



September/October

## College Applications

With the start of the school year under way, it is very important that seniors who are planning to further their education beyond high school get started on college applications, if they haven't already done so this summer. We highly recommend that students have all of their college applications completed by the middle of October in order to ensure timely evaluation of the application as well as the greatest opportunity to be in the pool for college scholarships. There are three main steps a student will need to take in order to apply to college(s).

- 1) **Complete the Application.** Most (if not all) colleges offer an online application on their website. Filling it out is typically a pretty straightforward process that involves inputting personal information, academic achievements, extra-curricular involvement, short answer questions, and sometimes essays. There is also typically a processing fee charged by each college a student applies to.

The State of Michigan requires the use of *Parchment* to send transcripts to colleges. A transcript is a record of a student's achievements in high school – classes taken, grade point average, attendance, and unofficial standardized test scores. Registration codes for setting up a *Parchment* account were e-mailed to all seniors and counselors met with students in English classes to get them signed up. For new students, or students who still need to register, the process is very simple. Please visit <http://counseling.zps.org>, click on "Transcript Requests," and follow the instructions for creating an account. Please note: Students will need to remember their *Parchment* password, as they will use *Parchment* in the spring of the senior year to send a final transcript to the college they attend. If students need a transcript after graduation (transferring colleges, for example), this is also how they will request that transcript.

- 2) **Send Standardized Test Scores to Colleges.** In order to process a college application, colleges will require student's standardized test scores. When registering for both the SAT and ACT, students have the option to select up to 4 (ACT) or 5 (SAT) institutions to send their scores to FREE of charge. Students who do not select any colleges upon test registration and need to send their scores must log in to their College Board or ACT account to make their request(s). There is a fee associated with each request.
- 3) **Give the Counselor Recommendation Form to Your Counselor.** Lastly, some college applications require students to have the school submit a counselor recommendation form. This form is either an online form, part of *Parchment*, or can be downloaded from the school's website.

### What is the Common Application?

Some colleges (roughly 700 nationwide) use an application process called the Common Application. The Common Application makes it possible for a student to fill out a single application and have it sent to any colleges that use the Common Application. The opportunity to fill out one application to apply to several colleges may help save time for some students. The Common App requires the electronic submission of recommendations by at least two teachers along with a school report that must be completed by the student's counselor. *The counselor also uploads a student's transcript and senior schedule right to the Common App site; therefore, you do not need to also request a transcript be sent to the same school through Parchment.* Some colleges also require students to complete

supplemental forms specifically to that school. Any college that uses the Common App will indicate such on their website. More information about the Common App can be obtained by speaking with a counselor or visiting <http://www.commonapp.org>.

## Tips for Completing College Applications

Described below are some helpful tips for completing college applications as well as a definition of some important terms associated with college admission.

### Types of Admissions Policies

- **Regular Decision** - You submit an application by a specified date and receive a decision within a reasonable and clearly stated period of time. You may apply to other schools without restriction.
- **Rolling Admissions** - A school reviews applications as they are completed and gives decisions throughout the admissions cycle. You may apply to other schools without restriction.
- **Early Action** - You apply and receive a decision well in advance of the school's regular response date. If admitted, you're not obligated to accept the offer of admission or submit a deposit prior to May 1. You may apply to other colleges.
- **Early Decision** - Early Decision is an application plan offered by some colleges that allows students to apply and receive an admissions decision early in the year. When you apply Early Decision, you will sign a contract promising that if you're admitted you will attend the college and immediately withdraw all of your applications from other colleges.

**What is the difference between Early *Decision* and Early *Action*?** Students often confuse these two terms. Both plans allow students to learn their admissions decision early, but there are some key differences that are important to understand. Students who apply under an Early *Decision* plan are making a *binding commitment* to attend that college if they are admitted. If they're admitted, they must withdraw their applications from other colleges, and they can't apply to additional colleges. Students who apply under an Early *Action* plan, on the other hand, are not making a binding commitment to attend that college. They are free to keep their applications at other colleges active, and they generally have until May 1st to make their final decision about which college they'll attend.

- **Open Admissions** – Colleges offer admission to all students who apply as long as they have a high school diploma or have passed the high school proficiency test (GED) or are at least 18 years old. Open admissions usually means no subject, grade point average, or entrance exam requirement; however, many of these schools do require you to take an entrance exam at the time of registration. An example of an open admission college is the community college.

*\*\*Some information taken from [www.aie.org](http://www.aie.org).*

### The Admissions Process

The admissions process for freshmen entering a college or university varies from school to school. Here is a brief overview:

- Application Process – Common documents required for most admissions applications.

- Application
- Official test scores (ACT or SAT)
- Official high school transcripts
- Application fee
- Additional requirements that you may need to complete or include with the application:
  - Essays (may be a critical application component)
  - Admissions standards (may include class rank and copy of senior year schedule)
  - Letters of recommendation – it is recommended that if you request someone to write a letter of recommendation on your behalf, you give him/her at least two weeks notice
  - Extra-curricular activities resume
- Offer of Admission – If your application is approved, you will receive an offer of admission from the institution.
  - The offer:
    - Is sent to the student’s permanent address or e-mail address
    - Is sent within institution-specific dates or on a rolling basis
    - Contains student’s deadline for acceptance and payment of enrollment deposit
  - Additional information and requirements that may accompany the offer of admission:
    - Deadlines for registration, housing requirements, and financial aid
    - Information concerning orientation and campus life

### **Top 10 College Application Mistakes**

In order to give colleges a good first impression of who a student is, it is imperative that a college application be free from errors. Listed below are the common mistakes that students make when applying to college.

1. **Misspellings and grammatical errors** - This is a big pet peeve of admissions staff. If you misspell on something as important as the application, it shows that either you don't care or you aren't good at spelling. Some students even misspell their intended major. But don't stop with a spell check. Proofread for grammatical errors, too.
2. **Applying online, but the application isn't submitted** - If you apply online, you should receive confirmation that the college or university received it. Confirmation could be an email message, a web page response or a credit card receipt. Follow through and make sure that your application has been received.
3. **Forgotten signatures** - Make sure you sign and date the application form, even if it's electronic. Often students overlook that part of the form. Check that all spaces are completed.
4. **Not reading carefully** - For example, if the form asks what *County* you live in, don't misread it as *Country* and write United States.
5. **Listing extracurricular activities that aren't** - Those that make the list include sports, the arts, formal organizations and volunteer work. Talking on the phone and hanging out with friends don't cut it. Make sure your activity information is accurate. Colleges may check with your high school.
6. **Not telling your school counselor where you've applied** - Let your counselor know which colleges you're applying to since they may need to complete a counselor recommendation form.
7. **Writing illegibly** - First impressions count, so if you are completing a paper application, take your time and use your best handwriting. It will make a better impression.

8. **Using an email address that friends might laugh about, but colleges won't** - Select a professional email address. Keep your fun address for friends, but select an address using your name for college admissions.
9. **Not checking your email regularly** - If you've given an email address, the college will use it. You don't want to miss out on anything because you didn't read your email.
10. **Letting Mom or Dad help you fill out your application** - Admissions people know if your parents help, whether you have two different styles of handwriting or your admissions essay sounds more like a 45-year-old than a 17-year-old. It's fine to get advice, but do the work yourself.

*\*information taken from [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)*

## **Writing College Admissions and Scholarship Essays**

Essays are an integral part of the college admissions and scholarship application process. A college admissions or scholarship essay should be personal, intriguing, and well-written. It should have a focus and be specific. It should make you stand out from other applicants. Here are some tips to help you achieve these tasks.

### **Be yourself.**

Choose a topic that has meaning to you. If you choose a topic that you could care less about, it will show through your writing. Consider writing about an event, a person, or a place that has affected you in some way or that has helped shape who you are today. Don't forget to make the essay your own. If you are funny, don't be afraid to make the essay humorous. If you are passionate, write about that quality and describe what motivates you.

### **Provide a clear thesis and prove it.**

The reader should be able to identify the main point of your essay. The thesis should indicate where you are going and what you are trying to communicate from the very beginning. It should be stated in the introduction of the essay and should be supported with specific facts and examples in the sentences that follow.

### **Be creative.**

Draw the reader in with an original introduction so he will want to finish your essay. This original introduction could be a question, a quote, a vivid description, etc. Don't forget that admissions officers read thousands of essays so you have to make yours stand out from the crowd.

### **Stay on task.**

Most colleges or scholarship organizations want you to write about specific topics or answer certain questions. Make sure you stay on topic throughout your essay. If the directions have a set limit for the amount of words in the essay, follow the requirements. Don't ramble on for ten pages when all they want is a 500-word paper.

### **Don't write over your head.**

If you use too many big words, the person(s) reading your paper will think you are trying too hard to show off your vocabulary and may even toss the essay out, especially if those big words are misused. Stick to words that flow easily throughout the paper and only use big words occasionally.

### **Proofread.**

Your essay should have zero grammatical and stylistic mistakes. Proofread the essay several times before you submit it. Make sure there are no misspelled words, punctuation errors, or incomplete sentences. Essays with grammatical or stylistic errors are easily dismissed. When writing your college admissions essay(s), be sure to

refer to the correct school. Counselors know that essays are sometimes recycled, but you should be courteous enough to address the correct school.

### **Ask others for input.**

Grab parents, teachers, tutors, or older siblings and ask them to read the essay and give you feedback. They may also find grammatical mistakes that you have overlooked.

*\*information taken from ecampustours.com*

## **Senior Calendar**

### **Fall**

- ★ Conduct final visits to colleges that interest you (remembering to communicate these visits with the attendance office).
- ★ Meet with the college reps when they visit ZHS to learn more about schools that interest you
- ★ If still unsure where you plan on applying to, attend a local college fair. The Holland-Area College Fair, held on **Thursday, September 29** from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. at Hope College's DeVos Fieldhouse. More information is available at <http://hollandareacollegenight.com/>. Additionally, Aquinas College will be hosting a fair on **Thursday, October 20 from 6:00 to 7:30**. More info available at [http://www.aquinas.edu/undergraduate/college\\_night\\_aq.html](http://www.aquinas.edu/undergraduate/college_night_aq.html).
- ★ Make a calendar of key application and financial aid deadlines.
- ★ Complete and submit college applications.
  - Apply in September and October to increase your chance of admission because colleges can only accept a limited number of students.
  - Remember that although colleges may give a deadline, you shouldn't wait until the last possible moment to apply.
  - Some colleges waive the application fee if submitted online.
- ★ Take/retake the SAT and/or ACT in October and/or November, if necessary. If considering the December test, be sure to check with the colleges you are applying to in order to see if they accept the Dec. score for admission and/or scholarship purposes.
- ★ If you haven't done so already, and are planning on playing Division 1 or 2, or NAIA college sports your transcript needs to get sent to the NCAA or NAIA Clearinghouse. More information available at <http://www.eligibilitycenter.org> and <http://www.playnaia.org>.
- ★ Search and apply for scholarships
  - The counseling office website – <http://counseling.zps.org> - lists scholarships opportunities that are sent to us.
  - FastWeb (<http://www.fastweb.com>) is the one of the largest free scholarship search databases.
  - BigFuture – The College Board's college planning and scholarship resource site – <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org>
  - Check with the colleges you are interested in.
- ★ Attend Financial Aid Night at ZHS on **Thursday, November 10 at 6:30 p.m.** in the DeWitt Auditorium at Zeeland East.

## Winter

- ★ As 1<sup>st</sup> semester ends in January, make sure you have passed the courses required for graduation.
- ★ Most regular decision applications are due in January or February; be sure all the necessary materials have been sent and received. Remember, though, that although colleges may have official application deadlines, your chances are often better if you apply earlier.
- ★ Do your taxes and submit the FAFSA online (<http://www.fafsa.gov>). Check with colleges for their deadlines for submitting the FAFSA. Most colleges require you to submit by mid-February. The State of Michigan's deadline is March 1.
- ★ If interested, sign up for AP exams.
- ★ Check with your prospective schools about any additional financial aid application forms and requirements.
- ★ If you need additional assistance in completing your financial aid paperwork, financial aid representatives from around the state make themselves available in February at various sites to provide FREE assistance. Find out more at <http://www.micollegegoal.org/>.
- ★ Continue searching and applying for scholarships. Local scholarships offered through the Holland/Zeland Community Foundation generally become available in early February. Descriptions are listed on the counseling office website.

## Spring

- ★ Review your Student Aid Report (SAR) for accuracy (this is the result of FAFSA completion). Also, watch your e-mail and mail for acceptance letters (if you haven't received them already) and financial aid award letters. Compare financial aid packages.
- ★ Make an official decision on what to do after graduation and let the proper parties know of your decision. (This generally needs to be done by May 1.)
- ★ Take AP tests if you registered for them.
- ★ Do NOT allow senioritis to kick in. Most ALL schools review final grades and may rescind an offer of admission if senior year grades slip.
- ★ Complete the senior survey informing ZHS of your post-high school plans and of any scholarships you may have received.
- ★ Final high school transcripts should be submitted to the college you are planning to attend and to the NCAA if planning on playing Division 1 or 2 athletics. You must request this through Parchment – <http://www.parchment.com>.

## **Counseling Office Website and Facebook Page**

Please visit <http://counseling.zps.org> to explore the counseling office website. There is a wealth of information concerning your student's high school experience as well as post-high planning. We also post pertinent information on our Facebook page. Search for “**Zeeland High School Counseling Office**” and like us!