

March 2010

# The College RoadMap



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## March 2010

Underclassmen—  
Make plans for a productive summer. Investigate summer programs, jobs, internships, and opportunities to visit college campuses.

Juniors – Create an initial list of colleges

Juniors—Prepare for spring SAT/ACT exams

**13<sup>th</sup> – SAT**

**Reasoning Exam**

## April 2010

Seniors – Final acceptance letters should arrive this month

Juniors – Visit colleges

Prepare for AP Exams

**10<sup>th</sup> - ACT and ACT plus Writing**

Seniors – compare offers of admission; revisit top choices

Seniors – evaluate financial aid packages and explore college funding options

## Legacy Admissions

In a time when anxiety about getting into college is so high, it's not surprising that people look for an edge in the admissions process. Parents often ask whether the fact that they graduated from a college will help their child get into that school. Admissions officers at most colleges don't provide statistics about the rate of admission for legacy students compared to other students. But at some schools, having a parent or even grandparent who attended that college is clearly an advantage.

At Princeton, where fewer than 10 percent of applying students are admitted, the acceptance rate for legacy applicants jumps to 40 percent. Middlebury College admits almost half of their legacy applicants, while their overall admission rate is under 20 percent. Dartmouth admits legacies at about twice the overall admission rate.

The University of Pennsylvania has an office dedicated to helping children and grandchildren of alumni. The Alumni Council on Admissions offers special advising sessions and on-campus interviews for legacy students who are applying to one of the University's four undergraduate schools. Legacy applications receive a supplemental review before reaching the admissions committee, and this extra consideration is maximized for students who apply under the Early Decision plan. But legacy status is no guarantee, and the majority of these applicants are still denied admission to Penn.

Fostering goodwill among alumni pays off in a number of ways. Happy alumni are more likely to donate money to the college. They also tend to stay involved in other helpful ways, including providing internships to current students and career mentoring to new graduates, as well as recruiting prospective students for the college.

Since the percentage of alumni that donate to a school is one of the factors used in the

*US News & World Report* rankings, college administrators have another incentive to cultivate loyalty among alumni. When families look at the rankings and see a healthy percentage of alumni donating to a college, they may feel better about sending their child to that school, because they believe that people have had good experiences there and are willing to support the college.

The alumni admission advantage can be more compelling if a family has contributed generously to the college for years. With alumni donations accounting for almost 28 percent of charitable contributions to colleges, administrators would rather not alienate reliable donors.

While preferential treatment of legacy applicants favors affluent students, and can be seen as undermining a school's commitment to admitting a diverse student body, there is another side to the story. Keeping alumni happy also means having the funds to support those students who need financial aid and to build the facilities that enhance the college experience for all students.

In addition to whatever special consideration the admissions office gives legacy applicants, children of alumni may be well prepared to make a strong case for admission based on their knowledge of the school gleaned from stories told to them through the years. These students also typically come from families that value education and have attended good schools, so they also often present strong academic credentials.

While legacy status can factor into admissions decisions, it doesn't compensate for a mediocre academic record. Strong grades and test scores are necessary but not sufficient. The majority of well-qualified legacy students are routinely denied admission to highly selective schools, but legacy status can indeed provide a boost.

## Colleges for Dancers

Creative types have special requirements that must be considered when they begin their college search. If dancing is your passion, you'll need to think about the kind of degree desired (BA, BS, or BFA), type of dance to pursue (ballet, modern, or jazz emphasis), if you want to perform or train for a dance-related career, and if you're heading for a dance major or minor. Let's take these one at a time.

The BFA (Bachelor of Fine Arts) is the most-intensive dance degree; BFA's are generally awarded to students who graduate from conservatory style programs. Most students who choose to pursue a BFA are headed toward careers as performing artists. The majority of university-based dance programs award the BA (Bachelor of Arts) degrees in Dance. The BA degree offers intensive study of dance coupled with general education and other courses outside of the major. A few schools offer the BS (Bachelor of Science) degree in Dance; these programs may be conservatory-based or part of a general liberal arts curriculum.

Most university-based programs now emphasize modern dance techniques. If you're more interested in ballet or jazz, you'll need to search out programs that specialize in these forms of dance or that offer strong programs in each area. The University of Arizona allows students to study all forms of dance while programs such as those at Point Park College and at the University of the Arts allow students to focus on any one of the three types offered.

How you see your future career also matters. Conservatory style programs may be most appropriate for those who want to perform, while a dance major at a liberal arts college or university may be more suited to students who

want to consider career options such as dance education. If you hope to own your own studio some day, you might want to consider a major in business and a minor in dance. Another good option for those students who choose a city-based college is to major in any subject of interest while pursuing their passion for dance at professional studios such as the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in New York.

Many colleges that offer the BFA or BA/BS in dance will require applicants to audition. Auditions are commonly held in the spring, but you'll need to arrange your audition well before the application deadline. Most colleges hold their auditions on campus, but some have audition tours that stop in large cities. Make your arrangements to audition as early in the fall of senior year as you can. Audition requirements differ from school to school, but often include participation in classes in ballet and modern dance as well as a solo performance. There are also many dance programs that do not require auditions for acceptance, but the most intensive programs preparing students to become professional dancers generally will.

When considering a dance program, check out the number of opportunities you'll have to perform. Even if you're looking to minor in dance, make sure that non-majors are allowed to participate in performances and to take part in master classes given by visiting artists. Check on the percentage of male dancers in a prospective program since gender balance affects performance options. Be sure to look for a low faculty-student ratio to ensure more individual attention from faculty members.

You can learn more about dance programs by reading [Creative Colleges](#) by Elaina Loveland or [Dance Magazine's College Guide](#).



Students at Columbia University can pursue a liberal arts curriculum while majoring or minoring in dance at Barnard College

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## Focus on Finances: Cutting the Cost of College



As financial aid packages begin to arrive, families are faced with just how much college will cost. At many schools, self-help is up and gift aid is down.

That means that colleges are offering less in the way of tuition discounts or grants, and expect families to assume a greater part of the college financial burden. Parents may pay expenses from savings and wages, students through part-time employment, and both parents and student may meet some expenses through educational loans. No wonder families are eager to find ways to cut college costs. Here are some ideas:

- Plan to graduate from college on-time or even early. In order to earn a bachelor's degree in four years, students need to choose appropriate classes and stick with them. Dropping a class may leave you with too few credits and lengthen the time re-

quired to earn your bachelor's degree. Changing majors or double-majoring may also add to the length of your stay at the school. The net effect: increased cost and lost wages.

- Get a jump on credits through AP classes or CLEP exams. Passing scores on AP exams taken in high school may lead to college credit, while high scores on the College Level Examination Program can shorten the time you need to earn your degree. Check out [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) for a list of schools that award credit through CLEP exams.
- Consider taking some of your credits at a nearby community college during summer breaks. Community college classes are generally less expensive per credit. Make sure that they'll be accepted by your college before registering for outside courses.
- Get a job. Part-time employment provides extra structure to the college student's day and yields extra money to meet college expenses.

## Campus Visits

You've read the college guides, searched through the glossy college viewbooks, and visited the websites of numerous colleges. You've asked for advice from your advisor, teachers, and parents, and you've measured yourself against each college's typical entering class. Although all of these activities are necessary in crafting your initial list of colleges, an actual visit to the campus is often the deciding factor in determining how well a college fits you.

Campus visits allow you to look behind the college's promotional literature for a first-hand view of the physical facilities, course offerings, special programs, and campus atmosphere. You'll be able to speak with current students, sit in on a class, try out the dining hall, and even stay overnight in a dormitory. Take the admission office's tour and participate in any information sessions offered, and then strike out on your own. Some questions you'll want answers to include:

- Who are the instructors – professors, graduate students, or research assistants?
- How difficult is it to get into the classes you want and need?
- How safe is the campus? What security procedures are in place?

- What are the housing and food options? How many students live on campus?
- What percent of students graduate on time? What percent of the freshman class returns for sophomore year? What percent of freshman actually graduate from that institution?
- How satisfied are current students with their choice – what do they like best? What do they complain about?

Schedule your campus visit well ahead of time—college websites allow you to reserve a space on a campus tour. If at all possible, try to visit while school is in session, although a summer visit can still help in determining fit.

Although nothing can take the place of a physical visit to campus, this visit may simply not be feasible for economic or logistical reasons. If a trip to campus is not possible, consider the next best thing. *Collegiate Choice Walking Tours* offers videos of the student-led tours of over 350 colleges and universities across the U.S., Canada, and Europe. These candid videos are spontaneous and unedited, and provide a forthright view of a college from a student perspective. Each tour is \$15 – you may view tours available and order at [www.collegiatechoice.com](http://www.collegiatechoice.com).

## Do You Need to Take SAT Subject Exams?

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With the University of California system eliminating the SAT subject test requirement for students entering after 2012, many students wonder if they still should take subject exams in preparation for college admission. With the exception of the UC system, relatively few colleges have ever required subject exams. Many of the most selective colleges, however, have long used them to aid in evaluating applicants, and it looks like they will continue to do so.

SAT subject tests are generally taken when students complete their study of a particular course in which they've shown strength. Thus, students doing well in an honors class in Chemistry or US History may opt to take these subject exams around the same time as their final exams. Math II is often taken when stu-

dents complete pre-calculus or honors pre-calculus. Students who want to take a biology exam may do so after either honors biology or AP Biology. Foreign language exams should be taken after three or four years of foreign language study.

Thus, many SAT subject exams are taken even before you finalize your college list. Since you can't be sure whether or not you'll be applying to one of the colleges that require subject exams, it's good to keep your college options open by taking several exams in areas of strength as soon as you complete your study of that subject. That way, if you do decide to apply to a college that requires subject tests, you won't have to scramble and test at the last moment to complete needed exams. And you also won't have to restudy for a subject that you might not have had for a year or two!

## Website of the Month: [www.CollegeConfidential.com](http://www.CollegeConfidential.com)

Originally started to "demystify the college admissions process", CollegeConfidential is filled with a wealth of good information interspersed with occasional misinformation and rumor (generally supplied by student comments about colleges and the college admissions process). There's really a lot of useful information on the site, including facts about school search, college finances, the admissions process, and the vibe found on individual college campuses. An "ask the dean" feature provides advice about numerous topics of interest to precollege students and their families. Use with caution though—you can't necessarily trust the student-generated opinions.

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