

Riley Baker Educational Consulting

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April 2013

13th - ACT and ACT plus Writing

Seniors should have their final letters of acceptance by April 1st

Juniors – Visit colleges

Prepare for AP Exams

Seniors – Compare offers of admission; revisit top choices

Evaluate financial aid packages and explore college funding options

May 2013

1st – Common reply date for college enrollment

4th – SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests

(register by 4/5 - late registration 4/19)

6th-17th - AP exams

Juniors – work on resume

Juniors – speak to advisor about military colleges or ROTC programs

Seniors – notify the colleges that you will not attend and take some time to thank those who wrote your college recommendations

Taking a Break

With the May 1 deadline for enrollment deposits rapidly approaching, many high school seniors are making final decisions about which college to attend in the fall. But after twelve years of school, some students are deciding they need a timeout. Other seniors have been offered January admission to their first choice school and are considering their options until they begin college.

Gap year has long been a tradition in Britain. Perhaps it's because when students begin college there, they need to know exactly what they want to study. Since American students can spend the first two years of college trying different subjects before committing to a major, they often start college without clear goals.

In the United States, many students go straight to college after high school because that's what is expected. But some of these students are not ready. They may lack academic focus, self-discipline or social skills, and could be at risk of depression, alcohol abuse or academic failure. Taking some time to develop academic and life skills or to explore possible careers can help students feel more motivated and purposeful when they get to college.

Gap year is becoming more common in the United States and is accepted by most colleges, which will defer a student's admission for a year. Harvard did a study that found that students who had taken a gap year earned higher grades during their freshman year than students who started at Harvard right after high school.

Students choose a gap year for many reasons. A student who has been immersed in AP courses for the last few years may want a break from the academic treadmill. Spending a year traveling, doing a service project in another country, or even working at a job, can protect a student from academic burnout and allow her to begin college with a renewed interest and a mature

perspective.

Other students, whose high school records are less than stellar, may find themselves in a stronger position to apply to college after attending one of the post-graduate programs offered by a number of boarding schools. Mitchell College in Connecticut has a post-graduate school, Thames Academy, where students work on improving study skills and increasing confidence before transitioning to college.

For the student who questions the need for college, working can be a real motivator when it becomes clear that salary and job growth are limited without a college degree. A job may also help a student develop time management and social skills that will be useful in college.

For students who don't need to earn money but want to explore career interests, a structured program such as Dynamy may be the way to go. The program starts with a wilderness course, then places students in apartments and arranges three nine-week internships. Students also have the option of participating in a college credit seminar.

Another option is to get involved in a volunteer project. AmeriCorps, the domestic version of the Peace Corps, offers opportunities to mentor at-risk students, build homes, provide disaster relief and assist in community development. The program provides a living allowance and, after completing service, students receive a grant of \$5,550 for college.

Then there are the volunteer opportunities abroad, such as teaching English in Russia or maintaining trails in the rainforest in Brazil. There are so many ways to make a difference in the world while at the same time gaining self-esteem and a new perspective.

For the right student, a gap year can be the best path to a successful college experience.

Learn more about these modern majors:

Association for Computing Machinery - www.acm.org

Premier professional organization for computing professionals. Includes information on Special Interest Groups (SIGs) and student chapters.

National Workflow Center for Emerging Technologies -

www.nwcet.org

Organization whose primary goal is the creation of innovative and industry-relevant education programs for the IT and related industries.

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook - www.bls.gov/ooh

Information on job titles, work responsibilities, wages, and employment prospects.



Focus on Majors: Information Sciences/Technology

If you're creative, have facility with computers, and want a practical college major, Information Systems or Information Technology just might fit the bill. There is considerable difference of opinion about what these two terms actually mean. Some people make clear distinctions between the two, while others use the terms interchangeably. Information Technology can be considered a subset of Information Systems. IT deals exclusively with the technological aspects of information systems (hardware, servers, operating systems and software etc.). IS refers to the design and use of systems and, as such, considers the people and processes involved, as well as the technology. That being said, most colleges and universities offer only one undergraduate major devoted to this study, and choose either IS or IT to describe it.

The Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) defines IT as "undergraduate degree programs that prepare students to meet the computer technology needs of business, government, healthcare, schools, and other kinds of organizations IT specialists assume responsibility for selecting hardware and software products appropriate for an organization, integrating those products with organizational needs and infrastructure, and installing, customizing, and maintaining those applications for the organization's computer users. Examples of these responsibilities include the installation of networks; network administration and security; the design of web pages; the development of multimedia resources; the installation of communication components; the oversight of email systems; and the planning and management of the technology lifecycle by which an organization's technology is maintained, upgraded, and replaced."

Well-respected IS/IT programs offer a balance between theory and applied skill development. Classes frequently combine

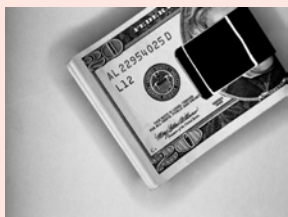
lectures, hands-on lab experience, projects and presentations. IT/IS students need strong writing, research, and presentation skills, along with the ability to work effectively as part of a team. Most programs require students to complete senior projects, so you'll need to collaborate with others to solve real-world problems.

IT/IS programs begin with fundamental classes in calculus, discrete math, and statistics, and then move onto courses in computing and networking technologies, databases, information systems and business. You can expect to take classes in information technology and systems concepts, web design, hardware and software architecture, networking, data management, systems analysis and design, and internet security. You'll probably also be required to take courses in technology and entrepreneurship, ethics, and technology and society. Most curricula will allow you to choose electives in an area of personal interest. When researching schools, pay careful attention to the concentrations that are offered and the research interests of the faculties.

So, you're armed with a degree, now what? Graduates typically obtain jobs as network administrators, database administrators, web developers, technical writers, software developers, and quality analysts. Further, a wide range of employers in government, education, global consulting, manufacturing, consumer products, finance, and software development recruit graduates with IS/IT degrees.

Given the diversity of IS/IT positions, wage and employment statistics provide general indications only. In 2010 the median annual salary for those with Bachelor's degrees in IT/IS was about \$70,000 and upwards, depending on the work specialty. The really good news is that the demand for IS/IT professionals is expected to grow faster than average over the next seven to ten years.

Financial Matters: Education-Related Tax Benefits



With tax returns due on April 15th, this seems to be a good time to discuss benefits that lower the true cost of your child's college education. These tax benefits fall into two general types: credits and deductions.

Credits are applied dollar for dollar against the tax that families may owe. Credits can even result in a refund.

Currently, the U.S. tax code provides for two educational credits. The **American Opportunity Credit** (which replaces the Hope credit) is available only for four years of post-secondary education. This provides a maximum credit of \$2,500 per student for qualified educational expenses, and there are family income limits that apply. A **Lifetime Learning Credit** of \$2,000 per student is good for any type of study with no time limit. Income limits do apply to this credit also, but any family member can claim this credit for qualified educational expenses.

Although they don't have the money-saving value of tax credits, education-

related **deductions** are also helpful when meeting college expenses. Deductions reduce the amount of your taxable income. Families may reduce their taxable income by as much as \$4,000/ year to pay for tuition and fees at an eligible post-secondary institution. Families can also deduct up to \$2,500 of the interest paid on student loans taken to meet educational expenses. Both of these deductions also carry income limits.

To learn how these education-related tax benefits apply to your individual family situation, please contact your accountant or financial advisor.

Learning Style and College Choice

We hear a lot about selecting a college for fit, not for reputation. Understanding how you best learn is an important criterion in finding the college that fits you. Start with past experiences. Consider the classes that intrigued you, and in which you were actively engaged in the learning process. What was the teaching style of your instructor? Was this a lecture class in which you did the reading and then sat back and listened to your teacher? How important to you was the ability to ask questions on the spot, or were you fine waiting until some time after the class was over to have your questions answered? In what ways were you actively engaged in the class? Think about whether you like discussion or seminar-based classes in which you must participate or if you prefer to blend into the crowd and not be called on.

Many of us learn best through first-hand experience. Do you perform bet-

ter in hands-on classes in which all of your senses are engaged? Tactile learners will find that colleges with frequent lab sections and opportunities for experiential learning fit them better than those institutions that feature mainly large lecture sections.

All colleges today attempt to meet the varied needs of their students. Even very large public institutions provide smaller break-out discussion groups to supplement those large lecture halls. Professors at every college have posted office hours when students may come to discuss issues or concerns. Unfortunately, this still does not provide the same opportunity for learning as does a school with smaller, seminar-style classes. Once you analyze how you learn best, you'll be able to choose colleges that fit you academically and then you can consider the extra-curricular and social aspects of life on these campuses.

Website

Here's a new website that may be of interest to those students who want to get a better handle on possible future careers. www.mynextmove.org is designed to help users figure out what they might want to do for a living. The site was created for the U.S. Department of Labor and offers resources to users who know what they want to do as well as to those who have no idea about their "next move". You can search careers by key words, browse over 900 different careers by industry, or take a short interest profiler to discover some careers that might be of interest to you. You may even discover careers that you had not been aware of. Additional sections focus on green careers and career opportunities for the future. The site also features information on career training through apprenticeship programs.

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Applying to a Military Academy

Have you thought about attending West Point or Annapolis? Does a career as an Air Force or Coast Guard officer appeal to you? If you're considering a military academy as part of your college search, you'll want to start your research and application process while still a high school junior. Here's some advice to get you started.

First of all, you need to have the "right stuff". That includes being a U.S. citizen between the ages of 17 and 22. You'll need to have exhibited leadership qualities through your participation in scouting, school government, club participation, or community or religious activities. Academic qualifications include an above-average high school record and strong scores on the SAT or ACT. You'll need to be physically fit with above average strength, endurance, and agility. In addition, you'll need to possess both good physical and mental health. If you meet these requirements, start a file at the service academy of your choice and complete their forms during the spring of your junior year.

Next, you'll need to apply for a nomination to the academy by your Congressman or Senator. Write to both and ask about their process for granting nominations. Sons and daughters of career military members are eligible for a Presidential nomination, as are the chil-

dren of deceased or 100% disabled veterans. Only the Coast Guard Academy does not require a nomination, accepting applications directly from applicants.

It's smart to attend one of the Academy's one-week seminars during the summer before senior year. These intensive sessions will provide you with a first-hand look at the life of a cadet, and will also give the Academy time to get to know you. Several sessions are offered at each of the service academies.

You should have received your nomination by fall of senior year, and should arrange to take needed tests and evaluations. The decision to admit will be based heavily on academic factors (about 60%), with leadership strongly considered (30% of decision). Only about 10% of the decision rests on physical assessments, but you will need to pass both a physical fitness test and a medical exam to be qualified for admission. Students judged to be a bit weaker in academics, but otherwise fully qualified, may be offered a spot in an Academy Prep program before being reconsidered for admission. For more information, log on to the website of the academy of your choice: www.usafa.af.mil (air force), www.usma.edu (army), www.cga.edu (coast guard), www.usna.edu (navy), www.usmma.edu (merchant marine).

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