

College and Career Counseling



The Guidance Department at St. Benedict Preparatory School seeks to provide students and parents with the best college and career information available to aid in decision making. This process is ongoing throughout the student's high school years through individual appointments, group advisories, and assessments such as the PSAT, ACT, and AP testing. A variety of day and evening programs are provided by Ms. Lambert to assist in this process. Students are always welcome to schedule an appointment with their counselor. Parents should also feel free to contact Ms. Lambert with any questions.

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Discovering Your Career Path

Post high school planning should include career awareness, exploration, and career decision making. The decision you will make about your career requires time. Thought, and energy. You will need to consider the following:

Values

What do you value most? What do you want to get out of a job? What is important in your life- security, money, family, prestige, power?

Interests, Abilities, & Skills

What do you enjoy doing? Do you have any special abilities, talents, or skills? Think about the person you are. Notice how your choices, interests, and abilities have developed over the years due to classes in school, part time jobs, hobbies, etc.

Research

What are jobs really like? How do you prepare for them? What is the employment outlook for certain jobs? These answers require research. Ask questions of people in the field. "Shadow" them-follow them around for a day or two on the job to see if that job is really what you want. Part-time jobs and internships can help answer some questions.

Integration

Integrate your values, abilities, interests, and skills. What job will enable you to use all of these? Listen to what your friends, counselor, teachers, and parents tell you about yourself. They may see your talents and interests before you

Education

How much education are you willing to pursue in order to meet your career goals?

The average person usually has at least 5-7 different careers over a lifetime. Each of these may require different training/schooling. Training beyond high school may also be needed in order to operate more advanced and complicated equipment.

Open-mindedness, flexibility, and willingness to learn are keys to careers of the future.

Types of Postsecondary Education and Other Opportunities

Four Year Colleges and Universities

Four-year colleges and universities provide students with a broad range of classes and educational experiences, along with in-depth courses specific to their major or minor. These institutions generally offer Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) and Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degrees, and prepare students for a career. A degree from a four year university may also allow students to do advanced studies to earn a master's or doctoral degree. Four-year colleges may be public or private and are generally more expensive than community and technical schools.

Community/Junior Colleges

If students have a high school diploma or equivalent, they can go to a community or junior college. These two-year public colleges can help students further their education, prepare for a four-year college, or focus on a particular trade for a specific job. Students can earn a certificate in a specific area of study, or earn an associate's degree when completing a two-year program. To help save money, students can complete required general education courses at a community college and then transfer those credits to a four-year university to finish their bachelor degree.

Vocational/Technical School

Technical and vocational schools prepare students for a specific trade, job, or career. Generally, these colleges offer two-year programs, though some offer three or four-year programs as well. Likewise, most help students earn a license, certificate, or associate's degree, while some may help earn a bachelor's degree.

Military

Every year, the Armed Services (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard) hire more than 340,000 people for military careers in 142+ different occupations. Training for and experience in military jobs can be helpful in testing out or preparing for civilian careers. If students enlist directly after high school, they will complete training in order to carry out fundamental operations of the military. The military offers Tuition Support.

Gap Programs

Some students choose to delay further education for a year to pursue “Gap Year” programs in travel, service, training, and adventures that are opportunities of a lifetime.

Apprenticeships

Some individuals choose on-the-job training programs in many different trades.

High School Planning Timeline for Students and Parents

Junior Year

Planning for your post high school experience should be taking place throughout your high school career. However, most students intensify this planning during their junior year. This is a great time to explore your options, skills, and strengths! The following is a timeline of suggested activities...you still have time to get going!

Fall

- Begin researching careers and colleges by familiarizing yourself with the information available at school in the Student Center by the counselor.
- Discuss with your advisors what your college/career plans are.
- Attend college fairs and listen to announcements for upcoming events.
- Begin online web searches.
- Research colleges and careers using Naviance.
- Register for the ACT (actstudent.org)
- Get involved in your school and community. Find things that interest you and help you develop an awareness of your skills and strengths!
- Take the PSAT
- Decide whether or not you desire additional test preparation for the ACT. For most students, a strong focus on current core classes will be the best preparation.

Winter

- Continue to investigate careers and explore available resources by talking with people who have knowledge within various careers (job shadowing, networking, etc.)
- *If you plan to attend a 4 year college:* Make a preliminary list of colleges you would like to investigate further. Continue to conduct research and talk to people who have knowledge of various colleges (teachers, parents, friends, your counselor, college reps)
- Select classes for senior year that will challenge you

- If you want to have more than one ACT test core for college admission, register at www.actstudent.org.
- If you plan to take the SAT please make sure you register at www.collegeboard.com.

Spring

- Planning to attend a 4-year school? We HIGHLY recommend you visit as many of the colleges on your lists as possible! (It is best to visit when the college campuses are bustling with students).
- Attend a College or Career Fair
- Make plans for summer to look for work experiences or special academic enrichment programs. If you can't get a job or are too busy with other activities, consider volunteering in your community.
- Determine if any of your college applications may require a letter of recommendation. Consider which teachers you would like to ask to write you one. (Keep in mind, they need at least 2 weeks in advance to write you a great letter)
- Finish the academic year STRONG! These are the grades colleges will be seeing in the fall when you apply!

Summer

- Hit the road as often as you are able to visit the rest of the colleges on your list. This can be woven into a family vacation!
- Begin preparing for the actual application process by drafting an application essay or personal statement, gathering your writing samples, and assembling a portfolio(s) or audition video(s).
- Keep in mind many colleges update their applications over the summer so you may have to wait until after September 1st to complete the actual application. Common App opens applications as early as August 1st.
- Rest up so you can have a great senior year!

If you have any additional questions please see Ms. Lambert in the Student Center!

High School Planning Timeline for Students and Parents

Seniors

During the beginning of your senior year, you will finalize your college choices. This year is filled with admission applications, scholarships, essays, and financial aid information. Throughout your senior year, continue to build your resume by achieving academic success, as well as participating in extracurricular activities. Colleges are very interested in well-rounded students.

Fall

- Narrow your college list to approximately 3-6 schools. Compare costs of each school that interests you by contacting colleges by phone, mail, or via their websites.
- Ask teachers, guidance counselors, and other adults if they would write you a letter of recommendation
- Mark your calendar with registration, admissions, financial aid deadlines, and fees.
- Determine if the schools that interest you have online applications.
- Register for the ACT/SAT (www.actstudent.org)
- Continue to visit college campuses and talk with students and faculty
- Meet with admissions reps that are visiting St. Benedict
- FAFSA CHANGE!
 - Beginning with the 2017-2018 school year, applicants will be able to complete a FAFSA as early as October 1st of the previous year.
 - Will collect taxes from the year prior
 - Used to be January 1st.
- Begin to complete college applications NOW, especially schools that have rolling admission, priority deadlines, or early action/early decision deadlines. Aim to have these completed no later than the end of October (THINK HALLOWEEN)!
- The Common App has applications open as early as August 1st.

- If a recommendation letter is required by your college, please give the teacher or counselor up to 2 weeks in advance in order to receive the best letter. We want to brag about you!
- Write a short “thank you” to the person who has supported you in this way. Recommendations are a courtesy, not a requirement.
- Begin working on your college essays and personal statements. Allow ample time for revisions. Visit your English teacher or after school tutoring for additional assistance.
- Finalize portfolios, audition tapes, writing samples, or other evidence of talent if required for admission for specialized programs.
- Finish admission applications with January 1 deadlines, including all required documents, early in December. **KEEP COPIES OF ALL FORMS YOU SUBMIT!**
- Begin to apply for outside funding or scholarships.

Winter

- Submit completed FAFSA with your parents.
- **SCHOLARSHIPS, SCHOLARSHIPS, SCHOLARSHIPS!**
- If your school requires a mid-year transcript, you must bring your forms to the counselor.
- Continue to focus on academics, as the college you choose to attend will still be watching your second semester grades!
- Register for AP exams at the beginning of February (if this applies to you)

Spring

- Watch the mail for college acceptance letters.
- Watch for important deadlines at your college of choice (housing, financial aid, etc.)
- Compare the financial aid awards you receive.
- Compare the amount of grants received to the amount of loans received. **DON'T** just look at the “bottom line” figure.
- Check with the college of your choice about the details of signing and returning financial aid award letters.

- Make your final decision no later than MAY 1, and send in a deposit by the deadline. Follow up with financial aid office to ensure all paperwork is complete.
- Notify the other schools' admissions and financial aid offices that you will not be attending.
- AP (Advanced Placement) exams are in May.
- Fill out final transcript request form to the college of your choice, and turn it in to Ms. Moore.
- Finalize summer school or summer job plans.

Summer

- Attend New Student Orientations
- Take Placement Exams and register for classes.
- Get a job.
- Go shopping for new residence hall accommodations and school supplies.

A Guide to College Testing

PSAT/NMSQT (www.collegeboard.com): This preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test is a practice test used to assist students in preparing for the Scholastic Aptitude Test, in short, the SAT. The PSAT is administered to pre-registered 11th grade students on a nationally- set Wednesday test date. Although colleges do not see a student's PSAT/NMSQT score, a student who does well on this exam and who meets either academic performance criteria may qualify for the National Merit Scholarship Program.

ACT (www.act.org): This is a college admission test published by the American College Testing and is designed to measure a student's academic achievement in English, math, reading, science reasoning and writing subtests. Most colleges will accept either the ACT or the SAT. The ACT is usually taken during the second semester of junior year, although it can also be taken in the fall of senior year as well.

SAT Reasoning Test (www.collegeboard.com): The Scholastic Aptitude Test is a college admission test which measures critical thinking and problem solving reading, math and writing. Most colleges will accept either the ACT or the SAT. The SAT is usually taken during the second semester of junior year but may also be taken during the first semester of senior year.

SAT II Subject Tests (www.collegeboard.com): The SAT subjects tests are achievements tests designed to measure understanding a student has already acquired. They are offered in areas of study including literature, history, math, science, and foreign language. Some highly selective schools require students to take one or more SAT subject tests when they apply for admission. SAT subject tests may be used for admission or for placement purposes. Students who anticipate the need for Subject tests should take these as they complete the final course in the subject area, while it is still fresh in their minds.

Advanced Placement (AP) Examinations: These exams, administered in May, are designed to test a student's knowledge in specific areas. Many universities grant college credit to students who score a 4 or 5 out of 5. AP exams are usually taken in the spring which a student has completed an Advanced Placement course. AP scores are not used in admission decisions. Colleges have limits to the number of credits they may give to a student from AP exams. Because AP scores are not accepted by all colleges, students should check with their schools of choice before taking the exams.

Choosing a College

I. Types of College

A. Four- Year Schools

- a. Universities - institutions made up of several colleges each of which may have different admission and graduation requirements. Universities offer a broad range of major and degrees.
- b. Liberal Art Colleges - schools that offer degrees in non- technical areas. Usually these schools require a more diverse program of study for gradation.
- c. Specialized Colleges - schools offering a narrow program of study usually focused on technical education or fine arts

B. Two - Year Schools

- a. Community Colleges or Junior Colleges - offering associate degree programs that can be either terminal or used for transfer to a four year school. Most curriculums are very broad in scope, offering career and non-credit courses, as well as, courses that are equivalent to the first two years of a four- year college.
- b. Vocational/ Technical Schools - specialized schools that offer a few specific programs and do not require study in areas outside the program of interest.

II. College Locations

A. Area of the Country

- a. Weather and distance from home - most common factor for many students
- b. Attitude of people and lifestyle
- c. Proximity to future career locations
- d. Recreational opportunities

B. College Community

- a. City - city schools offer accessibility to a broad range of culture, employment, and recreational opportunities. The city is a feature of the campus.
- b. Suburban - suburban schools offer the best of both worlds in some cases. They are a close commute to the inner cities wide range of activities as well as found within a well - developed town themselves, offering student access to jobs, recreational activities and more.
- c. Small Town Rural - small town schools usually offer a wide variety of out of class activities right on campus. Campus is the central focus.

III. Admission Selectivity

College and admissions counselors take into consideration many factors when reviewing a student's application. Test scores and GPA are only two determining factors.

Other factors include but are not limited to: essays, extracurricular activities, recommendations, community service/involvement, interviews, evidence of leadership, and campus visits.

- A. Open-all high school graduates accepted, to limit of capacity
- B. Liberal- accept many freshman with C+ GPA or higher
- C. Traditional- accepts freshman with B average GPA or higher
- D. Selective- majority of accepted freshmen with B/A average GPA, including some honors or AP coursework
- E. Highly selective-majority of freshman accepted with A/A+ GPA, including majority honors and AP coursework

Typical Test Score Averages Reported by Collegesource: ACT/Discover.org)*

Admission Selectivity	SAT Averages (V&M)	ACT Composite Score
Highly Selective	1220-1600	27-36
Selective	1030-1220	22-27
Traditional	950-1070	20-23
Liberal	870-990	18-21
Open	Below 870	Below 18

*On average, students who score lower on the ACT/SAT may need a higher GPA to meet a school's particular admissions selectivity

IV. Misconceptions about Costs

- A. Tuition/Room and Board-The cost of a college education varies from about \$9,000-\$55,000 per year. The advertised cost should not be a prime factor in considering colleges but rather should be seen from the viewpoint of out-of-pocket expense, i.e. financial aid package. However, cost may be the

critical factor when making the final decision to enroll. Find out what the net cost to you will be before deciding you cannot go to an “expensive” school.

- B. In State vs. Out-of-State Costs- Do not be fooled by the “in-state schools are less expensive” syndrome. This is not always true. Private schools charged the same tuition for in-state and out of state students. Many state schools throughout the country have lower tuition for out-of-state students than tuition charged by Illinois schools. Other schools make up the difference in tuition by having substantially lower room and board costs.
- C. Transportation Costs-Yearly, the money spent for trips between home and college often includes more than plane, train, or bus fares. It may include the cost of taking and returning all clothes, books, bikes, furniture, and small appliances to and from school. Other expected trips occur on holidays, breaks, family visitation days, etc. Parents should also be aware that the number of trips home usually decreases considerably as students get older.

V. College Size

A. Large Schools

- a. Enrollment usually over 10,000 students
- b. Usually larger libraries and more laboratory facilities
- c. Usually larger class sizes for general education classes in the first 2 years
- d. More diverse curriculum and more options in specialized study
- e. More anonymity and privacy
- f. Greater variety of extracurricular activities and organizations

B. Small Schools

- a. Enrollment generally below 3,000 students
- b. More personal, warm atmosphere
- c. Usually smaller class sizes throughout four years of college
- d. Less bureaucratic and more flexible with students
- e. Greater chance for participation in athletics and leadership positions
- f. Teachers expected to have more direct involvement with academic process

C. Mid-Sized Schools

- a. Enrollment is 3,000 to 10,000 students
- b. More personalized approach than larger school
- c. More options than small schools

D. "Atmosphere"

- a. A nebulous term but very important factor in college selection
- b. The intangible that makes the college feel like a home away from home

VI. Academic Options

- A. Major Course of Study- Does the college offer programs that will allow you entry into the career of your choice? Does the college offer your major or area of concentration?
- B. Faculty- Are there opportunities to work with several professors in your area of major? What is the student to faculty ratio? Are the teachers available to students?
- C. Study Abroad- Will there be the opportunity to visit other countries for credit? When do a majority of students attend a study abroad program? Where are the locations of the program? What is the cost of the program to participate? Will you be able to graduate on time and participate in study abroad?
- D. Internships- Is there an opportunity to explore a career in your major area of interest? Are they typically paid or unpaid internships? Do students typically become employed by the company/persons with whom they have completed an internship with?
- E. Research- Is there an opportunity to work with several professors within a student's major area of study on data collection, presentations, etc. Do you earn credit for your work? Can you only do research during the summer?

Campus Visits

There is no substitute for seeing a college for yourself! There are many ways to find out about a college: websites, brochures, and college fairs. But there is no substitute for seeing the campus yourself. If you are an athlete who is being recruited by a college, remember that you are a student first. Attend a general student tour and open house offered by the college. Be sure you like the school as a whole, not just the athletic program. Juniors and seniors are allowed one documented college visit per year.

Before you go:

- Call the admissions office in advance, and tell them the date you would like to visit as well as the time of day that you expect to arrive
- Inquire about scheduling an interview or attending an information session, visiting classes, and talking with the faculty.
- If you want to stay overnight in a residence hall, ask if they can make arrangements.
- Research the college on Naviance, the school's website, or from visiting the Student Center for more information.

While you are on campus:

- Talk to as many students as possible.
- Take a tour of the campus.
- Sit in on a class.
- Have a meal in the cafeteria.
- Pick up copies of the college newspaper and magazine.

Prepare for the Admissions Interview:

- Take along a list of your questions.
- You will be asked your academic background interests, hobbies, goals, and perhaps why you're interested in the college, so be ready to talk!
- As with any interview, be on time, or call ahead if you know you will be delayed.

Questions when you talk to students:

- Are campus jobs readily available?
- What's the library like as a place to study? To do research?
- Are faculty members interested in students and accessible outside of class?
- How many hours a week do you study? Is that typical here?

- What do you like most about this college? Least? If you could change something, what would it be?
- Are the athletic facilities open to all students or only to athletes?
- Do many students go home on the weekends?
- Is it possible to study in your dorm room?

In an interview:

- Does the college have academic programs that fit my interests?
- Will I have access to special equipment (such as an electron microscope) as a first- year student?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the college's advising system?
- How many students will there be in courses I'm likely to take in my first year? Are those courses taught by professors or graduate assistants?
- Will there be any new programs or facilities in the next two years?
- Will I have to pay additional fees for computer time?

Observations when you attend a class:

- Are students prepared for the class? Do they seem interested in the material?
- Am I intellectually challenged by what is taking place in class?
- Is there time for questions and discussion? Do students participate?
- Is there a good rapport between professors and students?
- Do I feel that the students are learning - either new facts or new ways of thinking about a subject?

As you tour the campus:

- Are computers and lab equipment up-to date and plentiful?
- Are the buildings in a good repair? The grounds well- kept?
- What is the cafeteria like?
- Are the residence halls pleasant and quiet enough to study in?
- Are there laundry and kitchen facilities ?
- What is the surrounding town or city like?

Application Process for Four Year Colleges

Obtaining Applications

- Colleges prefer students to complete applications online by visiting the college's website.

Completing Applications

- APPLY EARLY and ON- LINE whenever available.
- Prepare application materials carefully. Follow the colleges' instructions. Schools accepting the Common Applications may require supplemental material. Some schools encourage students to apply on-line and will even eliminate the application fee. MAKE COPIES OF ALL OF YOUR APPLICATIONS.
- BE AWARE OF DEADLINES! Complete applications with rolling or priority deadlines first. Aim to have these completed by the end of October (Halloween).

Tips for Applying On- line

- Read instructions carefully before filling out the applications. Print the instruction page. If there is a " virtual tour" of the applications, take it.
- Know what is needed for your counselor. Know what information needs to be sent. Is there a signature page to be included? What is deadline?
- If you need a recommendation from teacher or counselor, make sure you ask them in person! Do not just send them a recommendation request electronically and expect them to you a " glowing" report!
- SAVE YOUR WORK. Some online forms will not allow you to store unfinished work unless every required block has an entry in it: choose a short word and copy it into every space ; you can remove it and fill in the space later.
- Don't compose your essay online. Compose it in a word processing application, save it as a text file , and then copy/paste it into the appropriate boxes online.
- Print the applications, and review them carefully before sending. Make any corrections to the applications, and preview it on screen.
- Print the final version of your application for your records. If anything goes missing, it can be faxed.
- Remember to hit "submit" when the applications is reviewed and ready.
- Record the date and time of submission, as well as the transactions number for the receipt of the application and/ or fee. If there is a confirmation page, print it.

Counselor/Teacher Letters of Recommendation

- NOT EVERY school needs a letter of recommendation. Please check with your individual college or university to determine if one is needed prior to requesting one from a teacher and/or counselor
- Recommendation letters are confidential and will be sent by the counselor/teacher directly to the college
- If NEEDED, make arrangements with counselor/teachers on an individual basis. Allow them TWO WEEKS to complete the forms/write a letter. REQUEST A LETTER IN PERSON. It is professional and shows that you appreciate the teacher taking the time to write you a recommendation!
- Provide the counselor/teachers with a copy of your resume or the RECOMMENDATION FORM provided by Ms. Lambert.
- Write a short “thank you” to the people who have supported you this way.

Once you have completed your application

- Request a transcript through Naviance. Ms. Moore handles all transcript requests if you have any questions.
- Confirm that your application materials have been received by calling or emailing the admissions office.
- Decision times/notifications will vary by school. Remember that you may have until May 1st to make your final decision and you can only commit to one school.
- Begin to work on scholarships.
- Prepare materials that are needed for financial aid.

Types of Admission Decisions

Early Decision

Under this binding program, students are allowed to apply to only one college through an early decision program (usually by November with decision received in December rather than April). Students who are admitted under early decision must withdraw all other applications and agree to attend this school.

Priority Deadline & Early Action/Notification

This non-binding program allows students to submit an early application (usually by November) and be notified early (usually in December rather than April). Students have until May 1st to express their intent to enroll.

The priority deadline for most students is an early postmarked date. You can apply after the deadline but have a greater chance of getting accepted if a completed application is filed by the deadline.

Deferred Decision

The college or university determines that more information is needed to make a final decision about a candidate's application. Often the decision is delayed until 2nd trimester grades and/or new test scores are received.

Regular Admission

Students apply before the regular deadline, usually by December/January and receive notification of decision by March/April. Students have until May 1st to respond to the offer of admission.

Rolling Admission

Colleges with rolling admission review applications as they are received. Students may apply at anytime within the admission "window" with notification of decision made within 4-6 weeks. Space availability at some schools, however, may be an issue the longer the students wait to apply.

Wait Listed

When there are too many qualified applicants for a particular institution, some students may be waitlisted (usually in April). The "waitlisted" letter should report the number of students on the waitlist, the number historically offered admission, as well as the availability of financial aid and housing. Students may remain on the waitlist for final

decision or choose another school. Some colleges may require a deposit or a written commitment as a condition of remaining on a waitlist. The school is expected to notify you of the resolution of your wait list status no later than August 1st.

Deferred Admission

The plan permits a student, once accepted, to postpone matriculation for one year in order to pursue other plans.

Financial Aid

Financial Assistance comes in several types: grants, scholarships, loans, and work-study.

1. **Grants** are typically based on financial need and don't need to be repaid.
2. **Scholarships** may be awarded based on academics, special achievements, or involvement in school or community activities. Financial need is sometimes a factor. It is known as gift aid, and does not need to be repaid.
3. **Loans** are a significant part of most aid packages. The loan must be repaid, most often not until after graduation. Interest rates are usually lower than other types of loans. The repayment period varies from two to three years up to thirty years.
4. **Work-study** refers to part time jobs on campus. Funding is provided through the federal work-study program or institutional funds.

Financial Aid Forms and Paperwork

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

You can access the online application at www.fafsa.ed.gov. The FAFSA cannot be filed prior to October 1st of a student's senior year. If you have additional questions, please contact FAFSA or ISAC (Illinois Student Assistance Commission)

CSS Profile (College Board's College Scholarship Service)

Used by selective, private institutions the Profile utilizes institutional methodology which differs somewhat from the calculation performed by the federal government. The profile collects more specific data than the FAFSA and sends it to colleges. Since there is a cost for this service, student(s) should check directly with the college to be sure the Profile is required. Families can complete this form early in the senior year and should do so at www.collegeboard.com

Institutional Forms

Some schools ask students to complete an individual financial aid document from their own financial aid office. Such forms are typically mailed to accepted students or may be included in the student(s) financial aid packet.

Financial Aid Terms

- **Financial aid package:** The combination of scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study that a student receives

- **Need analysis:** Using information provided on the FAFSA form and on other forms a college might require, the income and assets of both parents and student are analyzed. Many variables that affect a family's financial situation are considered, such as the number of people in the household, children in college, age of parents, and types of assets and savings.
- **Expected family contributions:** The amount the family and the student can contribute toward the cost of a college education. This is determined by the needs analysis.
- **Need-based aid:** Financial aid awarded on the basis of the financial need shown by a family, determined by need analysis.
- **Merit-based aid:** Financial aid awarded on the basis of factors other than financial need. This usually consists of scholarships awarded for academic performance and/or special talents.
- **Comprehensive fee:** The total cost of tuition, room, board, and student fees charged by a college or university. In addition, other expenses such as transportation and books are added to the comprehensive fee to determine the cost of attendance at a college.

Students with Special Needs

The process of researching and selection an appropriate college is a complex one for any student and their family....as the previous sections indicate, and for the student with special needs and accommodations such as learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, or physical disabilities, the process takes on even higher levels of complexity. But there is good news! More and more colleges are providing services and developing support programs for students with special needs. The Goal of this section is to provide some insight to students and their families as to the additional steps they must follow to insure that they find a college that will meet their needs.

Self Advocacy

The best gift we can give our students with special needs is to teach them the skills to advocate for themselves. Talk to any college counselor or admissions director, and their unending mantra to all students is that they must learn how to ask for help-early and often, especially students with learning differences. Students with special needs must have a complete understanding of their learning difficulties and be familiar and articulate about strategies that work for them.

Earlier Planning

For students with learning disabilities, ADHD, or other special needs, early college planning is the key, particularly for students looking for or needed specific support programs or services. While most of the 'college planning buzz' occurs for students in their junior or senior years, students with special needs can and should begin their college research earlier than that. The key is to determine what you're looking for in a college and the level of support you believe your student will need.

Levels of Support

Like all college-bound students, there are several criteria that the student and family are looking to meet when choosing a college. They include the school's geographic location, size of the college, cost of tuition, academic curriculum, etc. And for a student with special needs, the primary goal in the college search becomes finding a college that will meet your students needs-specifically the level of support your student will need to become successful at the collegiate level. Some colleges offer one or more of these levels of support, and it is up to the student and the family to determine what level their student will need and whether specific colleges provide these services.

Highly structured programs: These college programs provide comprehensive services for students with learning disabilities. They are more likely to have separate

admissions processes and charge additional fees over and above the tuition costs. The number of students accepted into highly structured programs is usually limited to insure high staff/student ratios. Students are required to submit their psycho-educational evaluations and often personal interviews are required.

The admission decision is usually made by the Director of the Support Program or in conjunction with the Director of Admissions. Once admitted, students may develop an Education Plan, similar to their Individual Education Plan in high school, and may be required to attend study or tutoring sessions. Plus, there is a close monitoring of the student's progress throughout the school year.

Coordinated Services: These services are provided to students who voluntarily identify themselves as needing academic help and/or accommodations to be successful in college. Students may submit an application and the Director of Student Support Services at the college may be involved with the admission decision. Traditionally, the onus for receiving these types of services is on the student- to advocate for himself/herself and initiation the accommodations- with the help of the Disability Support Services Department, if necessary. There are usually no additional fees for Coordinated Services.

Basic Services: Most colleges will provide basic services that comply to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Sometimes these services are directed by persons knowledgeable about learning disabilities, so it is valuable to find that out when researching your colleges. The student is admitted to the college in the normal way and then must seek out these basic support services if needed-often in the form of peer tutoring or sometimes professional tutoring. This degree and effectiveness of basic services varies from college to college, and it will always be up to the student to seek out these services.

Supportive Environments: These are colleges that may not have a bevy of services and programs, but the small size of the student body and the care and involvement of the faculty provide a very nurturing environment.