



College Handbook

Guidance Department

Dear Cadet and Parents:

This ***College Application Handbook*** was designed to provide you with a resource to help all of you successfully navigate the college admission process. Although most cadets have begun thinking about college long before arriving at FUMA, the process begins in earnest in the winter of your junior year. However, this information is of value to all cadets and their families as they look ahead to life after Fork Union.

Cadets and their families should keep several important factors in mind as they move into the college search and application process:

- College is a match to be made, not a prize to be won. There is a college out there for everyone who is qualified and desires to attend.
- The Guidance Office stands ready to assist, answer questions, provide information and conduct small group sessions on the admission process.
- Each student holds the key to his own success. As has been noted in the past, “the best way to dazzle college admissions officers is not to appear impressive, but to be impressive.” This is done by compiling an impressive record of academic, extra-curricular and community service experiences during high school.
- Students who explore many different colleges through printed and online materials, as well as through campus visits, alumni interviews, and talks with admissions representatives, tend to make better college choices than those who “fall into a school choice.”
- The junior year is most important in your college search and exploration. When you return to the Academy as a senior, you should have your application list completed.
- Parents, though we will work with your son through the application process, know that we can’t replace you as your son’s most valuable ally and advocate along the way. Please communicate often with your son about where he is in his journey toward college acceptance. We ask that you keep track of his progress and help as much as you can to encourage him to meet the many deadlines that will require his attention until his goal of college acceptance has been reached.

We hope you find the information in this handbook helpful and informative, and we welcome your suggestions and insights that might benefit future cadets. Please feel free to contact any of us in the Guidance Office should you have questions or comments.

Sincerely,

The Counseling Staff:

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Section 1: CALENDAR FOR COLLEGE PLANNING

FRESHMEN YEAR

- Develop good study habits and organizational skills. Work hard to make the best grades possible.
- Talk with as many adults as possible about career fields, college choices and possible fields of study.
- Participate in sports, clubs and other activities at school.
- Take the PSAT 8/9 with all other freshmen in preparation for the SAT that many students will be taking during the junior year.
- Utilize the career and college exploration resources on www.collegeboard.org, among other sources.

SOPHOMORE YEAR

- Continue to make the best grades possible in a challenging program of studies.
- Take the PSAT/NMSQT in October with all other sophomores.
- Continue to utilize the college exploration resources on www.collegeboard.org, among other sources in the Guidance Office, to learn about schools that might be possible choices for you.
- Take advantage of every opportunity that you have to visit college campuses, either near your home or while traveling.

JUNIOR YEAR

- Visit the Guidance Office in September.
- If you haven't already done so, open a College Board online account to register for college readiness tests, take practice tests, and to review your scores once the tests have been taken.
- Take the PSAT in October with all other juniors.
- Continue to make the best grades possible in a challenging program of studies.
- Develop good working relationships with your teachers, especially those you may have had more than once. These are your most promising sources of recommendations.
- If you have not already done so, choose at least one activity to pursue in depth.
- Pay attention to notices of visiting college recruiters/representatives.
- Attend the College Fair in October.
- (Optional) Register for the January administration of the SAT. The deadline for registering is in December.
- Register for the May administration of the SAT. The deadline for registering is in April.
- Plan to visit colleges that interest you as you have the opportunities to do so. Take advantage of the "College Road Trips" offered by the Guidance Department. Take the opportunity to talk with Admissions Office staff and students, and perhaps even attend a class or two.
- Continue to research colleges using the internet and Guidance Office Resources.
- By the end of the summer you should have a list of 10 or so colleges which strongly interest you. Download application materials. Bring your list and application materials with you when you return to school in August.
- If you are interested in applying to one of the U.S. Service academies, contact the institution requesting application materials. This will open your initial file. In addition, apply for their one-week summer programs.

SENIOR YEAR

- Meet with the Guidance staff in September to review your college application checklist.
- If you haven't already done so, open a College Board online account to register for college readiness tests, take practice tests, and to review your scores once the tests have been taken.
- Register for the October SAT and/or the October ACT. Consider registering for the November SAT II subject tests.
- Identify at least three teachers who you feel know you well and who might be willing to write positive recommendations for you. Contact them prior to the end of September.
- By October 1st, you should finalize the list of colleges to which you will apply and begin the application process. Definitely begin the Common App process if the school(s) to which you are applying require this form of application.
- Consider all factors that are important to you in determining where to apply, including the size of the college you want to attend, its location, the academic programs that are offered, and the cost of the institution.
- Make a "Deadline Calendar". Include all deadlines for SAT, ACT, college applications (especially if considering Early Decision) and scholarships. Include on this calendar a target application completion date that is prior to Winter Leave. You don't want to spend your vacation completing applications and essays.
- Write your application essays (if required by your schools). Be sure to review these with at least one of your teachers.
- Continue to keep your grades up.
- Early Decision candidates should notify the Guidance office of their acceptance or deferral as soon as it arrives.
- Be patient as you wait for your replies. Remember that some schools have a set date on which all letters of acceptance/rejection are mailed; others mail continuously throughout the spring.
- Notify the Guidance office of all application replies that you receive regardless of the decision.
- Insure that you have accepted a position at ONE college by May 1st. Notify all other colleges that accepted you that you are declining their offer of admission. DON'T FORGET THIS STEP.
- Remember that some students are on waiting lists; their admission to school depends on your releasing your seat if you are not attending.

**THE BEST
IS YET TO
COME**

Section 2: COLLEGE ADMISSION TESTING

PSAT/NMSQT

The PSAT/NMSQT follows a very similar format to the SAT in that it tests students in Critical Reading, Writing and Language, and Mathematics. All college-bound students should take this test in the fall of their sophomore and junior years. This test provides two important pieces of information: a) an approximation of how well prepared you are to take the SAT, and b) your eligibility for the National Merit Scholarship Competition. As a rule, you can take your PSAT scores and multiply them by ten to approximate your SAT score. It is imperative that you navigate through the information on the College Board website (<https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org>) to gain familiarity with the PSAT/NMSQT.

SAT

From the College Board website: “The SAT is a globally recognized college admission test that lets you show colleges what you know and how well you can apply that knowledge. It tests your knowledge of reading, writing and math — subjects that are taught every day in high school classrooms. Most students take the SAT during their junior or senior year of high school, and almost all colleges and universities use the SAT to make admission decisions.

Taking the SAT is the first step in finding the right college for you — the place where you can further develop your skills and pursue your passions. But SAT scores are just one of many factors that colleges consider when making their admission decisions. High school grades are also very important. In fact, the combination of high school grades and SAT scores is the best predictor of your academic success in college.”



It is imperative that you navigate through the information on the College Board SAT website (<https://sat.collegeboard.org>) to learn more about the SAT and especially about the changes to the SAT that will take place in the spring of 2016. You will want to sign up for an account through the website so that you can register for the tests online, take advantage of practice tests (through Khan Academy), retrieve your scores once you take the SAT, and find information about colleges and scholarships.

Fork Union’s school code for the SAT is 470860. All students should take the SAT at least twice since being directly familiar with the test often helps your scores. In addition, most students find that they benefit from participation in our evening SAT I Preparation workshop.

SAT Prep Classes:

Fork Union offers SAT preparation classes twice during the year: in the fall for seniors and PGs and in the spring for juniors. This program reviews both math and reading/writing material commonly found on the SAT. Cadets must pay a small fee to participate in this class. ***Please bear in mind that participation in either/both SAT preparation programs does not guarantee higher scores.***

SAT SUBJECT TESTS

From the College Board website: “Subject Tests are hour-long, content-based tests that allow you to showcase achievement in specific subject areas where you excel. These are the **only** national admission tests where **you** choose the tests that best showcase your achievements and interests. SAT Subject Tests allow you to differentiate yourself in the college admission process or send a strong message regarding your readiness to study specific majors or programs in college. In conjunction with your other admission credentials (your high school record, SAT scores, teacher recommendations, etc.), they provide a more complete picture of your academic background and interests. Some colleges also use Subject Tests to

place students into the appropriate courses. Based on your performance on the test(s), you could potentially fulfill basic requirements or receive credit for introductory-level courses. There are 20 SAT Subject Tests in five general subject areas: English, history, languages, mathematics and science.

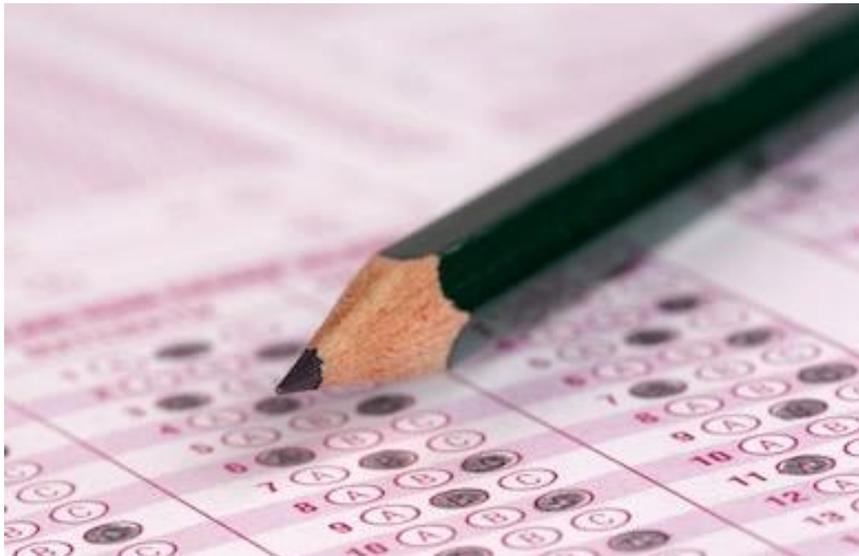
ACT

The ACT is a college readiness assessment used to measure high school achievement and is a determinant for many colleges in their selection process. The ACT consists of four multiple-choice tests: English, mathematics, reading, and science. The ACT with writing includes the four multiple-choice tests and a writing test. Students are encouraged to take this test during their junior and/or their senior years. Navigate through the ACT website (<http://www.actstudent.org/>) to set up an account, to gain familiarity with the test, and, upon test completion, to view your scores. This site can also help you in college and career planning and selection.



ACT Prep Classes:

Fork Union offers ACT preparation classes twice during the year: in the fall for seniors and PGs and in the spring for juniors. This program provides instruction and review in English, mathematics, reading, and science. Cadets must pay a small fee to participate in this class. ***Please bear in mind that participation in either/both SAT preparation programs does not guarantee higher scores.***



Section 3: DEVELOPING YOUR COLLEGE LIST

IMPORTANT FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Even before your senior year, you should compile a list of at least four colleges/universities to explore. Some of the factors that you should consider when developing this list:

- **SIZE:** Do you think that you would prefer a small college or a large university?
- **LOCATION:** Would you prefer a college/university located in a rural area or in an urban location? Do you have a preference of where in the country you want your school to be located?
- **CAMPUS LIFE:** What kinds of clubs, organizations, and/or athletic teams are you interested in pursuing in college?
- **ACADEMIC PROGRAMS:** Does the school you're considering offer the courses/major that you are interested in pursuing?
- **EXPENSES:** How much will scholarships and financial aid influence your choice of college?
- **ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS:** How challenging is your high school academic program? What is your GPA? Your class rank? How about your SAT and/or ACT scores?

When developing your list, you should keep several other important factors in mind:

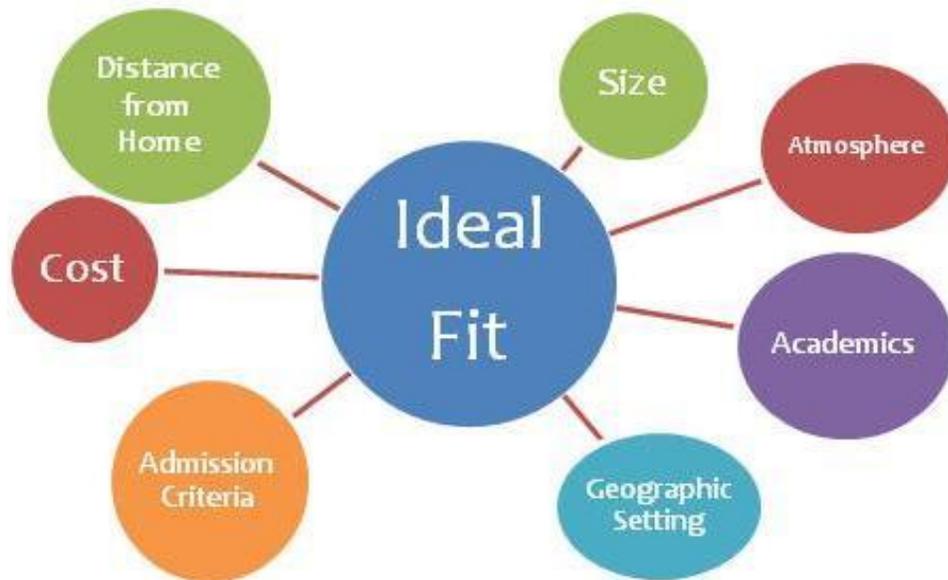
- The college selection process is not an exact science. Remember that admission statistics are reported in ranges, not precise numbers.
- Admission criteria do change somewhat from year to year depending on the pool of applications received.
- Don't apply to a college unless you are actually willing to attend that college.
- Never indicate to a college that it is your "Back Up School".
- The name on your college diploma is no guarantee of admission to graduate school: No one is admitted to any medical school with a "C" average from Harvard, but an "A" average at a reputable smaller school may open many doors for you.
- Most colleges review your academic record with the following order of importance: Strength of high school academic program; GPA or Class Rank; SAT/ACT scores.

As you consider options, keep an open mind. You might find several schools that seem to match what you're looking for in a college or university. Rank your list and then spend your time focusing on your top choices. It is recommended that you level your choices according to the categories on the next page.

THE THREE-LEVEL LIST

- A "Dream School" is one that you really want to attend, and which offers programs you want to study, but this school might prove to be somewhat of a reach for you. Their acceptance statistics place you in the lower portion of their average GPA/SAT/ACT range, but you still have some chance of acceptance. You should not have more than two "Dream Schools" on your list, and you should not include a school at which you have no chance of admission. Know that some schools might be considered "Dream Schools" because of cost rather than admission standards.

- “Reasonable Schools” match your profile fairly evenly and seem to offer a good chance of admission. (Know that there is never a guarantee!) These schools offer programs of study that interest you and are within your family’s financial constraints.
- “Likely Schools”, sometimes referred to as “Safe Schools” are schools where admission is almost a certainty for you. When you review their statistical information, you see that your record is near the upper range of admitted students. Again, these schools should offer programs that interest you, are affordable, and where you think you will be happy.



Section 4: COLLEGE VISITS

Although you can gain a great deal of information about a college from a tour of its web site(s), nothing can replace an actual visit to a campus during a regular undergraduate term. A visit during one of the regular semesters allows you to not only tour the physical facilities of the college, but also provides you with an opportunity to “feel” what it might be like to attend that college. You can talk with students, sit in the student commons, perhaps even attend a class or two and speak with the instructors. Although a visit during a vacation period or during summer term is certainly preferable to no visit at all, you will not have as



thorough a visit at such times. Take advantage of the “College Road Trips” offered by the Academy. We also allow seniors to miss up to two class days for approved college visits. Juniors are allowed one school day absence for this purpose. College visit leaves may not be attached to major leaves. College visit leave forms require the signatures of the Academic Dean, a Guidance Counselor, the Deputy Commandant, the cadets’ TAC Officer, his coach, and his teacher. In addition, the cadet taking a college visit leave must have the admissions representative with whom he meets complete a verification form and ask that a college business card be attached to the form to further confirm that a visit took place. This verification form (and card) should be turned in to the Guidance Office on the first business day following the return from a college leave.

ARRANGING THE VISIT

You should always make arrangements for your visit at least several weeks in advance. If the school offers admission interviews, you would be wise to schedule one. Be sure to prepare a list of questions to ask during the interview. These questions should include some that are probably not covered in general information sessions. If you are interested in varsity athletics, you should also try to schedule an interview with the coach of the sports you are hoping to play. Be sure to dress neatly for your visit, especially if you will have an admissions interview. Be prepared to answer questions about your program of studies and activities while at Fork Union, about your other interests and hobbies, about summer jobs you may have had, or volunteer work you may have done. Interviewers will usually ask open-ended questions which give you an opportunity to provide interesting and detailed responses that tell them about you. Don’t be afraid to “rehearse” a bit with a friend or family member. While interviews do not usually make a large contribution to an admission decision, you can be guaranteed that it will not help at all if you do not make a favorable impression. A student who is “on the fence” of an admission decision could possibly receive an acceptance as a result of their interview.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS and QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

The following are questions that you might consider asking an admissions counselor at a selected college or university:

- What makes your college unique?
- What academic programs is your college most known for?
- How would you describe the kids that go there? Where do most of them come from? Where do your students hang out on campus?
- What happens on weekends—are there things to do on campus or in town, or do most students go home?
- Are fraternities and sororities a big part of campus life?
- What are the housing options for freshmen?
- Do many students live off campus?
- Is there a sports complex or fitness center?
- What are the most popular clubs and activities?
- What's the security like on campus?
- What's the surrounding area like? Is it easy to get around?
- What are the most popular majors?
- How would you describe the academic pressure and workload?
- What support services are available (academic advisers, tutors, etc.)?
- Do I need to bring my own computer?
- What's the faculty like? How accessible are they outside of class?
- Are there opportunities for internships?
- Is there job placement help for graduates?
- Are any big changes in the works that I should know about?

Source: Get it Together for College 2nd ed. (College Board 2014).

The following are questions that you might be asked by an admissions counselor at a selected college or university:

- Which subjects are of most interest to you?
- Which extracurricular activity is most rewarding to you?
- How do you spend most of your spare time?
- What kind of reading do you like best?
- Name some of your favorite books.
- Why is a college education important to you?
- What would you identify as your best personal quality?
- What are your short term, mid-term and long-term career goals?
- Why do you want to attend this college?
- What would you identify as your major weaknesses? How can you overcome them?
- How well prepared are you for the programs of study offered by this college?
- If you could change one thing about yourself, what would that be?
- If you decided not to go to college now, what would you do instead? Why?
- If you had a million-dollar grant to give away, who would get it? Why?
- What event would you identify as the most significant in your life?
- What is the most important thing about yourself that you would like me to report to the admissions committee?

The following questions should be considered if you are interested in playing sports at the collegiate level:

- I know this school has a great (football, basketball, hockey, etc.) program, but how highly rated are its academic programs?
- Are my high school grades and test scores good enough for your school to admit me?
- Does my college counselor consider this school a good match for me considering my grades, test scores, and athletic aspirations?
- What does my coach think about this college with respect to my athletic abilities and performance?
- On an average day, how many hours will athletics take away from my academic obligations?
- If I start to experience academic difficulty, what supports are available through the athletic department?
- If I am accepted on an athletic scholarship and become seriously injured and unable to play, do I lose my scholarship?
- If I obtain an athletic scholarship, for what expenses am I still responsible?
- Can I afford to travel home from this school during vacation periods, or am I expected to stay on campus for practice and game responsibilities?
- What do present and former athletes have to say about the school and the athletic department?
- Do my particular skills seem to fit into the playing style of this team?



Section 5: **APPLYING TO COLLEGE: FAQ'S**

Source: "Big Future" **College Board.org**:

Here are answers to a few of the most commonly asked questions about applying to college:

When should I start?

The summer before your senior year is the best time to start. Most students do the majority of their application work in the fall of their senior year.

How do I begin?

Find out what goes into an application and begin collecting the materials you need. Create a folder for each college you are applying to. At the front of each folder, put a checklist of what you'll need for the application and when it's due.

How many colleges should I apply to?

Five to eight colleges is the recommended number. They should all be colleges you'd be happy to attend. It's good to apply to some colleges that are a bit of a stretch for you and some that you feel will likely admit you. But most should feel like good, realistic matches.

Should I apply early?

It depends. If you are sure about which college you want to attend, early decision or early action might be the best choice for you. If you're not sure, keep in mind that some early application plans require you to commit early. You may want to keep your options open.

Should I use an online or a paper application?

Check with the college to see which is preferred. Most colleges prefer online applications because they are easier to review and process — some even offer a discount in the application fee if you apply online. Applying online can also be more convenient for you — it's easier to enter information and correct mistakes. Whichever method you choose, be sure to tell your school counselor where you have applied so your school transcript can be sent to the right colleges.

Should I send additional material?

It is best if you can express everything about your qualifications and qualities in the materials requested. Colleges spend a great deal of time creating their applications to make sure they get all the information they need about each applicant. If you feel it's absolutely necessary to send additional material, talk to your counselor about it. Some arts programs may require portfolios or videos of performances. Check with the college to find out the best way to submit examples of your work.

Is it OK to use the same material on different applications?

Definitely. There's no need to write a brand-new essay or personal statement for each application. Instead, devote your time to producing a great version of basic application parts.

What is the Common Application?

The Common Application is a standardized application used by more than 525 colleges. Instead of filling out eight different applications, you can simply fill out one and submit it to each college. Be aware that you may need to submit additional or separate documents to some colleges. You also still need to pay individual application fees for each college.

Should I apply to colleges if my admission-test scores or grades are below their published ranges?

Yes. The admission scores and grades that colleges show on their websites are averages or ranges — not cutoffs. There are students at every college who scored lower (and higher) than the numbers shown. Remember that colleges consider many factors to get a more complete picture of you. For example, they

look at the types of classes you take, your activities, recommendation letters, your essay and your overall character. Colleges are looking for all kinds of students with different talents, abilities and backgrounds. Admission test scores and grades are just two parts of that complete picture.

Should I even bother applying to colleges I don't think I can afford?

Absolutely. Remember that after financial aid packages are determined, most students will pay far less than the "sticker price" listed on the college website. You don't know if you can afford a college until after you apply and find out how much aid that college will offer you (if you're accepted). Fill out the FAFSA as early as possible after Jan. 1 to qualify for the most aid. Even if the aid package the college offers is not enough, you have options. Many colleges are willing to work with students they have chosen for admission to ensure that those students can afford to attend.



Section 6: EARLY ADMISSIONS PROGRAMS

Most colleges offer two types of Early Admissions programs:

EARLY ACTION PLAN

This plan is most often used by very competitive colleges and allows a student to apply early in the fall of the senior year for consideration based upon work completed through the end of the junior year. If a student is accepted as an Early Action candidate, he is still free to apply to other colleges and may defer making a commitment to the college until May. This plan is not financially binding.

EARLY DECISION PLAN

Seniors with outstanding academic records may choose to apply for early decision to the one school in which they are most interested in attending. This application promises that, if admitted under this plan, he will not apply to any other college. This process is financially binding upon the student and his family.

There are a number of factors to consider if you are thinking of applying under the Early Decision plan:

- Because of the binding agreement during the Early Decision period, only those students who have made an extensive college search and are absolutely certain that this is the “right” college for them should apply.
- If you apply early you cannot improve your college profile any more. You should thoroughly review the profile you have compiled including your test scores. Do they match (or beat) the requirements of the college to which you’d like to apply? If your grades have been rising steadily over the past few semesters, chances are they will go up again the fall terms of your senior year as well. This improvement might be just what is needed to gain your admission to your first-choice school.
- If you do apply Early Decision, you should continue to operate as if you will not be accepted. Continue to complete the application materials for the other colleges on your application list, but do not send them. It will be very difficult to complete everything between the end of the Early Decision period and the January 15th or February 1st deadlines if you haven’t done so already.

Early Decision vs. Early Action

- Both require students to apply by an early deadline - usually between October 15th and December 1st
- Decisions are usually rendered between December 15 and February 1
- Borderline students are usually deferred and considered with the regular applicant pool at a later date
- Only students that have thoroughly investigated colleges and completed most standardized testing by the end of the eleventh grade with high test scores will be in a strong position to consider early application

WHO SHOULD NOT APPLY EARLY?

- A student whose record is mediocre in light of that college's traditional applicant pool.
- A student who does not handle rejection well. Remember that in the spring you will have acceptance letters coming should your first-choice school deny you admission.
- A student who needs the pressure of college admission to keep working hard in senior year. Even if accepted Early Decision, your academic performance must continue at its current high level or the college may rescind its offer of admission. (This of course is also true for regular admission candidates.)
- Students who know they will be applying for financial aid will be giving up a tactical advantage by applying Early Decision. Many schools are unable and/or unwilling to give financial aid this early in the process. Also, if you are accepted to a number of institutions in the spring, you will have the ability to review the financial aid offered by the different schools and pick what is best for you. If you are accepted Early Decision, you must accept whatever package the college offers you no matter how meager. Colleges are well aware of this fact and have been known to give lower awards than would have been given in the spring.

Please consult the following to compare the pros and cons of Early Decision for you:

ADVANTAGES

- It helps show the institution that your interest is strong and sincere.
- It eliminates the hassles of filing for admissions to a number of schools, including the inevitable fallback institutions in which you are only minimally interested.
- An early decision allows you to concentrate on high school senior year studies without having to spend so much time on college admissions.
- If you are turned down for early admission, you may still apply to the same college for the regular spring admissions cycle...with all the work already completed.
- Even if you are rejected you will still have time to apply to other schools.
- You have obtained your references from teachers before the mid-winter crunch when everyone else is seeking them.

DISADVANTAGES

- An early admission decision locks you into a college, sometimes ten months or more before school begins.
- The college knows you are coming and may be less generous when awarding financial aid.
- Your ideas about what you want in a college may change during your senior year.
- Many colleges are swamped with early decision candidates. Your record might stand out more when competing with those in the regular cycle.
- You can't compare and negotiate financial aid offers unless you receive them from several schools.
- If your grades are on the upswing, you would fare better applying when you know your grades for the first two terms.
- Many highly selective schools are so deluged with early admission candidates that they may take an even harder line on acceptances than during the regular cycle.

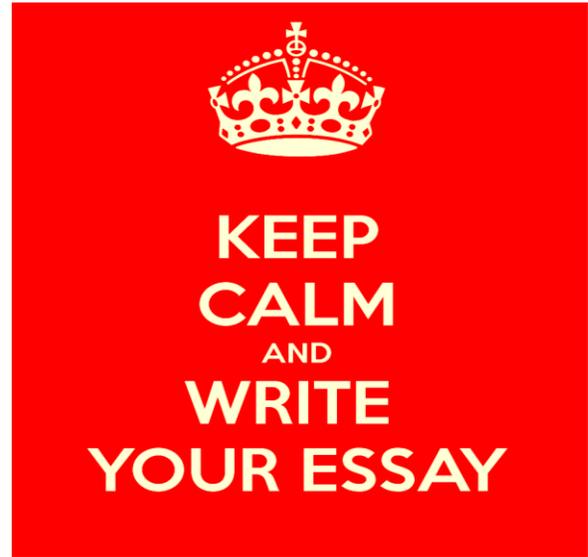
NOTE: Many colleges have eliminated their Early Decision Program due to some of the disadvantages noted above. More and more colleges are adding a non-binding Early Action Program.

Section 7: COLLEGE ESSAYS

The college essay is, without a doubt, the most time-consuming, difficult and, perhaps, important part of your applications. While your GPA and test scores have been finalized by application time, there is always the possibility that a very strong essay will sway the admissions committee in your favor. The application essay, along with your teacher recommendations, is the place where the admissions officers can go beyond the series of letter grades and test scores and learn what type of person you truly are.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD ESSAY?

Every essay should demonstrate two extremely important features: (1) evidence of writing fluency and good technical control of the English language and (2) an honest and thoughtful portrayal of yourself, your values, your accomplishments and your goals. Here are a few practical hints for your writing:



- Leave plenty of time to write the essay and have it reviewed by others. Begin your essay at least by September of your senior year. Begin writing about important life events or people who may have helped to shape the person you have become. You may even find that some class assignments can turn into essay topics.
- Be sure to have a teacher, advisor, parents or counselor whose judgment you trust to read your essay. These individuals can provide an outsider's opinion about what is most or least significant in the essay.
- Utilize details to enrich your writing. Include anecdotes and examples to back up what you say about yourself. It's not enough to say you are concerned about your fellow man. What things have you done in life to show that you really are?
- Find some place in the essay to explain how the experience or person written about has impacted your life.
- Don't take anything for granted. Admission committees don't know what you don't tell them. If a summer volunteer experience was really significant to you, tell them about it, explain why it was important, and be your own advocate.
- Use inclusive language. Even though Fork Union is almost an exclusively male environment, most of the colleges are not. Don't alienate half the population of the world by using only the masculine pronoun.
- Be honest. Don't imply things about yourself that are not accurate; colleges are likely to easily see through this attempt. Remember, each person on the committee reads hundreds of essays each year and has become adept at "reading between the lines."

WHAT SHOULD YOU NOT WRITE ABOUT?

While some colleges ask you to write on specific topics, most will offer an open-ended prompt that allows you a wide variety of items about which to write. However, remember that the readers will have only what you send them, and you can't take back anything they will have read. The following topics should always be avoided:

- Your girlfriend. Admission committees don't care about and are not interested in your girlfriend. In fact, some will see an overly serious relationship as a detriment to your future academic success.
- Very controversial political issues. Don't risk alienating an admission officer just to "state your case."
- Your greatest athletic achievement. Unless there is a truly fascinating twist to it, any essay about athletics tends to become routine.
- Anything of a sexual nature. Further explanation should not be necessary.
- Your summer trip to Europe. While this trip may have been very important to you, this is one of the most common essays that colleges receive. Unless something most unusual happened on your trip, you should choose another topic.

A SAMPLING OF ESSAY TOPICS

- Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, or risk in your life and its impact on you.
- Discuss some issue of personal, local, national or international concern and its importance to you.
- Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you and describe that influence.
- Describe a character in fiction, a historical figure or a creative work (art, music) that has had an influence on you and explain that influence.
- A successful college community depends greatly on the intellectual and personal contributions of its individual members. Please share with us what you believe your fellow students could learn from you, both inside and outside the classroom.
- If you were given the opportunity to spend an evening with any one person, living, deceased or fictional, who would you choose and why?
- You have just completed your 300-page autobiography. Please submit page number 256.
- Describe a situation in which your values or beliefs were questioned by someone you respect. How was it resolved?

Section 9: PAYING FOR COLLEGE

Students and families are understandably concerned about meeting the ever-rising costs of a college education. However, you should not allow finances to limit the scope of your college exploration, selection, and application process. ALL COLLEGES OFFER SCHOLARSHIPS AND VARIOUS TYPES OF FINANCIAL AID. In fact, many of the schools with the highest price tags have the largest financial aid reserves and are dedicated to helping all admitted students find sufficient funds to attend their institution. While it is of course possible that you might not be offered sufficient financial aid to attend your first-choice school, one or more of the schools that accept you should be well within your reach.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND GRANTS

Most of scholarships and grants that students receive come from the institutions they attend. These are primarily awards based on some type of “merit.” Most colleges have a significant number of awards for incoming freshmen with exceptional high school academic records and/or SAT scores. Most schools also offer scholarships to very talented high school athletes in selected sports. A number of schools also offer funds to students participating in band and other music or performing groups since these are often seen as part of the school’s “public relations” team. There are also many scholarships and grants available from corporations, civic and fraternal organizations, churches, club and private foundations. While many of these have certain eligibility requirements and may involve participation in some type of competition and/or interview, you need to devote time to learning about these. Since many large companies offer scholarship opportunities for the children of their employees, it is important to have your parents inquire about such opportunities.

FINANCIAL AID

Unlike scholarships, financial aid is usually need-based in nature and is allocated primarily on the ability of the student and his family to pay for college expenses. Because institutions have different formulas to determine each family’s ability to pay, the amount of financial aid offered may vary widely from one school to the next. Colleges will determine the need-based financial aid package for the students they accept and will usually divide that money into three different types of support:

- **Grants:** This is money which does not have to be repaid.
- **Loans:** These are granted to students and/or parents and generally have very reasonable interest rates. Students do not have to begin repaying the loan until after graduation.
- **Work-study:** The college employs the student for a stipulated number of hours per week. The money earned is applied to college costs.

NOTE: Due to the changing economic circumstances of the past few years, many families whose income would have disqualified them for financial aid are now eligible to receive it.

HOW TO APPLY



Any candidate for admission to a college should apply for financial aid if the entire cost of four years of education is out of reach. Early in the senior year students must check the financial aid deadlines and obtain the forms necessary for each college to which they are applying. **EVERY STUDENT WHO WISHES TO APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID MUST COMPLETE THE FAFSA** (*Free Application for Federal Student Aid*). While some students prefer to submit a written version of the application, most now complete the application online. However, you will need to

have some of your family’s financial information on hand to complete the form. Some students download the form, complete it with their parents/guardian’s assistance, and then enter the data online to speed up the process.

All students should also fill out a *College Scholarship Service Profile* in early October of their senior year and submit it to the College Scholarship service. This form and the FAFSA require income and expense information that corresponds with the Internal Revenue Service references and definitions. Some colleges also require that their own financial aid form be completed and may require copies of the student's and parent's income tax returns. Many colleges require a FAFSA even for non-need based financial aid and athletic scholarships.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Colleges review the information you provide to determine your family's expected college contribution and financial need. This usually includes a parent contribution, student income contribution and student contribution from assets and/or benefits. Your family's income, assets, debts, family size and extenuating circumstances (such as medical conditions, etc.) are all considered when determining the family contribution. Families with special circumstances not reflected in the various forms should discuss their situation with the financial aid officer at the colleges to which cadets are applying. The determined financial need is the difference between what it will cost a student to attend a particular college and the family contribution. After your financial need has been determined, most colleges will award the financial aid as a "package" and will divide it up into grants, loans, and work-study as described above.

AN ESTIMATE

You can estimate your financial aid by visiting www.finaid.org. At this site you can enter family income, assets, etc., and this site can provide you with an expected family contribution. This number is not exact, and colleges may vary their formulas as well as the breakdown of grant vs. loan money. However, it will offer a rough estimate of how much money you can expect to receive. The FAFSA web site will also provide you with an aid estimate when the completed form is submitted.

"FAIR TRADE OPTIONS"

There are several "fair trade options" that can be of particular interest to FUMA cadets. The first of these programs is the ROTC Scholarship programs offered by the Armed Services. These scholarships range from 2 – 4-year awards, come in varying amounts, and carry some type of military service obligation after graduation...thus the "fair trade." These scholarships are especially valuable to students attending private or out-of-state colleges where tuition costs are quite high. Needless to say, a FUMA student with a strong academic record will be viewed very favorably by ROTC programs. If you are interested in ROTC scholarships, you must insure that the colleges to which you apply offer the branch of ROTC that you wish to join.

A second option is represented by College-Business CO-OP programs. In these programs a student enters into an agreement with a particular employer and his university. The employer usually agrees to pay tuition costs for the student in exchange for work experience during the college years (summers and at times a semester or two) and a specified employment term after graduation. CO-OP positions are always related to the student's major field of study and thus offer not only funds, but very valuable practical experience.

A third such option is the AmeriCorps program. Students who participate in this domestic Peace Corps receive living allowances, health care and an educational award of \$5,000 per year that may be used to pay back student loans or for financing future education.

The fourth such option, which is chosen by a number of FUMA cadets each year, is active military service immediately after high school graduation. Through the Montgomery GI Bill and other funding options, students can amass up to \$50,000 to pay for college expenses after leaving the military. The National Guard also offers an extensive tuition payment program and eligible cadets who enlist while juniors in high school can receive a partial tuition payment for their senior year at FUMA.

SCHOLARSHIP AND FINANCIAL AID TIMELINE

Junior Year:

Visit financial aid offices as you visit colleges. Write or search college web sites for information. Review the printed reference materials and online resources in the Guidance Office and in this handbook.

Senior Year:

In September, complete the College Scholarship Service Profile.

October 15 - November 15: Early decision financial aid deadline

January 1: Gather all necessary financial information

January 15: Complete and submit the FAFSA

March 1: Last opportunity to apply for financial aid (NOTE: Many colleges have a much earlier deadline.)

April 1: Most colleges make financial aid offers

May 1: Deadline for choosing a school and financial aid package

Note: Most colleges require a tuition deposit to hold the student's seat for the upcoming freshman class. These deposits are usually refundable up to May 1st but are forfeited if a refund request is not processed by that date.



Section 9: APPLYING TO THE ARMED SERVICES ACADEMIES

The following information is taken directly from www.military.com/join-armed-forces/us-military-academis-overview.html:

Learn About the Armed Forces Services Academies

The service academies annually award the biggest scholarships in the country. Each scholarship consists of four-years education, room and board, pay, exclusive benefits and training. But remember it can be quite grueling and will require you to be very disciplined and dedicated!

Here are 10 tips to give you an edge in getting into one of these elite institutions:



1. **Get the grades.** Face it, you have to be among the best to be a cadet. Ninety percent of cadets were in the top 20% of their class. But, the academies want well-rounded people. Good grades are a starting point, not the finish line.
2. **Practice testing.** The ACT and SAT are critical. Find out what scores you need at the web sites below Keep Testing until you score high enough to be above the average.
3. **Be an athlete.** Not everyone is an intercollegiate athlete, but most cadets play intramural sports, face fitness tests and undergo strenuous physical training.
4. **Be a leader.** The academies are looking for leaders. Participation in clubs and extracurriculars is not enough. Become a club officer or class officer. Work hard to earn school, athletic and community awards. Awards separate you from the pack.
5. **Be involved in the community.** Leaders care. Show you care by routinely volunteering or working in community programs.
6. **Ace the interview.** Your interview with the academy liaison officer is a big deal. You will be asked about citizenship, reasons for attending and even about current events. Read the newspaper before your interview. Practice with your family. Answer in clear, thoughtful sentences.
7. **Know your Congressman.** You need an official nomination to get into the academies (except the Coast Guard Academy). These come from Senators, Congressmen, the Vice President and the President. Apply to all the sources but get to personally know the ones you can. Volunteer in their office. Write them letters. Make appointments to see them.
8. **Go for more than one.** Congressman and Senators have a limited number of nominations for each academy. By considering all four academies you increase your chances of getting in.
9. **Attend summer programs.** Each academy offers programs for exceptional students during the summer before their senior year. These programs provide an up-close look at the academies and what cadet life is like. Your counselor can help you apply.
10. **Start now!** While the academies don't start official applications until your junior year in high school, you should start early. Write and get the pre-candidate questionnaires and candidate kits. Talk to your high school counselor. Talk to your Congressman. Meet the academy liaison officer for your area. Let everyone know you have a dream and a plan to make it real.

Below are links to each of the Armed Services Academies. Information can be found about each academy, including the admissions requirements.

The United States Air Force Academy: <https://www.usafa.edu/>

The United States Coast Guard Academy: <https://www.uscga.edu/>

The United States Military Academy: <https://www.usma.edu/>

The United States Naval Academy: <https://www.usna.edu/>



Section 10: WHAT IS REQUIRED TO PLAY SPORTS IN COLLEGE?

The NCAA Constitution requires student athletes to achieve certain minimum high school grade-point averages on core courses and minimum SAT/ACT scores to participate in Division I or Division II NCAA Intercollegiate athletics and to receive any athletically-related financial aid as freshmen. Students who fail to achieve the minimum standards to compete in college may attend a prep school (such as Fork Union) or attend community college for a time in hopes of improving their SAT/ACT scores for Division I or II standards. The NCAA Eligibility Center has published a document that lays out all requirements for collegiate athletic eligibility: <http://www.ncaapublications.com/productdownloads/CBSA16.pdf>.

Pay special attention to the following sections:

- Division I Academic Standards can be found on pages 10-12 of this document, which includes the Sliding Scales of Core GPA, SAT scores, and ACT scores.
- Division II Academic Standards can be found on page 13-15 of this document, which includes the Sliding Scales of Core GPA, SAT scores, and ACT scores.
- Attention should be paid to the definition of “core course”, found on page 16.
- Scholarship information can be found on page 31.

If you are an athlete interested in playing at the college-level, it is recommended that you, your coaches, and your parents have a discussion about NCAA eligibility.



Section 11: PRINTED COLLEGE & SCHOLARSHIP REFERENCE MATERIALS

Comprehensive Guidebooks

These guidebooks give facts about colleges and are usually found in the reference section of libraries. They are completely objective and consist mainly of statistics about the colleges. Please bear in mind that printed information of this type is always somewhat out of date, and you will need to verify some data (especially regarding costs) on the individual school's web-site. The following are the most frequently consulted college reference books:

- *Peterson's Guide to American Colleges*: Available in the Guidance Office. This guidebook offers detailed information about two and four year colleges. Colleges pay to be represented in this guide, so it may not be quite as trustworthy as some others.
- *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*: Gives average class size in introductory courses, labs, upper level classes, etc. instead of merely the average class size for the school overall. This may be important information for some students.
- *Cass & Birnbaum's Guide to American Colleges*: Breaks down the number of students majoring in each subject so that you can identify some differences between various small liberal arts colleges.
- *The College Handbook*: Quantifies admission data by male and female. It also has an index for sports at each school indicating which schools play Division I, II or III in each individual sport.
- Other lesser known guides include: *ARCO's The Right College*; *College Admissions Data Handbook*; *Kaplan's The College Catalogue* and *Lovejoy's College Guide*.

Subjective Guidebooks

These guidebooks try to give you a "feel" for a particular college. They offer opinions about good and bad features about the college and rate their quality. These opinions can be very helpful, but you have to remember that they are subjective and that the conclusions reached by the writers of these books may or may not mesh with your own conclusions.

- *The Fiske Guide to Colleges*: This publication rates each school on its academics, social life, and quality of life. One of the best features of the Fiske guide is that it gives a list of "overlap" institutions for each school. (These are schools that are similar to the one you are researching.)
- *Insider's Guide to the Colleges*: This book was compiled by a group of Yale students and is very easy to use. It has a college "finder" that helps you identify schools of interest by various categories.
- *Princeton Review's The Best 331 Colleges*: This book reaches its conclusions based on the reflections of independent counselors. It ranks schools by quality of food, intensity of study, levels or "partying," etc. It is fun to read but may not be the most helpful information for a mature choice.
- *Rugg's Recommendations on the Colleges*: Lists the quality of various majors at the colleges. This is a good starting point for cadets who have a specific interest, know exactly the field in which they wish to major and are looking for schools that are strong in their field. This book is certainly subjective but may provide you with some valuable comparisons. Rugg's also produces a book which compares the strength of major fields of study among many colleges and universities.

Books about the College Admissions Process

These books provide vast detail about “How to get into college.” Each offers its own insight into the world of college admissions. While these books might be helpful and make for interesting reading, they do tend to be a bit sensationalistic.

- *Scaling the Ivy Walls*: An excellent source for students who are interested in applying to Ivy League colleges. It provides helpful hints about how excellent students can insure that they represent themselves in the best fashion.
- *Looking Beyond the Ivy League*: This is a defense of small liberal arts colleges. For students who don't have the numbers to gain admission into highly selective schools but would still enjoy a focused college experience, this is an excellent source.
- *Playing the Selective College Admissions Game*: This book gives you a very interesting picture of what colleges are genuinely looking for in the admissions process. It is an excellent source for parents. Of particular interest is its re-creation of a college admission office meeting.

Financial Aid Books and Guides

- *Peterson's Scholarship, Grant, and Prizes*: **AVAILABLE IN THE GUIDANCE OFFICE.** This guide contains more sources of private aid than any other reference.
- *Peterson's College Money Handbook*: **AVAILABLE IN THE GUIDANCE OFFICE:** A very comprehensive guide to public money available to students.
- *The Scholarship Book*, (Cassidy) A guide to private-sector scholarships, fellowships, grants and loans for undergraduates. *College Cost and Financial Aid Handbook*: Produced by the College Board, this handbook compares costs and aid available at over 2,700 colleges.
- *The College Board Scholarship Handbook*: Information on scholarships, internships and loan programs.

Section 12: ONLINE COLLEGE & SCHOLARSHIP INFORMATION SOURCES

While the guidebooks described in the previous section can certainly provide cadets with a wealth of information, there is no better source of up to date, timely, interactive information than what you can find online. In addition to the websites maintained by almost every college, the following listing contains sites that students have found very helpful in their searches:

Helpful websites:

<https://www.collegeboard.org>: Website for the College Board with a wealth of information and services; Contains information about PSAT 8/9, PSAT/NMSQT, SAT, SAT Subject Tests, and AP testing opportunities.

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org>: A good source for searching for colleges, getting information about scholarships and financial aid, and for exploring careers.

<https://collegescorecard.ed.gov>: A site where viewers can compare/contrast schools based on a variety of factors.

<http://www.campustours.com>: Locate colleges, take college tours, view campus maps and enjoy web cam videos.

<https://www.petersons.com>: Provides links to information about colleges, summer programs, and study abroad programs; allows you to search for specific schools and provides college test preparation.

<http://www.princetonreview.com>: This is the website for the Princeton Review. It is a fun site with good test prep information, admissions tips, and college and university information.

<http://www.collegeview.com>: This company is one of the leaders in bringing technology to bear on college counseling. It allows the user to search colleges and universities for certain criteria.

<http://www.collegequest.com>: This site offers a free match service for trade schools and colleges by state.

<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>: This is a federal website that purports to contain more data on the nation's colleges and universities than any place else on the internet.

<https://www.commonapp.org>: This site provides access to more than 600 member colleges through one platform.

<http://college-insight.org>: Allows the user to browse and compare information about affordability, diversity and student success.

<https://www.unigo.com>: Information on this site is provided by students themselves about their college of choice and offers student comments, photos, and videos.

<http://www.mycollegeoptions.org>: This site provides college suggestions based exclusively on your profile.

<http://www.naviance.com>: Provides a means for documenting progression toward college acceptance, as well as providing a means for college and career searches.

<http://www.nacacnet.org>: Designed for college admission counselors, this site provides a "Student & Parent" link that holds countless helpful resources to help navigate the college selection process.

<http://www.gocollege.com>: A resource to guide students on how to finance and succeed in college. This site offers a section on "College Survival".

<http://www.collegexpress.com>: Provides tools for college search, scholarship search, summer programs, and for finding lists and rankings.

Financial Aid and Scholarship Information:

<https://fafsa.ed.gov>: U.S. Department of Education website that provides information about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

<http://www.nslc.org>: The National Student Clearinghouse for college loan information.

<http://www.finaid.org>: Free, comprehensive, independent, and objective guide to student financial aid.

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college>: A link on the College Board website that lays out steps for securing financial aid and scholarships.

<http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/paying-for-college/financial-aid-101>: Informative article with basic steps for applying for and securing financial aid.

<https://myscholly.com/>: Comprehensive and constantly curated scholarship database delivers a verified and personalized list of scholarships.

<https://www.raise.me/>: Earn “micro-scholarships” from colleges from achievements as early as 9th grade.