring (20-25) that you think you might be interested in. Look at their admissions profile, application procedure, visitation policies etc. Get to know your way around college websites. Be patient. Some sites are very student-friendly; other are very Madison Avenue slick. Become familiar with admissions *language*, which can change every year.

5. Review the admissions applications for several schools as well as the Common Application. Start to understand the types of questions that you will need to be able to answer routinely and accurately. Become familiar with the format that schools ask for information as well as the variety of essays and short answers you will be expected to respond to. As far as the Common Application, become familiar with the idea and purpose of the *Supplement*. Completing the documents in Naviance such as the Junior Questionnaire and the Resume will make the application process much easier.

6. It is time to really start using Naviance as a resource. Complete the assigned tasks. Make sure you remember your log-in information. Parents should have their own account and not be using your student account. You should have a College Board account as well to register for the SAT's and for sending scores (both SAT and AP). You should also establish an account with the ACT folks if you are considering that as an alternative. If you don't have one/either yet..... it's time.

7. Take February and April vacation to visit some schools. Spring athletes plan accordingly. Call ahead to confirm times for information sessions and tours. Many schools will have special Junior Days (kind of an April thing) with more in-depth programming (check their websites). If you are still lost, get started by visiting local institutions to get a sense of the routine. Try Wesleyan, Connecticut College, Fairfield, UConn, or CCSU. Get the visit routine down. Like interviewing, you usually think of something you wanted to ask when you get in the car. Focus on programming and fit, not prestige.
8. Get the *Fiske Guide to Colleges* from the local library or the CCC, or buy one. Keep it handy ...in the car etc. Beware *The Best 378 Colleges*. If you know you will be applying to very selective schools, consider reading *The Gate Keepers*. It provides an in-depth look from a reporter's viewpoint at the admissions committee(s) of Wesleyan University. The author was Jacques Steinberg, a New York Times education editor who was embedded in the Wesleyan University admissions office for an entire year.
9. Have your parents fill out the Weston High School *Brag Rag* on Naviance. This is their chance to gush about you. Tell them not to be bashful.
10. Get the best grades you can this semester. Grades have always mattered.
11. Make an inventory of all the writing you need to accomplish. Set a goal for yourself that you will return to school in the fall with your essays ninety percent done.
12. Have a conversation with your parents about financial aid and what role you will play in the process. What is the range of affordability in your home? What is the general attitude toward loans? In some homes that is a short conversation, in other homes it is a continuous conversation. Schools can cost as much as 65K a year. That is an enormous amount of money and should be a very valuable discussion (no pun intended). Remember, it is a tuition charge.....not a cover charge.
13. Use your PSAT as a blueprint for improving your SAT scores. Log in to the QuickStart website and dedicate time to improving specifically targeted learning objectives outlined in your PSAT Report and the improvement plan provided on QuickStart.
14. If you do things properly, this process *can* be fun. The most frequent complaint from our students usually center on timing. If you fall behind in the process, there are always compromises in the quality of the list, the quality of the essay, the overall quality of the file and the overall quality of your teacher and counselor recommendations. Get out front and stay out front. The greatest compromise is that what *could be fun and empowering* can quickly become a chore and *one more thing* to get done. Not the best conditions for promoting outcomes and opportunities for your future.
15. Remember who the applicant is.

Essential College Planning Tasks for Juniors

December /January:

- Parents – Register for Naviance:** <http://connection.naviance.com/weston>
- Attend the WHS “College Planning Evening Seminar” for junior students and parents.
- Schedule an individual planning appointment with your counselor after midterms.
- Review your standardized testing plan and make adjustments for preparation and test taking. Review available dates for SAT I, SAT II and ACT and register online.
- Be sure to keep your appointment with the CCC to further explore colleges and/or other post-graduate options. At the conclusion of this appointment you should have 15-18 colleges listed in your Naviance Prospective list.
- Plan winter and spring break college visits, reserving tours and information sessions. Be sure to sign in when visiting. Keep a journal!

February:

- Select senior year courses with an emphasis on a balanced, yet challenging schedule. Consult with your school counselor.
- Visit colleges during winter break. Keep a journal.
- Take ACT, if registered.

March:

- Take SAT I, if registered. (*SAT Subject Tests are not offered during March.*)
- Start planning college visits for April break.
- Consider meaningful summer opportunities—check out the *Summer Opportunities Guide* online or in the CCC.
- Return registration for AP Exams to Mrs. Osinski.

April:

- Take ACT, if registered.
- Visit colleges during spring break. Keep a journal!

May:

- Take SAT or SAT II, if registered.
- Take the A.P. test, if qualified and registered.
- Approach 2 teachers personally to request letters of recommendation.

June:

- Take SAT or SAT II, if registered.
- Take ACT, if registered.
- Finalize a loose list of 10-12 schools, comprised of reaches, targets, and safeties.
- Thoughtfully complete Resume, Junior Questionnaire, and Parent Brag Sheet in Naviance.

July/August:

- Start brainstorming college essay ideas; check essay topics on *Common App* (available March 2015) as well as individual college applications.
- The *Common Application* opens on August 1st; complete base application & review supplements (commonapp.org)
- Begin finalizing college list in consultation with parents and counselor in the fall.
- Plan fall college visits and schedule interviews (as required/recommended).
- Athletes planning to play a Division I or II sport in college need to register online with *NCAA*. A tutorial may be found on the WHS School Counseling website.
- Review specialty application requirements (music/theatre auditions, portfolio presentations if applicable)

*** Visit the WHS School Counseling Website for More Resources!!! ***

College Presidents said.....

“Who you are and what you do is much more important than where you go to college.”

“College rankings oversimplify and mislead.”

“Once you opt out of the marketplace mentality that surrounds college admissions... then you are responsible for your own choices and what you make of them.”

“Education is a process, not a commodity.”

“In education, the *unmeasurables* matter much more.”

“Upward mobility does not depend on admission to a handful of colleges.”

“Spurred by a relentless media barrage... collectively we have robbed students of their senior year in high school.”

“It is your future and no one else should prepackage your approach to the process.”

“The predictors and indicators of good education are easy to know, but virtually impossible to measure.”

“Far too many incoming students choose their schools for all the wrong reasons.”

“College selectivity is no guarantee of quality.”

“Unfortunately, the admissions process in America today has become so commercialized and competitive that it makes ‘shopping for the right school’ seem like a high pressure game show.”

“It does not have to be this way. You do not have to play their game.”

“The college selection process does not have to be stressful if students and parents focus on what is really important.”

2014-15 Common Application Essay Prompts

The Common Application will retain the current set of first-year essay prompts for 2014-15, without any edits or additions. The essay length will continue to be capped at 650 words. The feedback received from member colleges and school counselors has been positive. The essay prompts will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that they continue to serve students and member colleges well.

The essay prompts are as follows:

- Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what lessons did you learn?
- Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?
- Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?
- Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

SAMPLE: University of Chicago Writing Supplement Version

Every year, the University of Chicago asks applicants to write an additional long essay. Their prompts are some of the most creative around.

Here is a *sample* of the supplement.

1. How does the University of Chicago, as you know it now, satisfy your desire for a particular kind of learning, community, and future? Please address with some specificity your own wishes and how they relate to UChicago. Required Extended Essay. (Required, 275 Word Maximum, Paste In).
2. Share with us a few of your favorite books, poems, authors, films, plays, pieces of music, musicians, performers, paintings, artists, blogs, magazines, or newspapers. Feel free to touch on one, some, or all of the categories listed, or add a category of your own. (Required, 275 Word Maximum, Paste In).
3. Choose one of the six extended essay options and upload a one- or two- page response. (Required, Upload). Please upload your response here. Hint: A .pdf file under 500 KB in size will be accepted.

Essay Option 1: Winston Churchill believed “a joke is a very serious thing.” From Off-Off Campus’s improvisations to the Shady Dealer humor magazine to the renowned Latke-Hamantash debate, we take humor very seriously here at The University of Chicago (and we have since 1959, when our alums helped found the renowned comedy theater The Second City).

Tell us your favorite joke and try to explain the joke without ruining it.

Essay Option 2: In a famous quote by José Ortega y Gasset, the Spanish philosopher proclaims, “Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia” (1914). José Quintans, master of the Biological Sciences Collegiate Division at the University of Chicago, sees it another way: “Yo soy yo y mi microbioma” (2012).

You are you and your..?

Essay Option 3: This is what history consists of. It’s the sum total of all the things they aren’t telling us.– Don DeLillo, *Libra*. What is history, who are “they,” and what aren’t they telling us?

Essay Option 4: The mantis shrimp can perceive both polarized light and multispectral images; they have the most complex eyes in the animal kingdom. Human eyes have color receptors for three colors (red, green, and blue); the mantis shrimp has receptors for sixteen types of color, enabling them to see a spectrum far beyond the capacity of the human brain. Seriously, how cool is the mantis shrimp:<http://www.mantisshrimp.uchicago.edu> What might they be able to see that we cannot?

What are we missing?

Essay Option 5: How are apples and oranges supposed to be compared? Possible answers involve, but are not limited to, statistics, chemistry, physics, linguistics, and philosophy.

Essay Option 6: In the spirit of adventurous inquiry, pose a question of your own. If your prompt is original and thoughtful, then you should have little trouble writing a great essay. Draw on your best qualities as a writer, thinker, visionary, social critic, sage, citizen of the world, or future citizen of the University of Chicago; take a little risk, and have fun.

If you share it, they will read

November 22, 2014 by Kevin McMullin

It was about ten years ago that I first started getting the question during seminars, “Do colleges look at your (insert popular social media tool here)?” The question often came from parents who were smartly concerned about what their kids might choose to post online.

More recently, I’ve heard from students and some parents who take offense to the idea that a college would do such a thing. Some think that reading what an applicant posts online is unprofessional and even that it violates a student’s privacy. Debating whether or not those arguments have legs misses the larger point. Once you put something online (without appropriate privacy settings), you relinquish all control over who views it, how it colors their perception of you, and what they choose to do with that information. And it’s naïve to assume that anyone—colleges, potential employers, people you’re about to go on a first date with, etc.—would flatly refuse to google you out of respect for your privacy.

I have never met a college admissions officer who had the desire or time to read every applicant’s Twitter, Facebook or other online postings. But does it happen occasionally? Of course it does. Hacking into your private Twitter feed would be a violation. But reading your public tweets is just consuming what you chose to give the online world. To object to them reading it is like playing guitar on a crowded street corner and then taking offense when someone chooses to stop and listen.

If you share it, someone will read it, so it’s important to protect and even cultivate your online legacy. Share—or don’t share—accordingly.