

# COLLEGE PLANNING HANDBOOK

## **DUANESBURG CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT**

163 School Drive  
Delanson, New York 12053  
<http://dcs.neric.org>

### **High School/Middle School Principal**

Wilford LeForestier

### **House Principal**

Beth DeLuke

### **Counseling Staff**

Chris Dickson  
Alicia Kirkpatrick  
Neal Silverman

The Duaneburg counseling staff has prepared this handbook to assist parents and students with college and career preparation. Please do not hesitate to call the high school at 895-5350 with any questions you may have or to arrange an appointment with your daughter or son's counselor.

## PREFACE

### Choice

We make choices all the time. Our decisions may be based on a value, or a whim, or perhaps after a thoughtful weighing of the pros and cons of a variety of alternatives. We usually find that we get the best results when we have employed a thoughtful decision-making process based on a great deal of factual information. Many times however, we have to make a choice, wishing we had more time or more information, or better still, a look into the future. Since we cannot know the future we make choices based upon the information presently available arranged in an efficient manner. A proven decision-making process includes the following:

1. Define the problem
2. Gather information
3. Consider possible courses of action based on information and personal values
4. Choose a course of action
5. Analyze results, modify if necessary

Choosing a career is a life-long process that results from a number of lesser decisions in our lives. Most theorists believe a career develops as a person tries to reconcile his/her beliefs, goals, interests, and values with the reality of work. Consequently, we need to learn about the world and ourselves. Interest inventories, value discussions, and an honest assessment of our aptitudes and interests combined with facts about the jobs and job trends can provide the basis for on-going decision making.

Choosing a college requires the same thoughtful process. College selection, like most life decisions, is not a choice between “good and bad” but rather between “good and good.” The more we know about ourselves and the variety of educational institutions available, the greater the chance we will be happy at the college that we choose. Approximately 70% of students change their choice of major study at least once during their college career and approximately 50% change colleges. Choosing is a process, not an event.

This handbook will hopefully acquaint you and your parents with the important activities, dates, and services available to help you with your important post high school decision-making.

We wish you well as you struggle with the important question of your future. Please feel free to use the counseling staff as a resource, but remember the final decision is your responsibility and opportunity.

Good luck.

**The Duanesburg School Counseling Office**

## CONTENTS

Section	Page
Preface	2
Introduction	4
Section 1: Making Some Basic Decisions	5
Career Exploration	5
School Work	5
Section 2: Fulfilling Requirements	7
How Colleges Select Students	7
Tests for College Entrance	8
College Entrance Exams at DCS	10
A Recommended Testing Schedule	10
Section 3: Researching Colleges	11
Select Your Best College	12
A General Worksheet for Discovering Your Values	13
College Comparison Worksheet	14
References Available in the Guidance Office	15
Sample Letter to a College	16
School Counseling Activities for Juniors and Seniors	17
Meeting with College Representatives	18
Campus Visit	19
Section 4: Applying to College	20
Filling Out Applications	20
College Interviews	21
Waiting	22
Section 5: Applying for Financial Aid	23
Timetable for Financial Aid	23
Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)	24
CSS/ Financial Aid Profile	24
Appendices	25
Checklist	26
Glossary	27
References	29

## INTRODUCTION

This handbook has been divided into five sections to help lead you through the college selection and application process, taking you from your freshman year of high school to your freshman year of college.

Section 1 **Making Some Basic Decisions** will help you start making plans for your future. Deciding what you want to do after high school is a difficult process. There are many different paths you can take--vocational school, a technical college, a two-year college, or a four-year college, just to name a few. Section 1 will help you narrow down your choices.

Section 2 is **Fulfilling Requirements**. Once you decide you are going to continue your education after high school, you need to be sure that you have met college entrance requirements including standardized tests and coursework that vary from college to college. Good test scores, a record of community service and activities, and a good academic transcript will help you get into the college you choose and receive scholarships to help pay your educational expenses.

In Section 3 we will discuss **Researching Colleges**. Once you are sure that you have fulfilled college entrance requirements, you need to make sure that the college fulfills *your* requirements. Section 3 will help you decide what is important to you and how to find colleges that have what you want.

Section 4, **Applying for Admission**, will help lead you through those confusing college applications. Applications, essays and interviews all give you the opportunity to show a college why they should offer you a place in next year's freshman class. Section 4 will give you some tips on how to show your best side to the colleges you are applying to.

Section 5 deals with what may be the most complicated part of going to college, **Applying for Financial Aid**. Where can you get the money to go to school? Section 5 will give you a starting place to look for the money for your post-high school educational expenses. This section discusses various ways to say "Show me the money."

## **Section 1**

### **Making Some Basic Decisions**

The time to start thinking about future plans is during your freshman year. There is a wealth of information available to you to help you start planning, but you do not want to wait until the last minute to begin sorting through it all. As well as starting on some preliminary research, you will want to think about what you are doing in high school. Colleges look at your high school record, and this includes your freshman year.

### **Career Exploration**

**Jobs and Careers:** What are you good at? What do you like to do? The answers to these questions can help you decide on careers you might want to explore further. If you are having trouble answering these questions visit the school counseling office. Your counselor will get you started by completing an interest inventory. This inventory will ask you questions about your strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes. Using this information a list of possible careers can be formed.

The **Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)** is another way of exploring careers. This test measures students' skills, interests, and personal preferences and aligns them with career opportunities. The test is available for students in grades 10 through 12 and is usually offered at DCS in December. The ASVAB is the same battery used by the military for entry qualifications. If you have further questions about the ASVAB and/or the results, please contact the school counseling office or visit the follow website: <http://www.dmdc.osd.mil/asvab/>.

**Further exploration:** Once you have narrowed the field to a few careers, you can do further research to see if you would really like them. The school counseling office, library and the Internet all have information on careers. Look at how much education is required to enter the field, possibilities for advancement, how likely you are to find a job in your chosen career, and even how much money you can expect to make. You will want to take all these factors into consideration and the research might take you a little while.

**Still undecided?** Do not be concerned even if you remain undecided about a career even after exploring various options. You will likely find that there are a number of careers that you find interesting. You may find that some careers are interesting, but difficult to find employment in, such as being an astronaut. You may find that over time you lose interest in some careers. What is important in high school is that you have a general idea of what you would like to do and where you would like to go after high school.

### **School Work**

**Course selection:** It's never too early to start thinking ahead. The state of New York and DCS have requirements you must fulfill to graduate. You will need to earn 22 credits before you can earn your diploma. Refer to your course description book to see how many English, social studies, math, science, and other specific credits you must earn. You will also want to look at some college view books. Many colleges require four years of math, while DCS only requires three for graduation. You may also want to think about taking 2 or more years of a foreign

language. Many colleges require at least two years of a foreign language, where as you are only required to pass the proficiency exam to graduate from DCS.

**NCAA:** Students who are interested in playing NCAA athletics have another set of qualifications to meet. Before an athlete can play a sport at a Division I or Division II school he or she must register and meet the specific criteria set forth on the NCAA Clearinghouse form. Students must have at least a 2.0 GPA and a combined ACT score of 68 or a combined SAT score of 820. Students must also have completed specific college preparatory courses in English, math, science, and the social sciences. If you are thinking of playing sports in college, see your school counselor early in your high school career to ensure that you are on your way to meeting all of the requirements.

**Grades:** Whether you decide to go to college or enter the work force when you leave high school, you will need to show a copy of your high school transcript. Your transcript shows every course you have taken since your freshman year, and the grades that you have earned, as well as your cumulative grade point average (GPA) and class rank. You will want to keep this in mind, even during your freshman year. If you “goof off” in a class, it could have an impact on your future.

**Recommendations:** Once again, whether you are applying for a job or entrance into college you will be required to submit letters of recommendation and names of references. Your best sources for recommendations are your teachers, counselor, bosses, coaches, and activity leaders. Remember this as you sit in class: if you try your hardest, turn in your homework, and participate in class, you can almost be assured a good letter of recommendation.

**School and community activities:** Participating in a variety of clubs, athletics, community service and activities will round out your applications, open up new areas of interest to you, and broaden the number of scholarships you can qualify for. If an activity interests you, give it a try.

**Note:** Remember, high school is the time for you to explore and try new things. Take chances. If a club or sport interests you or a class sounds like something you might like, give it a try. Who knows, you may discover an unknown interest that could grow into a hobby or even a career.

## **Section 2**

### **Fulfilling the Requirements**

Okay, you've decided that college is a definite possibility. Let's make sure you are prepared to apply. The easiest way to do this is to give you an idea of what a college looks for in an applicant.

### **HOW COLLEGES SELECT STUDENTS**

Colleges vary in their entrance requirements and standards. A student who is rejected for admission by College X may be accepted with open arms at College Y and be offered a great financial aid package.

All colleges make their admission decisions based on certain factors, both academic and personal. Each college will weigh these factors in their own unique way to arrive at an acceptable freshman candidate. They will base their decision on their institutional expectations, past experience, and sometimes most important of all, the number of applicants that year.

The factors considered for admission are:

- A. Academic
  1. Courses of study
  2. Grades
  3. Class rank
  4. Level of instruction as related to the proposed college major
  5. High School reputation
  6. Scholastic recommendations
  
- B. Standardized Tests
  1. College Board Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)
  2. SAT II Tests
  3. American College Test (ACT)
  
- C. Personal
  1. Student essay
  2. Special talents
  3. Evidence of leadership skills
  4. Character
  5. Activities in and out of school
  6. Constructive involvement
  7. Interview impressions
  8. Written recommendations
  9. Statements on application
  10. Desire for a diverse student body
  11. Alumni friends and relatives
  12. Financial resources

State universities and colleges usually establish a set of minimum academic standards (different for out-of-state applicants), accepting most candidates who meet these criteria. Here the academic and test factors are most important. Sometimes personal factors carry little or no weight.

Private colleges and universities tend to control their selection process to a greater extent. Applications are evaluated individually and accepted or rejected by a committee. The academic and test factors listed are important in the screening out of obviously weak candidates, but from the remaining acceptable group, the decision about actual acceptance is made on personal factors.

The most complicated area of college admissions takes place at the nationally known private institutions, mostly in the Northeast, where the admission offices are flooded with applicants from fully qualified high school seniors.

Some of the factors listed above cannot be controlled such as high school reputation, friends and relatives that are alumni, and the college's desire for a diverse student body. Worry about the factors that you can control such as the academic factors discussed above. Next, we will take a more in-depth look at the standardized tests that you will need to take. Personal factors will be discussed in Section 4 **Applying to College**.

## **TESTS FOR COLLEGE ENTRANCE**

Here are some testing dates and explanations that may be useful during the following years. Keep this data handy as a reference sheet. ACT and SAT applications may be obtained in the guidance office. You will usually take these tests before you have completed your college applications. You should request that the scores be sent to the colleges where you are applying. This can be done on the test application. Some colleges will prefer one test over the other, so be sure to check with the colleges you are applying to before taking any tests.

### **PLAN**

Given in October of the sophomore year, this is the practice test for the American College Test (ACT). It tests English, mathematics, reading and science reasoning skills. The test also includes a career inventory to help students identify and explore possible careers. The PLAN is approximately a three-hour test.

### **PSAT/ NMSQT**

Given in October of the junior year, this is the preliminary test of the College Board testing program, a two-hour version of the three-hour SAT. The results of the PSAT are also used by the Merit Corporation to determine national semi-finalists as candidates for scholarships. If you have not taken many standardized tests, or you do not do well at them, you may wish to register to take the PSAT in the spring of your sophomore year also. Taking the PSAT in 10<sup>th</sup> grade is only for practice; you cannot qualify for a National Merit Scholarship no matter what you score.

### **SCHOLASTIC APTITUDE TEST (SAT I)**

This is a three-hour test, primarily multiple-choice, which measures verbal and mathematical abilities. The verbal section consists of two 30-minute sections and one 15-minute section that tests your vocabulary, verbal reasoning, and critical reading skills. The math section also has two 30-minute sections and one 15-minute section, testing your ability to solve problems involving arithmetic, algebra, and geometry. You will also take one 30-minute section that does not count towards your final score. Beginning in March of 2005, the College Board is adding a new writing section and changing their math and verbal section (now to be called critical reading). The new writing section will be 50-55 minutes and include grammar, usage and word choice. There will be multiple choice and a student written essay. The new math section will be two 25-minute sections and one 20-minute section. Number and operations, Algebra I & II and functions, geometry, statistics, probability and data analysis will be included, and quantitative comparisons

will be omitted. The critical reading section will be made up of two 25-minute sections and one 20-minute section. Critical reading and sentence level reading will be covered. Analogies will be omitted. If you sign up for the Student Search Service (SSS), the College Board will send your name and some specific demographic information, but not your scores, to colleges, universities, and scholarship programs. In turn, you will receive free college and scholarship information from them.

## **SAT II**

You may be required to take up to three of these tests by colleges to which you are applying. Check the college catalog to be sure. The fee depends upon the number of exams you take. There are 23 different subject tests. Check the SAT information book carefully for the dates of the tests you plan to take.

Students who plan to apply to selective four-year private colleges (e.g. Harvard, Cornell, Union, or RPI) may consider taking SAT IIs at the end of 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and/ or 11<sup>th</sup> grades. These are one-hour exams designed to measure your knowledge in a specific academic area.

You should take SAT IIs when you are best prepared to do a good job with the material, providing, of course, the test results are really needed. For example, at the end of a biology course you are probably best prepared to take the biology test.

Some students tend to take too many tests, especially achievement tests. Perhaps you can save time, money, and anxiety by seeing your counselor before registering. Ask yourself “Do I really need to take this test?”

## **AMERICAN COLLEGE TEST (ACT)**

This is a three-hour achievement test that measures your knowledge in four subject areas: English, reading, mathematics, and science reasoning. Career interests and college majors are also examined. This test uses grade level norms, so most students take it at the end of their junior year. Check with your college or your school counselor to find out if they prefer you to take the SAT or the ACT. You can find the application booklet for the ACT in the school counseling office.

## **ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) TESTS**

Advanced Placement tests are given in May to test the knowledge you have gained in taking college level courses taught at DCS. Advanced Placement courses are taught in Calculus, Art, US History, World History, Economics, and Psychology. See your school counselor if you are interested in signing up for any of these courses. Usually the AP tests are taken for college credit. Many, but not all, colleges will award credit for the courses taken, based on your AP exam grades.

## **COLLEGE CREDIT COURSES**

DCS offers a variety of courses in which students can pay a minimum tuition fee and receive college credit. The following courses are eligible for college credit: French V, Spanish V, Math 12/Pre-Calculus, Keying, Business Law, Marketing, Internet & Web Design, Computer Science and Design & Drawing for Production.

## COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS

### CEEB

College Entrance Examination Board tests are given annually in November, December, January, May and June. The CEEB tests include the SAT I and SAT II. Duanesburg Central School District's code is 331585. Check in the school counseling office for the exact test date in each case. Registration forms are available in the counseling office and must be mailed in to the Testing Center according to the deadlines noted on the application form or on-line. The College Board provides late registration processing for an additional fee, and also walk-in registration for a higher fee. If you are unable to afford the fee to take the SATs, see your school counselor, who can help you apply for a fee waiver.

### ACT

The American College Tests are given annually in October, December, April and June. Again, DCS' school code is 331585. Registration forms are due four weeks prior to the test date. Check in the school counseling office for the exact dates and registration forms or online.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A Social Security number is needed on applications for scholarships and testing. Contact the Social Security Administration office to obtain the application form.

In order to take the ACT and SAT you will need to bring your admission ticket and a picture ID to the test site. The admission ticket should arrive in the mail in plenty of time for the test. If you have not received it within two weeks of the test date, contact the testing company.

### A RECOMMENDED TESTING SCHEDULE

Grade 10	October	PLAN
Grade 11	October	PSAT/ NMSQT
	May or June	SAT I, SAT II and/or ACT
Grade 12	October, November or December	SAT I, SAT II and/or ACT

**NOTE:** The above is a suggested schedule for college-bound students. Special situations may require additional testing or a variation in the timetable. Exceptions could be for early decision candidates, engineering and science majors, students seeking admission to highly selective (Ivy League) schools, two-year college-bound students and students who simply do not test well. Some 10<sup>th</sup> graders may take the PSAT for the practice effect only, but these results will not be considered for merit-based scholarships.

Discussions can now turn from what colleges look for in applicants, to what you should look for in a college. While you want to be prepared to fulfill the college's requirements for admission, it is just as important that the college fulfills your requirements. Let's take some time now to decide what is important to you, and how to make sure that the college has what you are looking for.

### Section 3

#### Researching Colleges

Before you can start researching colleges, you have to know what is important to you. Examine your own values. Some factors which you may want to consider are listed here. A more complete list of factors for comparing colleges is shown on the next page, along with a suggested worksheet for discovering your values and a college comparison worksheet. Some factors to consider are:

1. Your major or academic program of study.
2. Size of college
3. In-state or out-of-state
4. Admission standards-highly competitive, competitive, or not competitive
5. Expenses-State university, private, financial aid
6. Job Placement, after graduation
7. Activities-athletics, music, arts, etc.
  - a. Discuss your needs with your counselor.
  - b. Use local available references.
  - c. Talk to college representatives in the school counseling office and at college fairs. College representatives visit Duanesburg every fall and spring.
  - d. Discuss college and costs with your parents.
  - e. Talk to teachers, friends, and college students.
  - f. Visit colleges-both an interview and a tour are desirable.

You can start your search in the school counseling office. There is a computer program available to you, **Choices**, in which you can input your values as they become known to you. The computer program has a list of over 7,000 colleges. As you decide that a factor is or is not important, the computer will narrow down the list. Your initial research of steps 1,2, and 3 should give you between 5 and 25 colleges that seem to meet your needs, unless you have a restrictive need such as a commuter school, an unusual curriculum choice, or services for the disabled. You should start your search in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

Steps 4 through 6 are usually completed during the summer before and fall of your senior year to reduce the number to three to six colleges. Applications should be submitted to the school counseling office by December 1<sup>st</sup> of your senior year.

Continue your research during the fall and winter of grade 12. Be sure to include one college where your chances for admission are better than average. Applicants are notified of acceptance or rejection from December to April. By May 1<sup>st</sup>, a non-refundable deposit is generally required by the college that you have chosen to attend.

## SELECTING YOUR BEST COLLEGE

Factors to consider when comparing colleges:

Academic pressure	Scholarships, loans, and work-study
Accreditation	School calendar-semester, trimester, 4-1-4
Admissions	School-community relationship
Advanced placement	Special services- counseling, health, religion
Average freshman scores on standardized tests	Student employment
Campus activities	Student population
Campus atmosphere	Student body diversity
Class size	Study abroad
Courses available in major	
Courses required	
Curriculum	
Degrees programs offered	
Eating arrangements	
Expenses other than tuition, room, and board	
Faculty	
Financial aid	
Financial costs	
Geographical distribution	
Grading system, pass/ fail	
Honors program	
Independent study	
Living accommodations	
Off-campus housing	
Opportunities for electives	
Percent of students employed after graduation	
Percent of students going on to graduate school	
Percent of students living on campus	
Physical facilities-laboratories, library, athletic facilities	
Proportion of men and women	
Ratio of teachers to students	
Required high school subjects	
Required tests	
Rules: conduct, curfews, cars	

## A GENERAL WORKSHEET FOR DISCOVERING YOUR VALUES

Fill in each topic as best you can

1. Type of post high school institution desired. Indicate your 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> choices.

Four-year private college _____	School of nursing _____
Four-year state college _____	Business school _____
Two-year private college _____	Trade or vocational school _____
Two-year state college _____	

2. Cost: Discuss with your family the maximum amount you would consider paying. This will cover the cost of tuition, room, board, fees, books, travel, etc.

Less than \$3,000 _____	\$3,000-\$6,000 _____
\$6,000-\$10,000 _____	Over \$10,000 _____

3. Geographical location: Select the state or area of the country where you would prefer to continue your education (i.e., New York, Northeast US, California, Etc.). \_\_\_\_\_

---

4. Size of college:

Less than 1,000 _____	1,000-3,000 _____	3,000-6,000 _____	
6,000-10,000 _____	Over 10,000 _____		

5. Size of community (indicate 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> choices, if you have a preference)

Village \_\_\_\_\_ Small city \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ Large city \_\_\_\_\_

6. Student body

Co-educational \_\_\_\_\_ Women only \_\_\_\_\_ Men only \_\_\_\_\_ Historically black \_\_\_\_\_

7. Indicate what college majors or programs of study you are considering. \_\_\_\_\_

---

8. If you are interested in any special activities or clubs please list them here. \_\_\_\_\_

---

9. Do you want a school that is:

Highly competitive _____	Moderately competitive _____
Slightly competitive _____	Not competitive _____

10. Do any of these make a difference to you? If so, place a check mark beside those that interest you.

_____ Athletic opportunities and facilities	_____ Student/ Faculty ratio
_____ Opportunities for study abroad	_____ Graduate school acceptances
_____ Exceptional program in a specific area	_____ Religious affiliation
_____ Library size and quality	_____ ROTC
_____ Campus size and appearance	_____ Student morale



Now that you know what is important to you, you can start to determine which colleges have what you want. Once again, the best place to start may be the school counseling office. Below you will find a list of the reference materials that are available in the school counseling office. Many of these materials can also be found in the library, or you may choose to utilize the Internet to do some of your research.

### **REFERENCES AVAILABLE IN THE SCHOOL COUNSELING OFFICE**

- A. The **CHOICES PROGRAM** is available in the school counseling office and provides easy access to current factual information about colleges. You should make an appointment to use the **CHOICES PROGRAM** during the winter or spring of your junior year.
  
- B. **COLLEGE CATALOGS** and view books are available for browsing and loan. College catalogs give information about college courses, activities, and other specifics about the college. View books are about the size of a magazine and present a quick overview of the college. Many times the view book will also contain an application for admission. You may wish to request your own catalog and application materials using the suggested letter on the next page.
  
- C. **COLLEGE VIDEOTAPES** are available from some colleges, which may give you a better feel for the college than a catalog can give. You may sign out a tape for home viewing with the school counseling assistant.
  
- D. **ADMISSIONS REFERENCE BOOKS**  
*Peterson's Four Year Colleges*  
*Peterson's Two Year Colleges*  
*Peterson's Scholarship, Grants, Prizes*  
*Peterson's College Costs & Financial Aid*
  
- E. **OTHER REFERENCE BOOKS**  
*Occupational Outlook Handbook*
  
- F. There are also many other yearly publications, brochures, and manuals that can help you prepare for college and life.

## SAMPLE LETTER TO A COLLEGE

333 Main St.  
Delanson, NY 12053

October 5, 2004

Director of Admissions  
Any College  
Anywhere, New State 12222

Dear Director of Admissions:

I am a candidate for graduation on \_\_\_\_\_ from Duaneburg Central School District in Delanson, New York.

Please send me the following information about your college:

1. A catalog or bulletin of information
2. An application
3. Financial aid information
4. Any other pertinent information regarding the field of \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

(Sign your name)  
Type your name

## SCHOOL COUNSELING ACTIVITIES FOR JUNIORS AND SENIORS

Now that you've gotten a start on your research, we can look at some further activities and opportunities where you can gain more information.

<b>Fall/Spring</b>	<b>College representatives visit Duanesburg:</b> A number of representatives from a variety of colleges visit the school counseling office to speak with students throughout the fall and spring.
<b>October</b>	<b>PSAT:</b> Offered at Duanesburg High School
<b>November</b>	<b>College Fair:</b> Schenectady County Community College and the Empire State Plaza both host College Fairs  <b>ASVAB:</b> Offered at Duanesburg High School
<b>December</b>	<b>Financial Aid Night:</b> A financial aid representative from SUNY spends an evening at DCS giving information on the basics of filing for financial aid. He will also answer your questions.
<b>April</b>	<b>Job Fair:</b> Schenectady Chamber of Commerce hosts a Summer Job Fair.  <b>Construction Day Career Fair:</b> Hosted by Schenectady County.
<b>May</b>	<b>College Fair:</b> Hosted by Hudson Valley Community College.

**Juniors:** You should see your school counselor in the late winter/ early spring to start the college planning process. By the end of your junior year you should have a list of colleges to research over the summer and visit, if possible.

**Seniors:** Continue researching colleges, narrowing down your list as you go. By November you should have a list of 3 to 5 schools and start filling out your applications. Financial aid applications can be filed after the 1<sup>st</sup> of January. Visit the school counseling office frequently to look for any scholarships for which you are eligible. The more you apply for, the more money you have a chance to receive.

Throughout this process your school counselor will be available to answer any questions that you might have. Counselors are also happy to answer any questions that your parents might have. Parent meetings and telephone contacts are always welcome.

As well as the activities listed above, meeting with college representatives is a great way to gather more information. On the next page you will find information about representatives who visit DCS each fall/spring and a list of possible questions that may help you get information that is important to you.

## MEETING WITH COLLEGE REPRESENTATIVES

Each year representatives of colleges, business schools, nursing schools and technical schools visit DCS. These representatives are anxious to talk to students about the schools they represent. These visits are announced on the morning TV show announcements, or you can stop by the school counseling office to see what schools will be coming. Individual representatives visit during the fall and spring and many of those same representatives will be at local College Fairs.

The following are questions you may want to ask a representative. These are only a sample.

- Distance from Duquesburg
- Director of Admissions? Telephone number?
- Deadlines & dates Application? Notification?
- Class rank expected?
- Most popular major?
- Strongest major?
- Best feature?
- Athletics?
- Clubs and activities?
- Placement in jobs?
- What are your strong departments?
- What are your unique offerings?
- Do you require SAT or ACT scores?  
Do you require SAT II tests? If so, which ones?
- Do you consider the quality of the high school when assessing a student's GPA and rank?
- How do you determine a high school's quality?
- What opportunities for work are there for full-time students?
- Is on-campus housing available?
- What are living conditions, both on and off the campus?
- What is the best time for prospective students to visit the campus?
- How important is the personal interview in the selection process?
- What extra-curricular activities are available?
- What types of athletic scholarships are offered?
- What is your policy regarding advanced placement?
- What counseling services are available to incoming students?
- What types of financial aid are awarded?  
Need-based grants?  
Merit based scholarships?  
Federal aid?  
Work-study?

## CAMPUS VISITS

By now you probably feel as though you have been doing research forever, but hopefully you have narrowed down your list of colleges that you are seriously thinking about applying to. You have looked at the view books, explored the college's website, and talked to the representative who visited DCS last fall. You are certain this is the school for you.

No matter how certain you are, you should still plan to visit the campus. Visiting the college is the only way that you can really get a feel for the atmosphere of the campus. From the moment you walk onto the campus you will start to get a feeling of what it would be like to go to school there. Sometimes you will know what made you like or dislike a school, whether it is the friendliness of the students, the layout of the campus, or the athletic facilities. Sometimes, you won't have any idea why you like or dislike the school, just a gut feeling that it is not the place for you. Go with that gut feeling. If you don't think you would be happy there, you probably wouldn't be.

When you have narrowed down your list to 3 to 5 schools, or maybe a few more, plan on going back for a second visit, try to stay overnight if possible. Many schools have students who volunteer to show students around the campus, attend classes with them, and house the visiting student in their dorm room for the night. If it is possible for you to spend a couple of days at the campus, call the admissions office so they can help you set up your visit. Staying with a student is probably the best way to get to know the college. After an overnight stay you should be fairly certain if the college is for you or not.

As you start to look through the college applications that you have received you may notice that many schools recommend, if not require, an interview as part of the application process. When you call the admissions office to set up your visit and tour, be sure to mention that you would like to schedule an interview during your stay. We will discuss preparing for the college interview further in Section 4.

Now that you have done all the research, and visited as many of the schools that you would like to apply to as possible, it is time for that final narrowing down. Choose the 3 to 5 colleges that you feel are a "best fit" for you. Remember that there is more than one school out there for you. In fact, there are probably quite a few where you could be happy, successful, and receive the education that you desire. Be sure to choose one school that you are almost assured of being accepted into, just as a "fall back" school if another application is not accepted.

After making what is probably the hardest decision yet, you can start to fill out all those college applications. Turn to section 4 for help with filling out your college applications, writing your essays, and doing well at your college interview.

## Section 4

### Applying for Admission

Applications should be submitted to colleges between September and January of your senior year. The school counseling department will be happy to help you with your applications. Be aware of deadline dates. They may vary. Make sure you ask for letters of recommendation at least four weeks prior to your application being due. **Remember: If you miss a deadline you don't get a second chance!**

### Filling out applications

Below are listed some of the basics of filling out your college applications.

1. Pay attention to deadlines.
2. It may be a good idea to make a copy of the blank application that you can use as a rough draft. Once you are certain that the rough draft is accurate and it has been proofread, then you can begin filling out your official application.
3. Don't rush, read directions carefully, think through your answers.
4. Do not use slang terms or nicknames anywhere on the application.
5. Write a draft of your essay and ask an English teacher, your school counselor, or another qualified person to proofread for you.
6. The application should be completed and proofread before it is submitted. Neatness and clarity are important. Whenever possible applications should be typed or submitted electronically, otherwise be sure to print neatly. Use only blue or black ink.
7. Make copies, print out, or save to a disc everything you send out to your colleges. Many times you can use the same essay for more than one college application. Be sure to keep a copy.
8. Visit the school counseling office at least two weeks before the deadline for the application. The application will require an official high school transcript and will most likely have a section for your school counselor to fill out. Be sure to give enough time for these requests to be processed. Your school counselor will need more notice if you are also asking for a letter of recommendation.
9. Bring your applications and letters of recommendation to the school counseling office and give them to the school counseling assistant. Ask for your school transcript to be sent to your selected school. Be aware of your deadlines. Try to have all applications in two weeks before the deadline date.
10. Select references carefully. Ask teachers, your school counselor, or a boss; someone you feel you have a good relationship with and who can recommend you for acceptance. Be sure to ask the reference first before you include their name on your application.
11. Most colleges require a fee (between \$35 and \$50) for applying. Paper clip a check or money order to your application. **Do not send cash.**
12. Your school counselor must complete the school report. Be sure to print your name at the top.

**NOTE: Official transcripts and the school report must be mailed directly from the school counseling office to the college.**

## COLLEGE INTERVIEWS

College admissions officers agree that, except when impossible, no student should select a college without having spent some time on campus. At many colleges and universities an interview is desirable and sometimes required.

In arranging an interview, either call or write to the admissions office and suggest a date several weeks in advance. Provide back-up dates, if possible. Always contact the admissions office and tell them of your planned arrival. Arrange your interview so you can also have a campus tour, if one is available.

1. Prepare yourself by reading the college catalog ahead of time, and jotting down questions you would like to ask the interviewer.
2. Be on time for your appointment.
3. Dress appropriately, but do not overdress.
4. Take along an unofficial transcript, which may be obtained from the guidance office. Please give at least one-week's notice for your request to be processed.
5. Try to avoid asking questions that are clearly answered in the catalog, however, always ask about anything that you would like clarified.
6. Have your parents accompany you, if you like. Although they are welcome, they should never be the center of attention. The college is interested in you, and you are the one who must decide if you would be happy there.
7. Be ready to talk about yourself: your interests, accomplishments, goals, and your interest in the college. The interview is an opportunity to make it known that there is a real person behind the application.
8. Be yourself. Remember that college selection is a mutual process. You and the college select each other. Find out if the college offers what you are really looking for.
9. If you would like to, it is acceptable to ask if you can take notes during the interview.
10. Take time a few days later to send a thank you note to the interviewer.

## WAITING

After your applications are sent out you can relax. Well, sort of. While you wait you can continue to look for scholarships and other sources of financial aid that will help you finance your education next year. More about finding and applying for financial aid will be covered in Section 5.

Starting in mid-March you will start receiving replies from the colleges. The thick envelopes usually are the acceptance letters, but don't give up hope until you read the letter. Besides acceptance and rejection letters some schools will also place students on a waiting list. If you are placed on a waiting list, the college will update your status once they have received notification from the students who they offered admission to.

By now you have probably ranked the schools that you applied to and have picked your first and second choices. Even if you receive the acceptance letters from those schools early, you may want to wait until you have heard from all your schools. If you are accepted into a college, you will soon be receiving an award letter detailing the financial aid package that the college is able to offer you. This package may make a difference in which school you decide to attend.

Carefully review the financial aid award letters you receive. Call or write the financial aid office if you have any questions. What you want to look at is not how much money is being offered, but how much of your need will be covered. If all of your financial need is not covered, be sure to ask what other programs are available. Also ask how any outside aid, such as scholarships, might affect the award package you have been offered. If these questions have not been answered, do not commit yourself to attend that college. Call the college's admissions office and ask for an extension on the time you have to declare that you will be attending that college.

Traditionally, May 1<sup>st</sup> is the day when you are asked to respond to the offers of admission you have received. Make sure that you accept not only the offer of admission, but also the offered financial aid package. Once this decision has been made, and your acceptance letter and deposit have been sent to the college of your choice, notify the other colleges that you will not be attending. Your regrets letter will mean an acceptance letter for a student on that college's waiting list, so send it out as soon as possible.

If you are placed on a waiting list and you intend to enroll in that college if you are accepted, you may wish to contact the admissions director by calling, e-mailing, or writing, and ask what you can do to strengthen your application. If the other colleges that have accepted you are asking for an answer, call the admissions office and ask for an extension while you wait to hear from the schools that have placed you on the waiting list.

## **Section 5**

### **Applying for Financial Aid**

Financial aid might come from four different sources:

1. **Government:** There are both Federal and State programs for granting financial aid. There are grants, loans, and scholarships available but there is some paperwork you will have to fill out in order to receive any of this money. You must start by filling out the FAFSA.
2. **Your college:** most scholarship money will come from the college that you are going to attend. Be sure that you are filing the financial aid applications that the college requires from you. All colleges will ask you to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Some schools will also ask you to fill out the CSS/ Financial Aid Profile (FAP) or their own financial aid application. The money that will make up your financial aid package from your school may come from scholarships, loans, work-study jobs, academic scholarships (not need-based), and athletic scholarships (not need-based).
3. **National agency or program:** Private industry and foundations offer grants and scholarships that can be used at any college or university you choose to attend. These monies are usually earned on a basis of merit or merit and financial need. As you can imagine, these scholarships are sometimes difficult to find, involve some research and are very competitive.
4. **Local scholarships:** There are thousands of small scholarships, \$100, \$500, or even \$1,000. It may not seem like much, but every little bit counts. Keep checking in the school counseling office. You can also search on the Internet; there are plenty of websites which can lead you to scholarship money. Do not forget to check with local clubs, churches, organizations, industry, unions, etc. (especially if your family belongs)

### **TIME TABLE FOR FINANCIAL AID**

1. Take the PSAT in October of your junior year. This can qualify you for the National Merit Scholarship Competition.
2. Take the ACT and/or SAT by November of your senior year.
3. Attend the Financial Aid night in December at DCS.
4. Pick up Financial Aid forms in the guidance office in December of your senior year.
5. File financial aid forms by the end of January. This can qualify you for the Pell Grant, college scholarships, college work-study programs, college merit scholarships, and all college-based financial aid opportunities.
6. All through your senior year you and your parents should seek other special sources of financial aid. Eligibility requirements vary widely for different scholarships.
7. Student loans are generally based upon your financial aid application and terms vary with your financial need.

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

The first step to receiving any money for college is to file the FAFSA. The FAFSA applications will arrive in the school counseling office in early December. You can pick up the application and start to look at what type of information you will need to supply. Do not forget that you cannot file the FAFSA form until after January 1<sup>st</sup> and no later than June 30<sup>th</sup>. The FAFSA comes with an instruction booklet that is meant to help you complete the form.

As you open the instruction booklet you will find the four-page application form and an envelope to mail it in. Each numbered blank on the application form has corresponding numbered instructions in the booklet. Read the instructions closely before you begin to complete this form. One little mistake can send you back to the drawing board. If you and/ or your parents have completed your federal taxes, that can be a big help in filling out the FAFSA. Much of the information asked for will be similar, if not the same.

Some other helpful hints:

1. File the FAFSA as soon as possible. Some of the monies you may qualify for are handed out on a first come, first served basis.
2. Have your financial records nearby when you sit down to complete the FAFSA. Your latest tax return is probably the most helpful document you can have on hand.
3. Complete all sections and worksheets on the FAFSA. Double check your answers and make sure there are no blanks. Mistakes can delay the processing of the form.
4. Do not leave blanks on the form. You need to fill in your social security number, make sure the document is signed, and do not mail before January 1<sup>st</sup>. If you forget any of these conditions, your application will be shredded and you are not notified.
5. Before you send out your FAFSA, make a photocopy to keep for your records.

You must file the FAFSA in order to be eligible for Federal loans, grants, and work-study programs. The FAFSA is also used to apply for most state and private aid. Some programs may require you to submit some additional information.

## **CSS/ Financial Aid Profile**

Some schools may ask that you fill out the CSS/ Financial Aid Profile as well as the FAFSA. This helps the schools to award private, non-federal funds. Check in your college catalog or in the instruction booklet for the CSS/ Financial Aid Profile to see if your school requires it; if not, do not bother to fill out the CSS.

If you do need to file a Profile, come to the guidance office to pick up the registration guide. There are two ways to file for a Profile at DCS; by telephone or at the College Board online site. The registration guide will lead you through whichever option you choose.

It is important to register three to four weeks before your earliest school or scholarship deadline. After your initial registration there will be a few more questions to answer for your chosen college before sending it back to CSS, who will send it directly on to your college.

**APPENDICES**

## **CHECK LIST**

The following suggestions are offered as a checklist for students planning to attend college.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Register for the PSAT/ NMSQT in your junior year. The test is usually given on a Wednesday in October at DCS.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Create your initial list of colleges which you might want to apply to.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Register for the ACT and/ or SAT in the spring of your junior year.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Plan college visits through the summer of your junior year and fall of your senior year.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Schedule interviews with college representatives in the spring of your junior year and fall of your senior year. Attend college fairs and see college representatives in the school counseling office.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If interested in the service academies, write to your congressman and begin applications in February of the junior year.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Register for the ACT and/or SAT in the fall of your senior year.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Register for SAT II tests in October, November, or December of your senior year, if you haven't taken them earlier.
- \_\_\_\_\_ College applications should be filled out and transcript requested from the school counseling office by December 1<sup>st</sup> of your senior year.
- \_\_\_\_\_ File financial aid forms in January or February of your senior year. The sooner the better.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Replies to offers of admission should be made as soon as possible.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In the spring of your senior year read the Scholarship List carefully for announcements of the availability of applications for local and national scholarships.

## GLOSSARY

**Accreditation:** Six regional associations, such as the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, represent the highest accrediting authority in the United States by which they empower colleges the right to grant degrees.

**Campus-Based Programs:** Federal student aid programs, including Federal Perkins Loans, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, and Federal Work-Study which are administered by colleges.

**Candidates Reply Date Agreement:** Sponsored by the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB), this agreement establishes a common date, May 1<sup>st</sup>, which is the earliest date a subscribing college may require an accepted applicant to accept or reject the offer of admission.

**College Calendar:** Responding to market pressures, colleges now offer a host of college schedules. In addition to the traditional schedule (two equal semesters with a summer break), there is the trimester (the year is divided into four equal semesters, students attend three of the four), and the 4-1-4 (with two equal semesters divided by a January period for independent study or special projects). Many colleges may require a student to complete an internship in their chosen field before they graduate.

**Deadline:** Pay attention to the dates required for applications to be submitted. In the college application process, if you miss a deadline, you miss your chance. Financial aid deadlines are just as stringent.

**Deferred Admission:** The college accepts the student during the senior year, but allows a postponement of matriculation for a year. Usually this is for special family situations, work, or travel.

**Early Admission:** This is offered by some colleges and allows exceptional students to enter the college before completing high school. The student combines the senior year of high school with the first year of college.

**Early Decision:** In this plan, the student makes a commitment to attend the college if accepted. The application is made by October, and notification of acceptance is given in December. By applying early decision the student makes the commitment to attend that college if accepted. Students need to take all prescribed admission tests as outlined in the college catalog.

**Enrollment Status:** Determined by the number of credit hours for which you register. In most cases 12 credit hours or more is considered full-time, between 6 and 12 credit hours is considered half-time, and 6 credit hours or less is quarter-time.

**Expected Family Contribution (EFC):** The results of a federal formula using the family's income and assets to determine the amount of money the family can contribute towards the student's educational expenses. The EFC is determined from the information submitted on the FAFSA and is reported on the Student Aid Report.

**Federal Family Education Loan Programs (FFELP):** Low-interest education loans for students and parents which include the Federal Stafford and PLUS loan programs.

**Federal Pell Grant:** The largest pool of federal grant money. You must apply for a Federal Pell Grant by filing a FAFSA.

**Financial Aid Award Notification:** Letters from the college to which you have applied which will notify you of the financial aid package they are able to offer you.

**Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):** This is the document that you must use to apply for federal, state, and institutional financial aid. All students must complete this application to be considered for financial aid.

**Financial Aid:** The money package (including grants, scholarships, loans, work-study, and family contributions) that will pay for your educational expenses, including tuition, room and board, books, and other personal expenses.

**Grants and Scholarships:** Awards given to a student for one of many reasons. Academic achievement, athletic ability, financial need, or membership in a specific club or organization are only a few of the reasons a student may be eligible to receive an award. These monies do not have to be repaid.

**Loans:** Money borrowed by a student that must be repaid.

**Major:** A particular subject in which the student specializes while in college. Students will take classes in their major primarily in their junior and senior years. Sometimes students will choose to complete a double major and concentrate on two areas of study.

**National Community Service:** A federally run community service program enabling eligible students to work in exchange for a portion of their loans being forgiven or a portion of their higher education or training being financed. For more information call 1-800-94A-CORPS.

**Requests for Additional Information:** You may receive this request from your college that will ask for additional information or clarification of the information you reported on the FAFSA.

**Rolling Admission:** Colleges act on applications as they come in and tell students their status as soon as the application has been processed. You may apply any time before a specified date and will receive a reply within a month to six weeks from the date your completed application arrives at the college.

**School Profile:** Many schools require that a school profile accompany your application and transcript. The school profile gives the college an idea of how DCS schedules and grades student, what other students are doing, and just a general idea of what the school and community are like.

**Special Circumstances:** Extenuating family situations that were not addressed on the FAFSA but which you would like the colleges to consider when determining your eligibility for financial aid. A letter of explanation, detailing the circumstances and expenses which warrant special consideration, should be sent to each office reviewing your application(s) for aid.

**Student Aid Report (SAR):** The official Federal Pell Grant Notification you will receive after your FAFSA has been processed.

**Traditional Admission:** Usually you need to file an application before Christmas of grade 12. Notification of acceptance depends on the college schedule, but is usually in March or April. The student is obligated to confirm or refuse the acceptance by a specified date, usually May 1.

**Work-Study:** Part-time employment programs whereby students earn part of their college expenses as they work.

## References

### Internet Sites

#### American School Counselors Association

<http://www.edge.net/asca/links.html>

Provides links to college and high school home pages. Also includes advice on writing your application essay.

#### Net Tips

<http://www.collegeboard.org/gp/hartman/html/intro.html>

Ask questions and get advice from the College Board's Ken Hartman. Offers advice on how to use the web most efficiently.

#### The College Board

<http://www.collegeboard.org>

Gives thorough information about campus visits, interviews, and other aspects of the college search process. Download applications for over 800 colleges. There is also quite a bit of information about college entrance tests, the PSAT, SAT I, and SAT II.

#### Peterson's Education and Career Center

<http://www.petersons.com/ugrad/>

Campus news, advice on writing application essays, and a search engine for colleges.

#### U.S. News College and Careers Center

<http://www.usnews.com>

College rankings, advice from high school counselors and financial aid experts, a comprehensive college search engine, and a number of college links.

#### College Edge

<http://www.collegeedge.com>

A search engine with variables such as school size, a scholarship database, plus articles and a chat forum.

#### College Net

<http://www.collegenet.com>

An enormous searchable database of schools, plus links to colleges. Search variables include state or region, majors, and tuition.

#### College View

<http://collegeview.com>

One of the most detailed search engines on the net.

#### College Link

<http://kaplan.com>

Extensive links to colleges and universities. Advice on interviews and admission.

#### The Princeton Review

<http://www.princetonreview.com>

A good search engine with a wide array of variables.

**FAFSA on the Web**

<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>

Interactive web version of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The fastest and most accurate way to file.

**Fast WEB**

<http://www.fastweb.com>

A free searchable scholarship database that enables you to locate sources of financial aid that are suitable to you.

**Financial Aid Information Page**

<http://www.finaid.com>

A lot of good information on everything from scam alerts to scholarship searches.

**The Student Guide**

[http://www.ed.gov/pro\\_info/SFA](http://www.ed.gov/pro_info/SFA)

Financial aid information from the US Department of Education, plus FAFSA links.

**Other sites worth looking at:**

<http://www.collegelink.com>

<http://studentservices.com/fastweb>

<http://usmall.com>

<http://www.collegequest.com>

<http://www.xap.com>

<http://www.nycareerzone.org>

<http://www.gocollege.com>

<http://www.embarc.com>

<http://www.wiredscholar.com>

<http://www.fastaid.com>

<http://www.easi.ed.gov>

<http://www.freschinfo.com>

<http://www.gmsp.org>

<http://www.nasfaa.org>

<http://www.uncf.org>

<http://www.hsf.net>