LHS Social Studies Dept. Summer 2017

**Getting Ready for the College Application Process during the Summer**

# Fit

is the word that you need to remember when applying to college. Colleges and universities are not looking for the “best,” they are looking for the “best fit.” This means that some excellent students are not admitted to schools, because their strengths and interests do not fit well with what the college can offer. Other students who may not seem like superstar all-around students *do* get in, because they are a much better fit for the strengths of the college. Just as with job searches, you must think about how you as an overall person *fit* into the colleges you are investigating. As well, when you apply, you must prove to the school that you will fit in well.

**What does that mean?** First off, you need to have a fairly good idea of who you are: what are your strengths and weaknesses, what are your interests and dreams, what things do you see yourself doing in life? We will conduct two exercises in class that are designed to make you think outside the box about that.

Next, you need to figure some basic parameters of your search: do I want a big school, medium school, or small? Rural or urban? Close to home, within a day’s drive, across the country? Public or private? Sports school or academic? Frats and sororities, or not? It is best to make a list of what qualities you want in a school upfront. This will help you winnow through the hundreds of possibilities.

**Worry about the money second.** The money is not the primary concern in the “who-am-I” and school selection process. First, you need to figure out the fit and how you will present yourself to colleges; what will your narrative be? Only then do you worry about the money side. Remember, many expensive colleges have large financial aid programs and end up being cheaper than schools that look less expensive up front. Also, there are hundreds of millions of dollars of scholarships that are awarded each year to students who do the work necessary to get them.

**Talk with your parent(s)/guardian(s) early.** If you take initiative and show your parent(s)/ guardian(s) now that you are well prepared and serious about looking for schools and preparing for the college transition, you will have a much happier life for the next nine months. This is a tough transition for those around you, too. Your thoughtful work makes it easier all around.

What do I do now?:

* Start a notebook or file and write a draft “Who am I / What do I want” essay
* Make a list of what you think your strengths are
* Start work on a resume if you do not already have one
* Think about who your recommendors will be
* Start a “what I want in a college” list
* Look at some college brochures and websites and take notes about what excites you and what repels you
* Talk with parent(s)/guardians about what they think about the college process; factor that into how you will handle the process yourself
* DON’T STRESS. It will not help you. Steady, thoughtful work will help you. Start now so that you do not stress later.

*Next page: Tips on getting a recommendation*

**TIPS ON GETTING A GOOD RECOMMENDATION FROM A TEACHER**

A good teacher recommendation includes some or all of the following:

* how long the teacher has known you and in what circumstances
* what grade you received under the teacher (or what honors you received from a coach or advisor)
* what your particular strengths are
* testimonial to your character (maturity, hard-working nature, etc.)
* your goals and how your classroom/team behavior mirrors those goals
* a particular anecdote that reflects one or more of the above
* an assessment of how you will do in college

In order to gently guide your teacher/advisor/coach to include these things in her or his recommendation for you, you must do some preparation. If you help your recommender do her or his job, you will be rewarded with a better recommendation. What should you do?

1. Write a formal letter of request to your recommender (teacher/advisor/coach) that tells him or her where you are applying, what you are interested in, when you had the recommender (specific dates), how you did in his or her class/club/team, and personal facts that are relevant to your application and her or his class/club/team;
2. Give the recommender your college resume;
3. Give the recommender the full address of where the recommendation should be sent;
4. Make it absolutely clear what the deadline for the recommendation is;
5. Make it absolutely clear whether the recommender is supposed to send the recommendation separately, or whether you need it back to include in a packet;
6. Agree ahead of time whether you will see the recommendation; standard practice is to take it back in a sealed envelope and *not* to see it; different teachers will feel differently about this; colleges and universities prefer that you *waive* the right to see the recommendation;
7. If the recommender needs to send the recommendation to the school, be sure to give him/her a correctly addressed envelope with the correct amount of postage on it;
8. Talk briefly with your recommender to make sure s/he has everything s/he needs to write your recommendation; ask him or her if everything in your request letter and recommendation is clear;
9. If your recommender has not gotten the letter back to you or sent it out a few days prior to the deadline, remind him or her; do not remind him or her at the very last minute.

***$ and College***

**Summer 2017**

**A few critical things to remember:**

* Almost no one pays the “sticker price” for a school. You do not know how much it will cost until you get your financial aid (FA) package. Sometimes private schools with lots of funds are cheaper than public schools; sometimes not. Think about ROI (return on investment) when taking on debt, and remember to *think of* *college debt as a business investment.*
* Deadlines are critical. You cannot miss them. Many aspects of FA are FCFS (first come first served).
* You need to spend serious time on the FA part of the process — filling out forms, working with parents and guardians on various parts of the process, looking for scholarships. Take ownership of it.
* Scholarship forms and essays should be taken as seriously as college applications.
* Money attracts money. Success attracts success.
* Once a college admits you, they want to retain you. Don’t be afraid to try to negotiate if you don’t get enough aid to go to the school you want. The worst that can happen is that they say they cannot give more than they have already offered.

[College scholarships site](http://apps.collegeboard.com/cbsearch_ss/welcome.jsp). This is the college scholarships portal at CollegeBoard.com. It's a pretty good place to start. *Remember, if a site says that they will charge you money or asks you for information like a credit card number, don't use it.*

Other non-profit sites include: [FinAid's Scholarship search](http://www.finaid.org/scholarships/) and [FastWeb](http://edu.fastweb.com/).

The U.S. Government has excellent resources that can be accessed at: [U.S. Dept. of Education Guide to Federal Financial Aid](https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/); the direct link for information on the FAFSA is [here](https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa).

There are some pretty unusual scholarships out there? Look at some of [these](http://www.finaid.org/scholarships/unusual.phtml)...

**Sample costs from some schools:**

* UMass Amherst  
   <https://www.umass.edu/umfa/undergraduates/costs>
* UMass Lowell  
  <https://www.uml.edu/thesolutioncenter/bill/tuition-fees/default.aspx>
* Framingham State University  
  <https://www.framingham.edu/admissions-and-aid/student-accounts/tuition-fees/>
* MCC  
  <https://www.middlesex.mass.edu/StudentAccounts/>
* Bentley University  
  <http://www.bentley.edu/offices/financial-assistance/cost-and-billing>
* Lesley University  
  <http://www.lesley.edu/tuition-and-fees/college-of-liberal-arts-and-sciences/>
* Boston College  
  <http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/financial/finaid/undergrad/how_aid_works/cost_of_attendance.html>
* Boston University  
  <https://www.bu.edu/admissions/admitted/tuition-and-fees/>
* Harvard University  
  <https://college.harvard.edu/financial-aid/how-aid-works/cost-attendance>

Use the search string “[X college/university] cost of attendance 2017”

**Average Financial Aid Packages:**

The College Board Includes Average Financial Package information when you enter the school you want to investigate here:  
<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/>

Individual schools often will include their average aid package on their websites. Use the search string “Average aid package for   
[X college/university] 2016”

**You can get financial aid guidance here:**

* The U.S. DOE: [U.S. Dept. of Education Guide to Federal Financial Aid](https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/)
* Peterson’s (this is very comprehensive)  
  <https://www.petersons.com/college-search/ask-experts-financial-aid.aspx>
* US News & World Report   
  <http://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/the-college-solution/2011/02/22/how-to-measure-a-colleges-financial-generosity>

**A comprehensive list of ROI for 1300 schools is here:**

<http://www.payscale.com/college-roi?page=94>