



# College Counseling Handbook 2010-2011

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**October**

- Save your best graded papers, with teacher comments
- Gather artwork for portfolio (if applicable)
- Junior Parent Meeting
- October 17 – PSAT
- October 30 – Registration deadline for December SAT

**December**

- PSAT scores received this month
- December 5 - SAT
- December 15 – Registration deadline for January SAT

**January**

- Juniors begin to meet with their college counselor
- January 23 – SAT

**February**

- February 4 – Registration deadline for March 13 SAT

**March**

- College counseling appointments continue
- Visit colleges during Spring Break
- March 5 – Registration deadline for April 4 ACT
- March 13 – SAT
- March 25 – Registration deadline for May SAT

**April**

- College counseling appointments continue
- April 10 – ACT

**May**

- College counseling appointments continue
- May 1 – SAT
- May 5 - Registration deadline for June 6 SAT
- May 3 - 7 and May 10 - 14 – AP exams
- May 8 – Registration deadline for June ACT
- Complete resumes
- Talk to teachers about possible recommendations

**June**

- Ask two teachers to write recommendations
- June 5 – SAT
- June 12 - ACT
- Visit colleges

**July & August - Visit, visit, visit Colleges!**

## **College Application Calendar Senior Year**

### **September**

- Update counselor on college list.
- Meet with college representatives visiting Sacred Heart
- Pay attention to SAT and ACT registration deadlines

### **October**

- October 9 – SAT
- October 23 – ACT
- Visit or re-visit colleges during long weekends and other available days
- Meet with college representatives visiting CDSSH
- Work on applications
- Pay attention to SAT and ACT registration and to ED and EA deadlines
- Narrow list
- Wrap-up visits and schedule remaining interviews

### **November**

- November 6 - SAT
- Narrow list to final selections
- Continue to meet with college counselor
- Pay attention to application deadlines and requirements

### **December**

- December 4 – SAT
- December 11 – ACT
- Pay attention to application deadlines and requirements

### **January**

- Pay attention to application deadlines and requirements
- File all financial aid forms (FAFSA)

### **February & March**

- Enjoy spring vacation and two months with minimal college-related activities

### **April**

- Most admission decisions received this month
- Many opportunities to revisit campuses
- Inform the College Counseling Office of your news
- Meet with your college counselor to discuss options
- Notify those colleges that you are no longer considering

### **May**

- May 1 – deadline to make your final decision
- Notify each college to which you applied of your enrollment plans

### **June - Graduation!**

## **Guide to the College Admissions Process**

### **Getting Started!**

Consider this College Counseling Handbook your roadmap for the process. We have created it to describe Sacred Heart's approach to college counseling in a way that will minimize the uncertainty which can surround the college selection process. The handbook is organized in a manner that will take you through all components of the "college admission journey."

If you take the time to read through this Handbook, follow through on the deadlines, and take advantage of the advice and help of your college counselor, you will find the process to be an opportunity to develop your strengths and build on accomplishments. The key to successful college selection rests on good communication among the four parties involved: the student, the parent(s), the counselor, and the college(s).

This process can be an exciting journey as you discover the educational opportunities that are available to you. We consider it an honor to be part of your planning for life after Sacred Heart. We look forward to working with you over the coming months.

## College Admissions – A Reflection

Welcome to the college counseling process! Though at times stressful, this next year is going to be an exciting step towards your future and we feel privileged to be counseling you through this time. While further education is important, the end point of your high school experience is not simply “getting into a good college.” The process in which you are about to embark is only one step along your life path. As such, you should view it in perspective – your whole future does not rest solely on a college’s decision about whether or not you will join in entering freshman class. Most importantly, your job is to find the right college fit for your needs and interests.

Starting in the winter of the junior year you, your parents, and your college counselor will work together to find a number of colleges that will suit your skills, interests, and goals. Although many people will help in this process, the final decisions must be yours. Your willingness to accept these responsibilities – the excitement of envisioning your next step after Sacred Heart and the hard work of applying to colleges on time – will indicate your readiness for college and the independence it will offer.

During this process, you will have four primary tasks:

- to determine what you are looking for in a college
- to appraise yourself as a college candidate
- to complete your applications
- to choose the college you will attend.

Once college is a common topic of conversation, you will hear reports (often conflicting) about specific colleges from various sources – parents, counselors, teachers, coaches, relatives, and well-meaning friends. To resist stereotypes and rumors, you must investigate for yourself. Start to research on the internet or with a good college guidebook. As you become interested in particular colleges, start your own file of materials. Like any good researcher, keep notes of your findings and questions. As you begin to appraise yourself as a candidate, your college counselor will help you to sort through statistical information regarding former Sacred Heart students and the colleges’ admitted student profiles to assess your chances of being admitted.

We hope that by working together, we can provide you with the assistance you will need to successfully navigate the college process. To accomplish this task, each member of the partnership must recognize, understand, and fulfill his/her own responsibilities.

## Student Responsibilities

### Most Importantly:

It is **imperative** that you read every piece of information that you receive from the Counseling Office, ie. Mrs. Martin. These notices contain information about deadlines, visits to Sacred Heart from college admission representatives, application materials and other important information that will make the process easier. Having said that, be sure to do the following:

- **Check your school email daily.**
- **Attend College Fairs.**
- **Research the basic admissions criteria at the colleges you are considering.**
- **Plan to visit** as many colleges during spring break and summer vacation as possible among the schools that you might be considering.
- **Complete a Common Application and Personal Essay over the summer. Be sure to check if there are any supplements.**
- **Meet college representatives visiting Sacred Heart** in the fall of senior year.
- **Complete applications honestly and accurately, noting deadlines.**
- **Request letters of recommendation** from teachers. Usually, the same people write recommendations for all of your college applications.
- **Keep your college counselor up-to-date** on all of your plans, progress and results. Communicate regularly with your counselor.

### Important Note:

**Due to the volume of applications, transcripts will go out within two weeks of the request. It takes up to three to four weeks for transcripts to be entered into the college's system. Often times, a college's reminder to send transcripts crosses in the mail with the actual transcript.**

## Parent's Responsibilities

- **Be open with your child.** Discuss college plans, including the financial picture and any restrictions, openly and honestly with your child early in the process. Share these thoughts with the college counselor either by phone, in writing, or in person.
- **Support and communicate with your child and his or her counselor.**
- **Be aware of deadlines and other requirements.**
- **Help your child send official test scores to the colleges.** The student, not the college office, is responsible for sending test scores to the colleges that require them.
- **Plan your visits.** Assist your child in visiting colleges of interest as much as is appropriate.
- **Fill out and file financial aid forms,** if applying for financial aid.
- **Keep talking with your child.** Check with your son or daughter periodically about the progress of his/her college application process, testing, and information distributed at School. But please remember, too, that your child should own the college admission process. Help your child to recognize and celebrate their strengths. A weekly college check-in between parents and students is a good way to balance the need to stay on top of the process with the goal of encouraging students to take responsibility for the process.
- **Support, support, support.**

## College Counselor Responsibilities

- **Discuss college planning with the student and the parents** and help to develop a balanced list that represents good matches.
- **Provide information** about chances of admission to particular colleges.
- **Provide resources and opportunities** for students and their families to learn about various colleges.
- **Keep students informed** about visitations, special events, open houses at colleges, deadlines, scholarships and testing.
- **Make available certain forms:**
  - a. Common Application
  - b. SAT, ACT and Subject Tests registration forms and informational booklets
  - c. College Board standardized testing and application fee waivers for students who qualify.
  - d. Special scholarship information and applications
- **Prepare and send transcripts** to colleges.
- **Prepare a well-written recommendation** that portrays the candidate in a positive and honest light with an emphasis on strengths and patterns of growth where appropriate.
- **Send mid-year, if applicable, and final transcripts to colleges.**
- **Serve as an advocate** for students to the colleges.
- **Support and counsel students and parents** throughout the college research, application, and selection process.

## Just for Parents

Adolescents feel a tremendous amount of pressure associated with the college search. You, as parents, play an important role in making this experience more comfortable and productive for your children. You offer your children support as they go through this time of exploration. You act as cheerleaders when a child's confidence flags and when it is appropriate, you urge him or her on to higher goals.

At the same time, you also help your children assess themselves and understand what they can realistically attain. If they aren't accepted at a particular school, you assist them in dealing with the disappointment and in moving on.

Parents, then, feel a great deal of pressure as well. Some of you may look upon college choice as the "final exam" of parenting and judge whether you have passed or failed by your perception of the "value" of your child's college admission. Try to maintain perspective! Resist the urge to think of the college selection process as merely a "numbers game." Your child is not a 32 ACT, a 1030 SAT, or a 3.15 GPA. Similarly, a college's quality cannot be summarized by a mathematical formula or a national magazine's rankings. Admissions decisions, while they all use numbers as a starting point, are not always rational or obvious, as admission people will sometimes admit after the fact. Making these decisions is, in truth, more of an art than a science.

As parents, you should acknowledge and share your aspirations, but keep them in the context of all the other factors that are part of your child's college search. You need to lend your support and your guidance to your child, but he or she should be the one to make the decisions and take the lead. Be there for your child, help assure that the right questions are asked, but *let your child be the one who asks those questions.*

For starters, you will probably be asking yourselves how to determine what makes a "good" college. Is it the percentage of applicants the institution accepts each year? Is it the school's average SAT scores? Is it the rating a college receives in a national magazine's report? These numbers, in our opinion, are a poor starting point at best, as they promise a "quick fix", often leading families away from the hard work of finding a truly relevant definition of a "good" institution.

In lieu of the quick fix, we would suggest that **a college is "good" for an individual if it: matches well a young person's academic, extra-curricular, social, and personal needs and goals.**

You, of course, will add your own criteria to the definition: quality of academic programs and athletic teams; size, location and, yes, some numbers. Reference works, websites, and literature received from colleges will help, as will conversations with the college counselors.

Visiting schools, however, is essential if you wish to learn first-hand about an institution's programs and "personality." Visits are time-consuming, yet they are invaluable for the process. We hope you will play the role of a researching assistant during these visits. Comparing notes, reactions, and insights will ultimately help your child to reach more informed decisions.

Ideally, families should be able to enjoy the college search. Given the right attitude, it can be a time for parents and children to connect closely with each other. Communicate, support, make suggestions, help your student plan and manage time, encourage the self-exploration that is so important, but try to leave these things in your child's control. Think of this as a time of discovery for all of you.

## Beginning the Search

One of your tasks during your meetings with your college counselor is to create a college list that reflects the characteristics you are looking for in a college, such as size, location, and quality of academic or extracurricular programs, lifestyle, and so forth. You may come into your early meetings with some colleges already in mind. Your counselor will also make suggestions. You might also add names discovered through reading or conversations with relatives or classmates.

Your preliminary list may well include institutions unfamiliar to you. Research them nonetheless. They are there for a reason! *Never* let yourself be guided by name recognition alone. Perhaps, in your counselor's opinion, a college that might be unfamiliar to you actually fits your academic and/or extracurricular needs well, or a recent Sacred Heart graduate with whom you have a good deal in common had a great experience there. It costs nothing to explore!

Researching colleges is among the most important tasks you will perform. The goal of your research is to develop a list of colleges that you know well. To that end, you will need to use several sources to determine what makes each college unique and why each one on the list is appealing to you. From this list you will choose institutions to visit during spring break and holidays, and over the summer and, ultimately, to apply to in the fall.

Here are some tips to guide you through the process.

### **STEP I: INFORMING YOURSELF**

READ (especially in catalogs or on the internet). TALK (to knowledgeable people).

THINK (what do you think). VISIT (college campuses).

### **STEP II: CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING A COLLEGE**

These are criteria that can be used to evaluate and ultimately choose a college, though some may be more pertinent than others in your search.

#### **1. STUDENT ENROLLMENT:**

- **ENROLLMENT**— Very Small (under 1000), Small (1,000-3,000), medium (3,000-7,000), medium/large (7,000-10,000), large (10,000-15,000), or very large (15,000+) college. Freshman class size. % Undergraduate students.
- **RETENTION** - % of freshmen that eventually graduate or return for their sophomore year.
- **BACKGROUND** - Male/female ratio. % Commuter / resident. Geographic origin. % minority. % on financial aid.

## **2. LOCATION and SURROUNDINGS:**

- **LOCATION** - New England, West Coast, Middle Atlantic states, the South, a foreign country. Distance from home. Travel costs and convenience.
- **SETTING** - Urban/Suburban/Rural. Weather. Nearest city or countryside. Recreational opportunities.
- **FACILITIES** - Library. Laboratories. Study and practice rooms. Student center. Athletic complex. Art studios. Theater. Bookstore. Food sources.

## **3. COLLEGE TYPE and PHILOSOPHY:**

- **TYPE** - 2/4 year. Religious/public/private/historically Black. Coed/Singlesex. College/university.
- **PURPOSE** - Liberal arts. Technical/vocational institute. Conservatory. Art /design college. Pre-professional for business, education, engineering, fine arts. Degrees offered.
- **PHILOSOPHY** - Traditional/progressive. Deeply scholarly/career oriented. Comprehensive.
- **CALENDAR** - Semester/trimester/quarter/module. Inter-term program. Accelerated.

## **4. CURRICULUM:**

- **ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS** - Proportion of study dedicated to core requirements/major/electives. Required freshman courses.
- **ACADEMIC OFFERINGS** – Majors/minors offered in your areas of interest. Breadth and depth of courses offered in your areas of interest. Interdisciplinary courses. Strong departments.
- **INDEPENDENT STUDY** - Individual tutorials. Seminars. Research opportunities.
- **SPECIAL STUDY PROGRAMS** - Field work. Internships. Exchange programs. Semester/year abroad study. Joint degree programs. Cooperative work/study plan. Pre-professional programs.
- **STANDARDS** - Accreditation. Degree requirements. Grading system. Grading/distribution. Honor system.
- **COURSE DESCRIPTION** - Introductory/advanced/specialized courses. Courses for majors/non-majors. Number of courses required for major.

## **5. ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT:**

- **FACULTY** - % with Ph.D. Origin of degrees earned. Original faculty research/scholarship. Teaching course load. Expectations for teaching/scholarship/advising and other college service. Emphasis on undergraduate teaching and learning.
- **FACULTY-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS** - Faculty-student ratio. Advising. Accessibility for conferences, assistance. Departmental clubs, colloquia, committees with student representatives. Class size, average. Classes under 20 students, over 50 students. Opportunities for discussion/student presentation/exchange of ideas.

- **ACADEMIC DEMANDS** - Workload. Course expectations. Type of assignments. Academic pressure/competition.
- **INTELLECTUAL VITALITY** - Student attitude toward learning. Flexibility/structure for learning. Exchange of ideas. Interest in political, social, or world issues.
- **CAREER PREPARATION** - Pre-professional programs. Career advising and information programs. % who go on to graduate school. Graduate school and job placement.
- **INSTRUCTION** - What types of teaching/learning situations exist? If I know my field of interest, what courses and faculty are available in it? Do full professors teach undergraduates? Is there an advisor system?

## **6. CAMPUS and STUDENT LIFE:**

- **TYPES OF STUDENTS** - Diversity and response to differences. Typical/offbeat student. Importance of money/material possessions/social appearances.
- **COMMUNITY TYPE** - Homogeneous. Pluralistic. Cohesive. Fragmented. School spirit. Controversial campus issues. Liberal/directive/restrictive social regulations. Political climate.
- **LIVING ARRANGEMENTS** - Predominantly large dorms/housing clusters/small houses. Availability of single rooms/doubles/suites/multiple rooms. System of housing allocation/roommate selection. Centralized/decentralized dining. Alternate dining programs. Single sex/coed dorms. Housing guaranteed.
- **CAMPUS ACTIVITIES** - Activities related to your interests. Emphasis on social life, fraternities or sororities, sports, or other dominant interests. Clubs and organizations traditional/creative/competitive issue oriented. Presence of religious, ethnic or cultural groups. Cultural opportunities on campus or in community. Focus of social life on campus/fraternities/community/other college campus/home.

## **7. ADMISSIONS:**

- **DEADLINES** - Application. Notification of decision. Deadline to reply to offer of admission.
- **APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS** - Fee. Information forms. Specific high school courses. Secondary school report. Recommendations. Interview. Common Application supplements.
- **SAT/ACT/SUBJECT TESTS** - What are the college's testing requirements?
- **ADMISSION SELECTIVITY** - % of applicants offered admission. Average SAT/ACT scores of freshmen. % of freshmen ranked in top 10% of high school class. Freshman class profile.
- **FINANCIAL** - Need blind or need considered?

## **8. COSTS and FINANCIAL AID:**

- **COSTS** - Minimum-maximum total costs per year. Student budget for tuition and fees/room and board/books and personal expenses/travel costs. Admission and enrollment fees.

- **FAMILY RESOURCES** - What can your family pay toward college expenses? Your earnings and savings.
- **AWARDS** - % of students receiving aid. Range of awards. Average award.
- **FINANCIAL AID** - Based on need/merit/or funds available. Loan and job expectations. Off-campus work opportunities.
- **APPLICATION** - Which forms are required? Deadlines.

## 9. LEGACIES:

Do I have a family history at the college from which I might benefit?

## 10. INTANGIBLES:

Does the atmosphere of the institution appeal to me?

## STEP III: RESEARCHING

Now that you have a better sense of possible questions to ask yourself about colleges, you need to begin the process of obtaining information for colleges on your preliminary list. *You* are the crucial factor in this step; not your parents, not the College Office. Researching colleges, as with your school work, takes time to do well. You will need to take notes, so always have a pen and paper handy. We suggest that you create a notebook devoted to college research that you bring to meetings with your college counselor. Here are possible avenues to explore:

**1. General College Guides:** Remember that these are someone else's assessments and views of a given college; do not let one source make a decision for you. We recommend that you research each college in several sources, then move on to the next college. You should consider acquiring your own personal copies of at least one of these guides. A number of publications provide general information about America's colleges. These include: The College Board's College Handbook; Barron's Profiles of American Colleges; Peterson's 4 Year Colleges. Others provide a more subjective view, including: Edward B. Fiske's The Fiske Guide to Colleges; and The Insider's Guide to Colleges, from *The Yale Daily News*.

**2. The Internet:** The internet is an extremely useful source of information for anyone involved in the college search. You can search college databases by location, size, major, and cost to find the right matches for you; you can request view books, and course catalogs; you can take a "virtual tour" of a campus; you can browse the curriculum

As technology continues to expand, we in the College Office will do our best to stay current with information we think can help you. Here is a short, and by no means complete, list of useful websites. When you begin to "surf," stay alert for particularly great college sites; jot down the Internet address and let us know what you have found so that we can update our list. Have fun!

- Peterson’s Guide WWW.PETERSONS.COM
- The College Board: WWW.COLLEGEBOARD.COM
- My Road WWW.MYROAD.COM
- CollegeNet WWW.COLLEGENET.COM
- MyCollegeGuide WWW.MYCOLLEGEGUIDE.ORG
- Common Application WWW.COMMONAPP.ORG
- Google University Search WWW.GOOGLE.COM/OPTIONS/UNIVERSITIES.HTML
- National Association for WWW.NACACNET.ORG
- College Admission Counseling (NACAC)

**3. College Admissions Officers:** Many colleges send representatives to Sacred Heart in the fall to answer questions about their colleges. An up-to-date schedule of these visits will be available on the counseling website and posted outside the Upper School office.

**4. Friends:** You may have friends who are either in college or who have already gone through the college selection process. They are an excellent resource if used with care. Question them about their reasons for choosing certain colleges and avoiding others. See if those reasons fit *your* idea of preferred colleges; never cross a college off your list merely because a friend did not like it. **Think for yourself!**

**5. Requesting Materials:** You can often request materials directly from a college’s website. Admission officers will send appropriate materials and may also ask coaches, drama directors, orchestra conductors, and others to get in touch with you. The more information you provide, the more specific the response is likely to be.

## **6. Books You Might Enjoy**

### **The College Admission Mystique**

*Bill Mayher*

Since its publication, many of the colleges discussed have become more selective. However, this is still a great introduction to the college process written by a veteran independent school college counselor.

### **Letting Go, A Parents’ Guide to Understanding the College Years**

*Karen Coburn and Madge Treeger*

This book discusses the joys and challenges of parenting a college-age child.

### **Harvard, Schmarvard: Getting Beyond the Ivy League to the College That is Best for You**

*Jay Matthews*

This book gives students the information and skills to look beyond the name of the college and assess the “fit” of the prospective colleges.

### **The Gatekeepers: Inside the Admission Process at a Premier College**

*Jacques Steinberg*

This book was written by a New York Times reporter who spent a year following an admission officer and several applicants through the admission process at Wesleyan University.

**Looking Beyond the Ivy League and Colleges that Change Lives**

*Loren Pope*

Pope discusses colleges that are less selective than some of their better-known peers but which provide excellent educational opportunities for a variety of students.

## A Well-Rounded List

The final goal of the college search is to create a balanced list of colleges that fall into four categories. The terms we use— safety, target and reach – are relative, not absolute. In determining where a given college falls for a particular student, we use our best judgment based on experience with recent Sacred Heart graduates and with trends we are seeing nationally and at that particular institution. If we believe certain colleges are unrealistic, we will tell you so.

Changes in academic performance during the junior and senior year may well move certain colleges into a different category, and better standardized test scores taken in the senior year can also increase the likelihood of acceptance. We offer frank advice to help you evaluate your chances of admission at a particular college—not as a judgment of your performance during your time at Sacred Heart or your potential as a college student. Ideally, your final list should be so constructed that, if things work out well, you will be admitted to most of the colleges on your college list. If they don't, you should still have at least two or three good choices.

Here are the definitions of the four major categories colleges fall into:

**Safety (Likely):** Sacred Heart students with comparable test scores and grades are usually offered admission and an offer of admission is at least 70% certain. However, it is important that students apply to several “likely” colleges as the admission picture changes annually.

**Target (Possible):** Sacred Heart students with similar grades and test scores are sometimes admitted, sometimes waitlisted and occasionally denied. Chance of admission is roughly 50%.

**Reach:** Sacred Heart students with similar grades and test scores are less likely to be admitted, except in cases where extenuating circumstances, such as strong coach support or active alumni connections, affect the decision. There is usually a 20 - 30% chance of being admitted.

By the time you arrive at your final list of colleges we recommend that you have at least two colleges in the Safety category, and no more than three colleges in the Reach category. The majority of your colleges should be in the Target category. It's also important to note that the most selective colleges in the country will be in the Reach category for almost all of Sacred Heart's students regardless of how strong he or she is. In addition, because these colleges have so many qualified applicants, they're not concerned with whether a student can do the work, the majority of the applicants can do so quite successfully, rather they're trying to form a class of students who will bring unique talents to their colleges in addition to their stellar academic performance. Your counselor will be able to tell you why certain colleges fall in a particular category. **Remember that the selectivity of a college may have relatively little bearing on the quality of the education and experience that it can offer you!**

## College Admission Testing

Standardized testing is an important factor in admission decisions, especially at most of the “highly selective” colleges and universities. A few institutions have downplayed the importance of scores, and some have eliminated test requirements entirely, but those institutions are in the minority. Standardized testing still matters at most colleges. We want you to understand testing requirements and, just as important, to keep them in perspective.

### Test Descriptions

#### 1. PSAT / NMSQT – Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test

This test is given in October to the entire freshman, sophomore and junior classes. Registration is handled by the school. Scores from the junior year are used for National Merit Scholarship Qualification (NMSQT) and for student and counselor use only. These scores are not sent to colleges.

#### 2 . SAT Reasoning Test

SAT is officially called the SAT: Reasoning Test. It consists of critical reading, math, and writing sections and takes close to four hours.

#### 3 . SAT Subject Tests

These are one-hour tests measuring your knowledge of specific subject areas such as languages, math, sciences, and history. Students choose which tests to take. Most selective colleges require two (sometimes three) SAT Subject Tests in addition to the SAT Reasoning Test. These tests can be taken at any time during one’s high school career. Three tests can be taken at one sitting, but we recommend that students only take one or two at a time. For more information about both the reasoning and subject tests, access the College Board website at:

**WWW.COLLEGEBOARD.COM.**

#### 4 . ACT – American College Test

An achievement-based test, the ACT is a popular alternative to the SAT and some students do better on this test. Students can submit the ACT in exchange for the SAT Reasoning Test, the SAT Subject Tests, or both, depending on the college’s requirements. Almost all colleges accept the ACT. For more information access their website at: **WWW.ACTSTUDENT.ORG.**

#### 5 . AP – Advanced Placement exam

These exams are not required for college admission and are used, instead, for college credit or placing in an advanced course in college. College may look favorably on strong results if available, but students are not penalized if they have not taken the AP exams.

## Registering for Tests

1. **It is your responsibility to register for the SAT and the ACT tests.**
2. **Online registration is the easiest way for most students to sign up for the SAT Reasoning and Subject tests, or the ACT.** (Go to **WWW.COLLEGEBOARD.COM** or **WWW.ACTSTUDENT.ORG** and sign up) You will need a valid, major credit card to register. The earlier you register the better.
3. Though not advised, you can **register on paper** for the SAT in the College Office.
4. **Know the testing requirements of each college to which you plan to apply.** Note which SAT Subject Tests are required and whether they accept the ACT (**WWW.ACTSTUDENT.ORG**) instead of the SAT.
5. **Always use exactly the same name and address when signing up for any tests!** If you sign up once as Jane P. Sherman and as Janie Sherman another time, the computer will treat you as two different people, which can make sending scores to colleges much more difficult. Be just as precise with your address, birth date, Social Security number, and testing codes!
6. **Extended-time testing:** Students eligible for extended time testing must have on file with the Ms. Martin, an educational evaluation done in the last three years, with a diagnosed disability and specific recommendation for extended time. Please note that it is extremely difficult to obtain extended time for the ACT. See your counselor for details.
7. You will receive an **admission ticket** for all testing sessions. Check the information for accuracy, and to be sure you are assigned to the correct test center. If you are not, or if you have other questions, see your college counselor well ahead of the test date. Save your admission tickets and **score reports** you receive in a specific file, even after you have taken the tests. You may need registration numbers and test dates later in the application process.

### Recommended Testing Plan

#### Freshman and Sophomore years

- Register for and take any SAT Subject Tests that you are qualified to take in June. Refer to chart at the end of this chapter.
- Freshmen and Sophomores take the PSAT in October—the school will register the students.

#### Junior year

- October: PSAT—the school will register juniors for this test
- December: register for and take the SAT Reasoning Test
- April: register for and take the ACT
- March/May: SAT test dates can be used to re-take the SAT Reasoning test
- May/June: SAT test dates should be used to take SAT Subject Tests. Your college counselor will help you choose.

#### Senior year

- Re-take the SAT Reasoning Test, Subject Tests, and ACT as needed

## Reporting Your Scores

**The only way for colleges to see your SAT or ACT scores is for you to arrange for official scores to be sent. They are not on your Sacred Heart transcript and it is your responsibility, not the school's, to send scores.**

- **Colleges require official score reports sent directly** to them from the testing agency. As a rule, they will not accept a copy of the report the agency has sent to you. Always have an official report sent!
- **Use the correct code.** Every college and other organizations (scholarship agencies & the NCAA) that might want to see your scores has a four-digit code, listed in the back of the registration booklet or online.
- SAT and ACT registration forms have spaces to put these codes when you register; a certain number of official reports are sent “free” – part of the price of registration. **Do not list any colleges in this space when you take the test as a junior!** Do, however, use the spaces for senior test dates, at least for colleges to which you are fairly certain to apply. You can always add others later, online.
- **Score choice gives students the option to send SAT scores by sitting (test date) and SAT Subject Test scores by individual test.**
- **Score reports for all SATs are cumulative up to the date of the request.** Thus, if you request a report for the December testing date of your senior year, it will include all tests taken up to that point, both SAT and Subject Tests.
- **Score reports for the ACT are not cumulative.** You must obtain a separate report for each testing date.
- **When should colleges have your scores?** For students applying early, scores should be sent by the first of November at the latest. For most students applying regular, scores should be sent by early January.

**It is the student's responsibility to send official standardized test scores from the testing company to each college that requires them.**

## Preparing for the Test

Familiarity with the organization, structure, and types of questions on any standardized test can be helpful, as it will allow you, on test day, to focus on the content of the questions without having to spend extra time during the test to figure out directions. Some basic, common-sense strategies can be useful in preventing extra stress and unnecessarily wasted time.

Many types of test preparation for the SAT Reasoning Test, SAT Subject Tests, and the ACT are available, including books, computer software, and commercial courses that require a significant investment of time and money. At the very least, you should familiarize yourself with the format and structure of the exams by using the booklets with sample questions that The College Board provides. There are sample questions and test taking tips on the College Board and the ACT websites ([www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com), [www.act.org](http://www.act.org)). All contain practice test questions, as do many of the test-preparation books on the market. Some students are motivated to prepare on their own, while others may believe that they will not do the necessary preparation unless they have the external motivation that comes from a formal course. There is debate as to whether or not coaching can have a significant impact on a student's scores, but some sort of preparation is definitely beneficial; you and your family can decide which is best for you.

### SAT SUBJECT TEST RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COLLEGE OFFICE

#### In order to take...

#### You should be finishing...

#### Humanities

Literature  
United States (U.S.) History

AP English 11  
U.S. History (after grade 11)

#### Mathematics

Mathematics Level 1  
Mathematics Level 2

Pre-calculus  
Honors pre-calculus (or higher)

#### Sciences

Biology E/M (Ecological/Molecular)  
Chemistry  
Physics

Biology M (with prep course)  
Chemistry or Honors Chem  
Honors Physics (with prep course)

#### Foreign Languages \*

French  
Latin  
Spanish

Honors Level 4 or 5  
(with approval of teacher)

\* Test with Listening offered only in Nov

## ACT vs. SAT

The SAT and ACT are two very different college entrance exams. Both are nationally administered and are used to help colleges evaluate applicants. The SAT is essentially a three-part aptitude test (Reading, Math, Writing) while the ACT is more of an achievement test with four core sections (English, Math, Reading, Science) and an optional Writing section. Many colleges will accept either test or both exams. Some colleges require one (typically the SAT). The chart below will help you understand the structure and content of the SAT and ACT.

	SAT	ACT
Length	3 hours, 45 minutes	3 hours, 25 minutes (includes optional 30-minute Writing Test)
Sections	10 Sections: 3 Critical Reading, 3 Math, 3 Writing (including Essay), 1 Experimental (not scored)	4 Sections (plus optional Writing Test): English, Math, Reading, Science, Writing
Subjects	Critical Reading Math Writing	English Math Reading Science Writing (optional)
Reading	Reading passages with questions pertaining to comprehension and sentence completion	4 passages, 10 questions per passage
Science	N/A	Science (analysis, knowledge, problem solving)

Math	Arithmetic, geometry, algebra, and algebra II	Arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and trigonometry
Essay	Required	Optional (final section)
Score Composition	$\frac{1}{3}$ Math $\frac{1}{3}$ Reading $\frac{1}{3}$ Writing	$\frac{1}{4}$ English $\frac{1}{4}$ Math $\frac{1}{4}$ Reading $\frac{1}{4}$ Science
Scoring	Aggregate score 600 - 2400 based on total of 3 scores 200- 800 (Reading, Math, Writing)  Score of 0-12 for Essay	Composite score 1-36 based on average of 4 sections (English Math, Reading Science)  Score 0-12 for Optional Essay.
Penalties	Penalties (typically $\frac{1}{4}$ point deducted) for wrong answers	No penalties for incorrect answers
Sending Scores to Colleges	Currently entire score history is sent. Starting with the March 2009 test date, students can select (“opt-in feature”) which will allow them to choose specific test date(s) – 3/09 and forward - and all scores from the selected test date(s) will be sent.	Student decides which scores are sent
Additional Information	<a href="http://www.collegeboard.com">www.collegeboard.com</a>	<a href="http://www.actstudent.org">www.actstudent.org</a>

## SAT and ACT Score Comparison

This chart shows comparative scores for the ACT, the Current SAT, and the New SAT.

<b>Last Current SAT:</b>	January 22, 2005
<b>First ACT with Writing Test:</b>	February 12, 2005
<b>First New SAT:</b>	March 12, 2005

ACT Current	SAT	New SAT
If you scored a...	or a...	It's about the same as a...
36	1600	2400
35	1560-1590	2340
34	1510-1550	2260
33	1460-1500	2190
32	1410-1450	2130
31	1360-1400	2040
30	1320-1350	1980
29	1280-1310	1920
28	1240-1270	1860
27	1210-1230	1820
26	1170-1200	1760
25	1130-1160	1700
24	1090-1120	1650
23	1060-1080	1590
22	1020-1050	1530
21	980-1010	1500
20	940-970	1410
19	900-930	1350
18	860-890	1290
17	810-850	1210
16	760-800	1140
15	710-750	1060
14	660-700	1000
13	590-650	900
12	520-580	780
11	500-510	750

# SAT vs. ACT – The Test

The road to college can be a confusing and hectic one. Choosing the right admissions test to take - SAT or ACT - doesn't have to be. While most colleges across the country accept scores from either test, the SAT and ACT are significantly different, and in many ways, they measure different skills. Check with your guidance counselor and preferred colleges, then use the information below to decide which test is right for you.

## Differences at a Glance:

### SAT

- no science section
- no trigonometry section
- vocabulary emphasized
- non multiple-choice questions included
- guessing penalty
- no English grammar
- math accounts for 50% of your score
- questions go from easy to hard in most sections
- all your SAT scores reported to colleges

### ACT

- science reasoning section
- math sections include trigonometry
- vocabulary less important
- entirely multiple choice
- no guessing penalty
- English grammar tested
- math accounts for 25% of your score
- easy and hard questions mixed within sections
- report scores only from the test dates you Choose

## **The College Visit**

### *Campus Tours, Information Sessions, and Interviews*

Visiting college campuses in person can be one of the most helpful activities during your college search. Touring the campus, talking to current students, and meeting faculty add life and dimension to online descriptions. To schedule a college visit, simply call and inquire into the times for tours, information sessions, and interviews. Also, check the websites for tour and information session times. These visits do not typically require an appointment, but occasionally they do, so call ahead.

**Students are expected to complete the majority of their visiting prior to returning to school in the fall of the senior year.** Some families become frustrated by the fact that their first visits may be during times when current students are on vacation. However, there is only one day set aside just for seniors to visit colleges and the demands of the senior fall do not allow much additional time in which to travel to colleges.

### **Getting the Most out of the College Visit**

1. Call or check online for tour times or to reserve a spot on the tour and information session.
2. Many colleges have a formal information session at a specific time of the day. We recommend you attend this as well as do the campus tour.
3. Call ahead to see if the college offers on-campus interviews and try to arrange one. We recommend interviewing during the summer since it is often difficult to return to campuses during the fall.
4. If possible, attend some classes and also try to spend some time walking around the campus alone, to taste the flavor of the place. Often, visiting the dining hall and the student center, and listening to students talk, are other good ways to get a sense of the school's atmosphere.
5. Explore the areas of campus (and the surrounding area) where you think you will spend the most time. Walk around the academic departments that interest you.
6. Take notes during your visit -- some colleges can begin to look and sound alike after several days of visiting, not to mention weeks later when you are constructing your list.

## The College Interview

There are a number of variations in the interview policies at colleges. They often involve one of the following four options: no interview – group information sessions only; alumni interviews only – off campus; interviews are optional and informational only; interviews are encouraged and do become part of the student’s application file. If the college does offer an on-campus or alumni interview, we recommend that you take advantage of the opportunity. Interviews are a crucial method at your disposal to demonstrate your interest in a particular college.

### What can you do to prepare?

- Read all available material on the college beforehand.
- Do not ask questions that are answered in the material.
- Be prepared to comment on particular programs that combine your talents and interests.
- Be prepared for cryptic questions (e.g. “What would you like to talk about?”).

We have provided on the following page, the kinds of questions you might be asked. Think about each one and try to practice your answer aloud either at the dinner table or in the car with a parent. If you have thought these through, you should be well prepared for any question.

1. Please visit each college’s website and pay close attention to their interview policies, requirements, and deadlines.
2. Be prompt. Call if you are going to be late.
3. Try to be relaxed. Dress appropriately (at least neatly – no jeans).
4. Turn off cell phones and don’t chew gum.
5. Avoid asking questions already answered in the catalogue or viewbook (which you should have read) and be prepared to ask thoughtful questions.
6. Be prepared to engage in a conversation. You should talk about your strengths, what excites you intellectually and what your goals are. Without being arrogant, haughty or overbearing, you should be confident that you have a great deal to offer a college.
7. Finally, **take time to send your interviewer a hand-written thank-you note after the visit** (so make sure you have his/her name written down). This gesture is appreciated.

## Sample Questions from College Admissions Interviewers

1. How do you like Sacred Heart? What has been the most positive experience you have had? The most negative? What would you like to change about Sacred Heart?
2. What is your role in the school community? What would your teachers say about you?
3. What is the most significant contribution you have made to your school?
4. What are you looking for in a school? How did you become interested in \_\_\_\_\_?
5. What are some of your goals – personal and career – for the future?
6. Tell me about a class or assignment in which you found yourself stimulated intellectually.
7. What do you like best about participating in extra-curricular activities?
8. How and in what ways do you expect, plan or hope to transfer your secondary school contributions, achievements, and/or activities to the college level?
9. What has been your favorite subject in high school? Why?
10. What might you study in college?
11. What books or authors have made a lasting impression on your way of thinking?
12. What events, would you deem critical in your life thus far? Who has most influenced you?
13. Describe ways in which you are different from others at your school.
14. How have you spent your summers?
15. What are your reactions to current events—for example, HIV or The War on Terror?
16. Describe something about which you have become outraged or inspired during the past year.
19. Have you ever thought of not going to college? What would you do?
20. How do you spend your free time?
21. Why do you think you are a good match for this college?
22. Many qualified students apply to our school. What characteristics single you out from others?
23. Do you have any questions? (Have some in mind!)

## The Campus Tour

Below are some sample questions you might want to consider when you visit a college and take a campus tour. Remember that the tour is an important opportunity for you to talk with a current student (the tour guide) and learn more about the student experience at the college.

1. How large are your classes? Do you meet regularly with an advisor?
2. Where do you study? Is the library a good place to work or study? What hours do students have access to libraries, computers, labs, etc.?
3. What academic experiences are available beyond the classroom?
4. What percent of students live in dorms? Is housing guaranteed for all four years?
5. Is this considered a safe campus? Are there regular patrols, escort vans, emergency phones?
6. Is this an openly competitive campus? How are tests and exams administered?
7. Do you meet with professors informally? Have you ever been invited to a professor's home?
8. How tolerant is this community of independence and diversity?
9. What are the most popular extracurricular activities here?
10. What do you like best and least about being a student here?
11. Are there single-sex dormitories? Substance-free dorms? "Quiet" dorms? Any thematic housing? Are there laundry facilities in each dorm?
12. Is there a career guidance service on campus? A placement service? Is the placement service available to alumni?
13. Does social life revolve around the campus, or do most students leave on the weekends? What are the major social activities?
14. What is the biggest campus issue currently?

**At the end of your visit, ask yourself one very important question:**

**"Do I see myself fitting in here?"**

## College Admissions Criteria

### *What are Colleges looking for?*

Before you send an application to a college you must, as best you can, determine if you meet its admission criteria. Take a hard look at yourself, your academic potential, and your accomplishments. The mere fact that you attend Sacred Heart—or any other high school, for that matter—does not mean that your college of choice will accept you. Being at Sacred Heart affords you the opportunity to get an excellent education. What you do with that opportunity is up to you. The more selective a college is, the higher its standards are for admission. The best gauge of how you will do in college is your performance in high school. If you have pushed yourself, colleges will note that. If you have combined SAT's of 2400, but have only earned C grades, they will note that as well.

**1)** Colleges will judge you on the courses you have taken and the grades you have earned. *Simply meeting Sacred Heart's graduation requirements will not be enough to make you competitive in the admissions process at many institutions.* Most selective colleges expect the ideal applicant to have taken the following courses:

- 4 years of English
- 4 years of mathematics
- 3-4 years of natural science
- 3-4 years of foreign language
- 3-4 years of history and social sciences

While colleges like to see Honors and AP courses in a student's program (if the high school offers them), you should not get in over your head. Accept your limitations as well as your strengths. Nothing is gained on the college admissions front by taking an AP or an Honors course and receiving a C or a D.

**2)** Make sure that you have taken the specific courses and tests required by the institution to which you are applying. For example, to apply to engineering colleges, you should take four years of math through Calculus, Physics (Honors if recommended), and the Physics Subject Test.

**3)** A stellar academic record alone will not ensure your admission to the most selective colleges. What else can you bring to the college: athletic, musical, or artistic talent, uncommon intellectual pursuits, research experience, diversity?

**4)** Although test results are only one factor in the selection process, they are important. As a rule, the more selective the college, the more important the test scores. Do your scores fall within the range presented by most successful students to an institution? If they are below that range, are you being realistic?

## **When an admissions committee opens your folder to consider you for admission, they will see the following:**

### **Your official transcript**

Your official transcript from Sacred Heart will list all your Sacred Heart Upper School courses, your letter grades and your grade point average. **SAT/ACT scores are not included on the transcript.** Colleges will consider the rigor of your courses within the context of Sacred Heart's curriculum, whether you have received Honors, and other academic awards or distinctions. Improvement in the senior year is helpful, but it will not remove the stigma of a poor record in the first three years. If you entered Sacred Heart after grade 9, your transcript from your previous school will also be sent to your colleges for evaluation.

### **Completed application and essay**

The application will include all personal information, extracurricular and athletic activities, jobs you have held, and the like. Colleges look closely at the your part of the application, particularly the quality of the essay. Each year, we see students who improve their chances of admission because their essays are strong. Students can also be denied admission to colleges for which they were qualified because their application demonstrated little thought or care. The quality of your application is the one aspect of this process that you completely control; take advantage of the opportunity to help yourself. Start early and remember that neatness and spelling count!

### **Required supplementary materials**

Supplementary materials may include a graded paper or an institution-specific essay. These requirements will vary from college to college. Be sure you check with each institution to make certain you have fulfilled its respective requirements.

### **Faculty recommendations**

Usually, most colleges require that you submit two letters of recommendation. Ideally, one should be from someone who can speak to your ability to express yourself in writing, which usually means an English or history teacher; the second should be from someone who can evaluate your capacity to think in abstract, analytical, and logical terms, often a science or math teacher. You should select teachers from your junior or senior year as colleges want to hear from the people who have taught you most recently. Your counselor will also assist you in choosing which teachers to ask.

### **Interviews**

Many schools view your request for an interview as a sign of interest, and this interest can benefit you in their appraisal of your application. However, other college admission offices offer interviews as a way for you to evaluate the school rather than as a means to evaluate you. Regardless, the impression you leave in an interview may become part of your application file.

### **Additional recommendations**

You may wish to include additional notes or recommendations from athletic coaches at Sacred Heart if you are an athlete, or from an activity leader if you excel in another area outside of the classroom (music, dance, studio art, theater, journalism, etc.). Never send extra recommendations without first discussing it with your counselor. Colleges simply do not want extra recommendations and flooding your file with letters may actually hurt your chances at some colleges.

### **The Sacred Heart Profile**

Without a doubt, colleges respect a Sacred Heart diploma and recognize the hard work it represents. One of the ways we convey this information is through the School Profile. Sacred Heart sends a School Profile to each college with the student's transcript. This Profile includes our grading system, median SAT scores, and general requirements.

### **Test Scores**

Your file will contain an official report of all of your SAT Reasoning Test, SAT Subject Test, and ACT scores that you arrange to send. **Note that you must have these reports sent directly from the testing agency.** The College Office will not send your scores as colleges do not accept our score report as an official score report. Be sure you know the testing requirements for each institution.

### **Reporting Disciplinary Cases to Colleges**

## **The Application**

### *Putting Your Best Foot Forward*

Your completed application is an extension of yourself. You cannot afford to be sloppy and inattentive to details. Start by using the Common Application online. Remember: many schools on the Common Application also require their own supplement, such as a set of specific shorter essays, another long essay, or a graded paper with teacher comments. Make certain that you check the requirements for each school to which you apply. If one of your schools is not on the Common Application list, photocopy the school's specific application, and use that as your rough draft before you begin to fill out the final form, online if possible.

On the Common Application website ([www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org)), there is a link for downloadable forms where you can find Adobe pdf copies of all of the common application forms, including a *College Deadlines, Fees, and Requirements Grid*, which will provide you with all of the specific application process information for every common application college. We highly recommend that you download this document, print it out, and use it as your guide.

### **The Application**

Applications have two parts: "yours" and "ours." You have your responsibilities to fulfill, and the College Office has its own for each school to which you apply.

#### **Student section**

You are responsible for sending the following parts of your application:

- your personal information (the application)
- one or more essays (the personal statement)
- various types of supplements (a college's own essay question, a graded paper, a peer reference) if required
- the application fee
- your SAT Reasoning, SAT Subject Tests, and / or ACT scores directly from the testing agency
- securing your teacher recommenders

#### **College Office section**

We are responsible for mailing the following:

- Your transcript
- Secondary Report or College Counselor's Recommendation
- Sacred Heart Profile

## The Essay

Most colleges and universities require students to write an essay as part of the application (not all—many state institutions do not have this requirement). Why? Because they want to see: a) how well you write, b) as one admissions officer puts it, “how students can wrap their brains around broadly-based questions” and c) who you are, in your own words and from your own point of view. Along with the interview, the essay affords your best chance to share your thoughts, insights, and opinions; to highlight your accomplishments; and to convey your maturity and outlook on life. Look at the essay, then, as an opportunity to tell the admission committee something about yourself that isn’t in the rest of your application. College essays are therefore different from those you write for English, history or other classes. You try to write well and to “wrap your brain around questions” for those teachers, but usually you do not write about yourself. Some students find it hard, when applying to college, to shift gears and write about a topic that may be close to them personally. The task need not be difficult, however. Here are a few tips, many gathered from admissions officers:

### Choosing a topic:

Some colleges simply assign a topic, such as:

- Describe a person or an event that has been important in your life.
- If you had to choose four things to put into a time capsule to be opened in a thousand years, what would they be and why?
- Write about an issue of local, national or global importance.
- Many applications, in particular the Common Application, give you the option of writing about a topic of your own choice. Whatever you choose, bear in mind:
- No topic is inherently a “good” or “bad” one. Admissions people want to discover something about you that they cannot learn from your transcript or test scores, so write about something that matters to *you*, not what you think they want to hear.
- While no topics are “wrong”, there are wrong approaches. In general, do not dwell on specific experiences, but on your perception of or reaction to those experiences. For example, writing a travelogue about your summer trip to France is trite. (“The view from the Eiffel Tower was the most breathtaking thing I’ve ever seen!!!”) Instead, write about something you learned or that truly moved you while you were there. If you cannot do that, find another subject.
- Some topics do need to be treated with great care, and should be avoided if you cannot do so. It is very difficult, for example, to write about personal tragedies or those that affect your community or the world. If you choose one of these subjects, be sure to focus less on the events than on how they affected you—and never focus on just the negatives, be sure to note how you’ve overcome this adversity. If you are

asserting a strong opinion on a sensitive political, social, or religious issue, we recommend also pointing out that you are open to the opinions of others (if true).

- Try to avoid writing about privilege in your essay.

### **Writing the essay:**

- Be yourself, and write for yourself; use your own voice. Generally, we are taught to write for a particular group. The college essay has no audience *per se* except a group of strangers known as the admission committee. With no specific audience, students may compose an essay that attempts to convey an “educated” writer. This approach can result in stilted diction, posturing, and labored prose, rather than writing that reflects energy and spontaneity. If you write from the heart about a topic that is meaningful to you, you will be writing for yourself, and, as a result, your essay will be much more memorable to that group of strangers.
- Use words you are comfortable with. Do not use a thesaurus. You do not *ratiocinate* or *cogitate*, for example. You *think*.
- Do not try to be funny unless humor comes naturally to you and you are experienced—and good—at humorous writing.
- Good writing, as one admission officer put it, is lean, progressive, imaginative, grounded in specifics, energized by apt verbs, and respectful of the reader’s intelligence. Tell your story in a way that *shows*, rather than merely *claims*, that you have learned or matured through the situation or experience you are describing.
- Your opening sentence needs to “grab” the reader. Admissions people read so many essays that an imaginative opening will grab their attention.
- *Do not allow others to become involved in the writing process, other than as proofreaders.* It will be obvious if someone else wrote the essay for you!
- Spelling, punctuation, grammar, clarity, and neatness all matter, and they can sabotage an otherwise competent and compelling essay.
- Allow plenty of time to write your essay(s). *Edit, re-edit and proofread again and again!* If you wait until the last minute, it will show.

## Options and Deadlines

For every application you complete and intend to send there will be deadlines to which you must adhere in order to become a candidate for admission. They are defined as follows:

### **“Regular” Admissions**

Under a regular admission schedule, the student applies by a certain deadline, usually between January 1 and March 1, and is notified of a decision on or shortly after a specific date, most often between March 15 and April 15.

### **Early Decision (and Early Decision 2)**

The Early Decision (ED) deadline, often November 1, is much earlier than the regular one and the student is usually notified of the college’s decision one month later. One of three decisions is possible: Accept, Defer, or Deny. An accepted student is bound to attend the college and must withdraw any other active applications. Students who are deferred are simply put back in the pile and looked at again with the regular pool of applicants. If deferred, they are no longer committed to attending the college should they be accepted later in the year. Some colleges have a policy of denying Early Decision applicants they deem unqualified. While an outright denial can hurt, it does relieve the anxiety of having to wait another four or five months for a decision. A student may submit only one Early Decision application at a time. However, several institutions have ED1 and Early Decision 2 (ED2) deadlines; the latter are designed to attract students who were not ready to apply in November and applicants who may have been rejected or deferred from another college earlier in the year. Other institutions have Early Decision deadlines that are relatively late—for example, January 1— which serve the same purpose as ED2. Early Decision candidates must be ready to apply to other colleges immediately in the event that they do not receive an acceptance of their ED application.

Unfortunately, many colleges now use Early Decision as a marketing tool, designed to make them look more selective. In a nutshell, the result of this practice is that some institutions are easier to get into when one applies early. It is essential to ask admissions offices about their ED policies in this regard. If you do not get a satisfactory answer—which sometimes you will not—speak with your counselor before making any commitment. At Sacred Heart we do not advocate submitting an Early Decision application unless you are absolutely sure that the college is your top choice. Every year we hear students say “I know I am applying early somewhere, I just don’t know where yet.”

Using an early decision application as a strategic maneuver to get into a college earlier without really knowing that it is your top choice is an inappropriate use of the Early Decision program. When you use ED as a strategic maneuver, it can lead to matriculating at a school that you later find is a bad fit and ultimately to a transfer process that is stressful for you and your family. We want you to find a place where you will be happy, and if it takes until the regular decision deadline for you to figure out which school is best, we want you to take that time.

## **Early Action**

This plan (also known as “EA”) is similar to Early Decision except that there is no commitment on the part of the student to attend if accepted. A few schools in the United States have adopted an Early Action program that they have named “Single Choice” or “Restricted Early Action.” The Early Action-Single Choice program stipulates that if a student applies EA to any of these schools, they cannot apply under any ED or REA program at any other school. As with any other EA program, if the student is admitted, they are not required to attend and have until May 1 (see “Candidates Reply Date” below) to make their final college decision.

## **“Rolling” Admissions**

Colleges that use rolling admission will review a candidate’s credentials shortly after they are received (usually not before the end of the first high school marking period of the senior year), and will notify the candidate of its decision within a few weeks. The student generally does not have to tell the college whether he or she will be attending until May 1. As a rule, the stronger the student, the earlier he or she may receive a letter of acceptance. *Note that in these competitive times, many rolling admissions institutions become more selective as the year goes on.* It may be best, therefore, to apply early in the year. Always check with your counselor about timing. Submitting a Rolling Admission application *does not* conflict with Early Decision or Early Action-Single Choice programs at other schools.

## The Candidate's Reply Date

The candidate's reply date, or Candidate's Day, is the date by which a student must say either yes or no to a single college, and beyond which no extensions are possible. Most colleges have agreed on May 1, as the Candidate's Reply Date unless the student has applied and been accepted under the Early Decision plan. However, some do not observe it and will ask the student to send a confirming deposit within two or three weeks. If this happens to you, and you do not want to send your money to one college until you have heard from others, you can almost always call or write the college and get an extension, usually until May 1. They may tell you they still want the deposit, but that it is refundable until that time. **When in doubt, speak to one of the college counselors.** Students should not, however, expect to be allowed to put off their decision until sometime after May 1. Colleges need and have the right to expect a commitment from an accepted applicant at some point, and a May 1 deadline should give most people enough time to make up their minds. Usually, "making up one's mind" involves sending a substantial deposit--several hundred dollars--to the college one has decided to attend. Do not deposit to more than one school. "Double-depositing" is unethical. We will only send one final transcript to a college at the end of the year.

## Waiting List

The waiting list is a form of "insurance policy" used by many colleges as a hedge against the possibility of unfilled places in an entering class. There is no way to predict a student's chances of admission from the waiting list, as circumstances and conditions vary each year. Usually, wait lists are not ranked; rather, all wait-list students are reevaluated shortly after May 1. The number of wait-list candidates offered acceptance depends upon the number of places still to be filled. Students should choose to remain on a college's waitlist only if they are seriously interested in attending that institution. If they are accepted off of a waitlist, students are asked to submit a deposit and at that point the deposit at the other school is lost. If interest is not strong, students should remove their names to give their place to someone else.

### A Note about Deadlines:

**In general, a deadline is the date by which an application must be postmarked. However, for a number of colleges, the deadline is the date by which the application must be received. If in doubt, call the admission office well ahead of the deadline and ask. As a general rule, you should treat all deadlines as if they were the receipt date.**

## **Myths about Early Decision**

**Myth #1: Students should apply early to a “reach” school because it is their best shot at admission.**

**Fact:** There are many factors to consider when making the decision to apply early and *where* the student applies early matters as much as simply applying early. Applying to a “possible” school (where a student’s chances in the regular pool are about 50%) usually offers the most advantage. With all the media attention focused on early admission, many colleges experienced increases in their early application numbers last fall and subsequently have become more selective. Thus, students should work closely with their counselor to determine the right plan for them.

**Myth #2: Even if a student doesn’t have a clear first choice, s/he should still apply early.**

**Fact:** If a student doesn’t have a clear first choice, s/he may consider applying to a rolling or non-binding program rather than a binding Early Decision program. Sometimes, there are “likely” or “possible” schools on a student’s list that offer rolling or early action programs and it may help ease the stress of the application process to get an offer of admission before April.

**Myth #3: Students applying for financial aid should always apply early.**

**Fact:** Students applying for financial aid may want to consider non-binding programs so that they will have the option to compare financial aid packages.

## **Paying for College**

### *About Financial Aid*

A four-year college education now costs anywhere between \$40,000 and \$200,000, depending on whether you attend a public or a private institution. While some families can afford these expenses, many must rely on financial aid to help pay the bills. If your parents have not brought up the subject of paying for college, you should do so at the earliest opportunity, since, if you do apply for financial aid you will be bearing a significant portion of the expense in the form of loans at most schools. What follows is general information on the types of aid available, the process of applying and completing forms, and understanding financial aid awards. More information is available at the following websites:

WWW.FAFSA.ED.GOV

WWW.COLLEGEBOARD.COM

WWW.FINAID.ORG

WWW.COLLEGE-SCHOLARSHIPS.COM

WWW.STUDENTAID.ED.GOV

WWW.FASTWEB.COM

### **Financial Aid**

Financial aid is "need-based" as opposed to "**merit-based.**" In other words, you receive it because you cannot afford to pay all the expenses yourself. Your academic record usually has nothing to do with eligibility for financial aid, though grades are taken into account at some colleges. Financial aid funds come from the federal government, the college itself, and, in some cases, from state programs. Aid is awarded in a "**package**" comprised of **grants** (which you do not pay back), **student loans**, and **work study**, in varying proportions. Loans are often the largest component, and you, the student, must pay these back starting a few months after graduation. The average student on financial aid can expect to graduate with approximately \$20,000 in loan debt, to be paid back over about ten years.

### **Institutional Scholarships**

An institutional scholarship given by colleges, often called a "merit scholarship," is awarded to a student by a college because he or she meets certain predetermined criteria, such as excellent grades, exceptional athletic ability, or artistic talent. Demonstrated financial need may or may not be a factor. Institutional scholarships are either simply awarded to an applicant, or the student is invited to apply for them. Given by colleges as a means of attracting desirable students, they basically amount to tuition discounts. If colleges do not mention merit scholarships in their literature, ask about them when you visit, speak with representatives when they come to Sacred Heart, or call the financial aid office directly. Not every college offers merit scholarships.

### **Corporate Scholarships**

Civic groups and municipalities offer scholarships as well. Some schools will deduct it from the loan portion of your package; as often as not, however, it is taken off your grant award.

## **Athletic Scholarships**

A *very* few athletes from Sacred Heart win a “full ride” from a Division I college (occasionally Division II, never Division III, as athletic scholarships are not offered at Division III schools). These awards are given for athletic ability regardless of need. The College Counselor and the Sacred Heart athletic department will help you navigate the sometimes confusing process of being recruited.

## **The Basics of Applying for Financial Aid**

Your parents have certain responsibilities in the financial aid process, and so do you. *It is absolutely vital that everything be done in a timely fashion, strictly according to deadlines.* To drag your feet may very well mean that you will end up without a financial aid package. At least one, and often as many as three, forms are required to apply for financial aid. In order of frequency, they are the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (**FAFSA**), the College Scholarship Service Financial Aid Profile (**CSS Profile**), and, in many cases, the college’s own **institutional form**. The FAFSA and the CSS Profile are only available online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov), and [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) respectively. When submitted online, the FAFSA and the CSS Profile are sent to central agencies to be processed and forwarded to colleges. Families complete only one FAFSA and one CSS Profile. Institutional forms, on the other hand, are requested directly from each college and returned to its financial aid office. *It is your responsibility to obtain institutional forms from the colleges* by phone, letter or online.

### **The FAFSA ( Free Application for Federal Student Aid):**

Required by every college and university. As the name implies, there is no fee connected to the FAFSA, which determines your eligibility for Federal financial aid funds, the backbone of every college financial aid program. It is provided by the U.S. Department of Education. The FAFSA is available online at: **WWW.FAFSA.ED.GOV**. Both the student and a parent need a personal identification number (PIN) available at the FAFSA site. Note: [www.fafsa.com](http://www.fafsa.com) and [www.fafsa.net](http://www.fafsa.net), are the websites of private companies who will try to charge you money to fill out your FREE Application for Federal Student Aid. Avoid these sites!

The FAFSA must be filed between January 1 (not before!) and February 1. *It is your responsibility to log on to the FAFSA website and establish a pin* and share it with your parents, unless they have obtained one online. This will be your ticket to filling out the FAFSA online. You can establish a pin before January 1, but you cannot submit a FAFSA until January 1. It takes at least three days for a pin to be processed and delivered to your email account. If your parents are divorced or own their own business, they must fill out additional forms (see below).

### **The CSS Profile :**

This form is required only by those institutions listed on its registration form. Completing it requires that you register online by going to **WWW.COLLEGEBOARD.COM**. Registration fees may be paid by credit card when you register. The CSS Profile form asks all the financial questions wanted by the colleges to which you are applying. You can save your information as you work, so you don’t have to complete it all in one sitting. Make sure you remember your registration information so you can log back into the College Board website to

complete the Profile. There is a fee for each college you send the profile to. Colleges requiring the CSS Profile *also* require the FAFSA.

### **Institutional Forms:**

Some, but not all, colleges use these forms. They usually ask a few specific questions not covered on the FAFSA or the CSS Profile. These are available only from the college and are returned directly to its financial aid office. Again, *obtaining these forms is your responsibility. Know your deadlines!* They vary from college to college, so read admission and financial aid materials very carefully, and stay on track from the beginning. The main reason families who are eligible for aid do not receive it is because of missed deadlines.

### **Completing Financial Aid Forms**

1. Assemble the records you will need:

- Completed income tax forms for the most recent year or, if not yet available, the most up-to-date tax information you have.
- W-2 Forms and other records of money earned in that year
- Records of untaxed income such as welfare, social security, AFDC or veterans' benefits
- Current bank statements
- Current mortgage information
- Business (farm) records
- Records of stocks, bonds, other investments
- Student's driver's license and social security card
- Student's alien registration card (if applicable)

2. Use proper names, not nicknames, and make sure the social security number reported matches the one on the student's card.

3. Complete all the required sections of the form.

4. If the instructions tell you to skip a question, leave it blank. If your answer to a question is "none" or "zero," put a zero in the answer space.

5. The FAFSA website will not allow you to submit the form before January 1. Make sure you submit the FAFSA and CSS Profile at least five working days prior to your earliest financial aid deadline. If you do not have the required tax forms in time to complete the FAFSA, estimate your figures as closely as possible for the current year. You will have the opportunity to correct the figures later when you know the exact amounts (See #7 below). Consult the Financial Aid offices at the colleges concerned if you need to consider this option. **Keep a copy of all forms for your records.**

6. The FAFSA allows you to list only six colleges. If you are applying to more than six, first list the schools with the earliest financial aid deadlines, then list those institutions that do not require the Profile. After your application is received by those colleges, you can then go back and submit it to the rest of your colleges.

7. Within four weeks (at the latest) of receiving your form, you will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) through the email account you used to register for the FAFSA. The SAR will either request further information, such as tax information from your completed tax return, or provide you with a figure called the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). Once you have received a final SAR, you can log in to look at the information, make corrections to it, and print a copy for your records. The information is automatically sent to the six colleges you listed when you filled out the FAFSA online.

8. For questions regarding problems or difficulties using FAFSA on the Web, or specific questions about the FAFSA, call the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) or 1-319-337-5665. If you do not get a SAR in four weeks, it is wise to call and check on your application.

### **Early Decision and Early Action Applicants**

Some colleges are reputed to save financial aid dollars by “under-funding” Early Decision applicants, on the theory that if they want to attend badly enough to apply ED, they will find the extra money. While it is true that an Early Decision applicant will not have the opportunity to compare financial aid offers from different institutions, we have found that usually these students receive adequate packages. Many selective colleges, including the Ivy League, have gone on record to say that early applicants receive that same treatment from the financial aid office as anyone else. It is important, however, to ask about ED financial aid policies if you will be applying for aid. If you do not get a straight answer, we will be happy to call the college.

### **Divorced and Separated Parents**

In the case of divorce or separation, the non-custodial parent is usually asked to file a supplementary form in addition to the FAFSA. Since colleges view financing a college education as a family affair, both parents need to provide as complete a financial picture as possible. **A parent who refuses to file the supplementary form may well jeopardize his or her child’s chances for financial aid.** Financial aid officers do have some leeway in difficult situations, however, and may use professional judgment in making awards. The college counselors will be happy to discuss individual circumstances, and may be able to intercede with colleges if appropriate.

### **Understanding Financial Aid Awards**

Financial aid letters may accompany letters of acceptance; often they are sent separately. When letters are sent early in the year, some colleges may not specify the exact amount of state and federal aid they are offering you, but rather an estimated award. You will receive exact figures in a later letter. Here are suggestions on how to read and respond to a financial aid letter:

- Look at the combination of awards in the “package.” As we have mentioned, it will consist of two types of aid: “gift aid” (such as *grants* that do not have to be repaid), and “self-help” (usually a combination of *work* and *student loans*).

- In comparing your different packages, pay attention to two things: your *net cost* to attend each institution after financial aid, and the *proportion of grants to loans*. Do not be dazzled by the total amount of money a college offers you; focus on how much you will have to pay out of pocket, both as tuition expenses during your college years and as loan payments afterwards.
- Look for special conditions or requirements attached to your awards. For instance, some institutions require financial aid recipients to maintain a certain grade-point average in order to continue receiving merit awards.
- Be aware that most need-based awards involve federal money for both grants and loans. Financial aid administrators must adhere closely to Government guidelines in awarding federal dollars, and few colleges have enough to meet every applicant's full need. Even though your need is entirely legitimate, colleges may, for various reasons, award larger packages to other students.
- If you have questions about your financial aid award, or if your family believes that it does not meet your needs, call the college's financial aid office. Be polite; do not panic or become angry. You will find that most financial aid officers are very helpful. Review any circumstances you think may have been overlooked, and be prepared to offer concrete information if you want them to review your award. The college may be able to adjust your package based on new information, or they may match an offer from another college. Not all colleges will negotiate financial aid awards, however; each institution has different priorities and policies.
- If you are considering more than one college, wait to receive a financial aid letter from each school before making a final decision. While every college will ask you to accept or decline their offer of aid by a specific deadline, they will usually extend the deadline upon your request if you are still waiting to hear from other institutions.
- Once you make a final decision, do not miss the reply deadline; if you do, your money could go to someone else! Follow very carefully the instructions in your award letter, which may ask you to provide more information or to select a lender for a student or parent loan. Complete and sign the necessary forms and send them in. Be sure to notify the other colleges that accepted you that you will not be attending. This important courtesy will allow the institutions to re-allocate your funds to someone else.

## **The Student-Athlete**

If you are potentially a college-level athlete, the whole college application picture may be quite different from your peers. In some ways, the process can become simpler than it is for most other students; in others, however, it is fraught with pitfalls. Remember, playing sports at Sacred Heart does not guarantee that you will be recruited at any level. If you are not a recruited athlete, your sport may not play a significant role in admission. Here are some questions often asked by aspiring college athletes and their parents.

### **Where Can Athletics Help A Student Get in?**

First and foremost, be honest with yourself and decide early in the process how important sports are to your college experience. If you believe you must have a legitimate chance to play your sport in order to enjoy college, then you must adjust your college list to reflect your academic record and athletic ability.

If a college coach comes to look at you, and if the coach decides that you are a strong candidate for a college team, then – and only then – can you assume that athletic talent may be a significant factor in getting into college. If you are not recruited, athletic ability will play no more nor less important a role in the admission decision than any other seriously pursued extracurricular activity. Period. *Either way, the admissions office will make the final decision, not the athletic department or the coach.* Colleges have clear academic standards for athletes; there are limits to how far they will “bend.” No college will accept a student on athletic ability alone if it does not think the applicant can do the work.

Athletics at the college level is a business! Coaches are hired and fired because of winning and losing records. Therefore, it is crucial to remember that the college coach is a “salesperson” who cannot always back up promises. No college coach can guarantee a student’s acceptance to college or playing time once enrolled. A coach’s influence varies at each college for each sport.

If you are going to play a sport in college, be sure to read the NCAA Guidelines and register with the NCAA Clearinghouse. Once you register, your Guidance Counselor will be notified to send your final transcripts to the Clearinghouse.

## For the Musician

The following is intended as a guide for seniors who have focused on music during their time at Sacred Heart. Those who have done so are strongly advised to create a CD and a short document outlining their past musical achievements at Sacred Heart and elsewhere. Creating this CD and résumé will showcase your musical abilities and may help to set you apart from many other applicants. The Common Application has created an arts supplement for students. This can be done online or on paper. Some schools accept the arts supplement and others do not. Please check the individual school websites to see whether or not they accept the arts supplement. Some schools may require that students create a personal website to display their work.

### CD Format

1. Colleges differ in what they require for a musical CD. **If you intend to major in music, many colleges, universities, or conservatories will require an audition. Please check carefully about each school's audition procedure.** In many cases, auditions take place in February or early March. These are done either at the school or at regional sessions in major cities. The earlier you register, the better, because spaces will fill up quickly.
2. The recording should be made with the highest quality equipment available, and in the best possible acoustical surroundings. The possibilities may vary according to the instrument. You must never, however, “enhance” your voice or instrument electronically. To do so is to misrepresent your talent. If you are unable to record yourself, ask a professional to do so. A badly recorded CD is worse than none at all.
3. Choose your pieces wisely, always paying attention to the institution's guidelines. Play or sing selections that will show your talent in the best light. Highlight your strengths. Choose a variety of pieces to demonstrate different abilities. Pieces from different historical periods or pieces with differing tempi, dynamics, and articulations are good choices.
4. Do not make the recording too long. Leave them wanting more. If a piece has three movements, you may want to record only one and then add an additional piece contrasting in a style. You may, in fact, be penalized for recording more than the school asks for!
5. Send the recording to both the college admission office and to the appropriate member of that school's music department. Remember that in many cases, in addition to selecting a school, you are selecting a teacher. If you are a string player, send the tape or CD to the school's orchestra director or head of the string faculty; if a vocalist, to the choral director, etc. Enclose a letter and the résumé outlining your past musical achievements. Follow up with a phone call sometime later to that same music faculty member.

**Resume Format**

1. With your recording, enclose a résumé. List your important musical achievements, especially in your secondary school years. These may include work both at and outside of Sacred Heart.
2. List any awards, competitions, and/or titles that you may have earned. List teachers with whom you have studied and pieces that you have played or sung.
3. Sometimes it may be a good idea to include programs or reviews of your work.
4. Keep your information brief. Highlights of your accomplishments are enough. Along the way, if you need help with any aspect of this process, feel free to ask Mrs. Beatty.

## For The Artist

The following guide is intended for seniors who have focused on visual arts during their time at Sacred Heart. Those of you who have done so are strongly encouraged to create a portfolio of your best work at Sacred Heart and elsewhere as part of your college application, regardless of whether you intend to pursue your art at college. What you have done to date will set you apart from other applicants, demonstrating an unusual talent and skill. What you show them, if chosen and presented carefully, can only be to your advantage. The Common Application has created an arts supplement for students, that can be done online or on paper. Some schools accept art supplements and others do not. Please check each college's websites to see whether or not they accept art supplement. Some colleges may require that students create a personal website to display their work.

### Portfolio Format

1. Some colleges differ, but many will be looking for documentation of your work, usually no more than twenty examples on a CD or sometimes through a website.
2. Each CD should be labeled with your name and a **typed list** should accompany your work. The list should have a title for each piece, identification of the medium, an indication of size, and a brief description of the project or work.
3. You should also include a brief (half-page, typed) **artist's statement** that describes your interests and investment in the visual arts.
4. Other formats are possible and may in some cases be advisable, depending on the scope and type of your work and the college you are considering. Consult the college counselors, your advisor, your art teachers, and the admission offices of your target colleges.

### Compilation Procedure

1. Collect all your work from school and elsewhere, from sketchbooks to finished pieces, even from as early as your freshman year.
2. Ask Mrs. Markowitz to serve as your mentor for this process, and arrange to store your work. Review your collected works with that faculty member, considering which pieces may be most important and representative of your achievements. You should select about twice the number of pieces that you may finally include in your portfolio.
3. Through your faculty contact, arrange an appointment with a photographer late in your junior spring or early in your senior fall.
4. It is best if you can arrange to be with the photographer, at least at the beginning of the session, in order to keep clear what you want and possibly to help with the set-up. It is your responsibility to be sure the portfolio is accessible to the photographer and is clearly defined as to what you want included.
5. Payment must be arranged directly with the photographer before he or she has

photographed your work. After the photographer has billed you for the total, he or she must receive full payment before the slides are given to you.

6. Once you have received the CD, arrange to meet with your faculty mentor once again, review the work, and make a selection of what seems most appropriate. Final selection should be your choice, but take into account the suggestions offered by the faculty member, as they will help you present your talents most effectively.

7. Prepare your work, the list, and the artist's statement.

8. If you are submitting a portfolio to more than one college, you will need to have duplicates made, which should be done once you have made your final selection.