

# Riley Baker Educational Consulting

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## December 2012

### 1<sup>st</sup>—SAT Reasoning and Subject Exams

### 8<sup>th</sup>— ACT and ACT With Writing

Underclassmen—Review PSAT report with advisor and map out a plan for test preparation

Schedule spring SAT/ACT testing dates

Seniors—File any additional college applications before deadline dates.

## January 2013

### 26<sup>th</sup> – SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests

(register by 12/28 - late registration 1/11/13)

Seniors – apply for a pin and then complete and send the FAFSA any time after Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>. Apply online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

Seniors – Search and apply for scholarships that match your qualifications

Seniors – File any additional college applications

## What Makes a College “Good”?

Everyone wants to attend a “good” college, but what does that really mean? What truly determines the quality of a school is not how hard it is to get into but what that college does for students once they are on campus.

One factor to look at is the retention rate. Are students returning after freshman year and do they finish their degrees? Students are more likely to stay at a college where they are actively engaged in learning and part of a community that supports their intellectual, social and emotional development.

A college that emphasizes teaching rather than research attracts professors who enjoy mentoring undergraduates. If a school’s mission statement emphasizes a student-centered approach, that’s a good sign. Universities may tout their Nobel Prize winning professors, but that doesn’t mean much if undergraduates don’t have opportunities to study with them. Current students are a great source of information about professors, and you can ask them about their experiences when you visit a campus.

Advising is another important area where some colleges excel. Students who receive ongoing support as they explore majors and careers make better decisions. Advising doesn’t get much attention in the college search process, but it becomes very important once you’re in college. Ask if each student has an assigned advisor or whether students need to go to advising centers and see whoever is available. Also, how often do students meet with their advisors each semester, and are they required to discuss their course selections before registering for classes? Good advising helps students make smart curriculum choices and enables them to graduate in four years. For students who are planning to go on to law, medical, or graduate

school, it’s helpful to meet the advisors who help students with these applications, and to ask how many students have applied and been accepted into these programs in recent years.

Starting college is a major life transition, and a strong first year experience is another indicator of quality in a college. While most colleges have a formal orientation program, a comprehensive first year experience continues beyond the first weeks of school and often includes peer mentors as well as seminars with professors who serve as academic advisors during freshman year.

Academic learning has more impact when paired with experiential learning. Colleges that have internships and service learning built into the curriculum provide a rich education that connects what you learn in class to the world. Students develop marketable skills that look great on resumes, and these experiences also enhance graduate and professional school applications. While many college websites mention internships, it’s helpful to know where students have done internships and whether they get support from a designated internship advisor or need to find internships on their own.

Some colleges require students to complete a senior capstone project before graduating. A capstone project is an excellent way to synthesize what you’ve learned in your major, get research experience that prepares you for graduate school and connect your major with potential careers.

Tour guides rarely take families inside a college’s career center. But knowing that a school has a strong career services office that provides career exploration, resume and interview preparation, alumni mentor programs and on-campus recruiting is just as important as seeing a well-equipped campus fitness facility.

## Going Green

### *Studying Green: Which way to go: Environmental Science or Environmental Studies?*

**Environmental Science and Environmental Studies** are two college majors that are enjoying increased popularity.

*Despite similar names and interdisciplinary approaches, there are significant differences between these two majors ranging from their perspectives and emphases to their curricula. Whereas Environmental Science programs focus on the natural sciences, Environmental Studies programs tend to emphasize the social sciences.*



Learn more at:

Association for Environmental Studies and Sciences -  
[www.aess.info](http://www.aess.info)

National Association of Environmental Professionals –  
[www.naep.org](http://www.naep.org)

## Focus on Majors: Environmental Majors

**Environmental Science** draws on chemistry, physics, and biology to understand contemporary environmental challenges, such as global warming, and to develop new solutions for these problems. Because environmental issues are complex, this major requires students to think creatively and to integrate knowledge of both biological and physical sciences. One might think of this as applied science rather than basic science, which is science for science's sake. Most environmental science programs allow students to design a concentration in which they consider specific areas or problems of individual interest. In addition to concentrations in each of the natural sciences, many programs include such diverse offerings as atmospheric and oceanic science, biodiversity and evolution, geoscience, environmental physics and engineering.

In contrast, students who are more interested in how human activities impact the environment may prefer **Environmental Studies**. Programs in environmental studies tend toward the position that human society is undermining the ecological foundations of life and that we must change our behavior if we are to thrive as a species. This major involves developing a broadly integrated understanding of the social, political, and historical factors impacting our environmental challenges. Students spend much of their coursework examining the interaction between the natural and social sciences. They might learn about the cultural and religious traditions that lead to soil depletion in a geographic area or the political and economic pressures that prevent a group from adopting more “earth friendly” water treatment procedures. Students in this major might focus on resource management, environmental education, food and agriculture, or health and policy issues.

Both majors begin with fundamental

courses in biology, chemistry, physics, math, and statistics. Students complete environmental sciences courses that demonstrate the application of scientific principles to the solution of environmental problems. From there, students choose courses depending on their major and concentration. Environmental Science electives include environmental biology, chemistry, and physics, as well as hydrology, wildlife conservation, research methodology, and environmental modeling. Electives for environmental studies might include environmental health, environmental philosophy and ethics, environmental politics, and energy technologies. Students in both majors develop critical thinking and creative problem solving skills and use these in service to society. Computer skills are essential, as are opportunities to conduct lab research and engage in fieldwork. Rigorous programs may require senior capstone projects.

Both degrees prepare students for a wide range of careers in education, industry, and government. Some, particularly jobs in education, require advanced degrees. Graduates may pursue careers as teachers, researchers, environmental consultants, lobbyists, toxic waste managers, fisheries and wildlife managers, policy analysts and community activists. When students consider potential career paths, it is important not only to consider areas of intellectual interest, but also the work environments and levels of interpersonal, technical, and manual work that are typically required by each path.

The employment outlook for Environmental Sciences and Environmental Studies graduates is projected to grow by 19 percent from 2010 to 2020. Heightened public interest in the hazards facing the environment, as well as the increasing demands placed on the environment by population growth, are expected to spur demand.

## Financial Matters: Diversity Scholarships



Although the bulk of scholarship grants are provided by colleges and universities (over \$24 billion last year alone), another \$8.5 billion comes from foundations, local organizations, and private donors. Grant money is often awarded on the basis of merit—achievements in athletics, academics, the arts, and community service. A significant portion of the scholarship pot is also awarded to students who have shown pride and interest in their roots through their involvement with heritage

organizations. These are diversity scholarships, meant to encourage members of specific groups to continue their postsecondary education. Some of the groups that offer diversity scholarships include:

- The United Negro College Fund ([www.uncf.org](http://www.uncf.org))
- The Hispanic Scholarship Fund ([www.hsf.net](http://www.hsf.net))
- National Italian American Foundation ([www.niaf.org](http://www.niaf.org)) This group also provides scholarships for students majoring in Italian language and culture.
- Korean American Scholarship Foundation ([www.kasf.org](http://www.kasf.org))
- Japanese American Citizen's League ([www.jacl.org](http://www.jacl.org))
- The Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc. ([www.cbcfinc.org](http://www.cbcfinc.org))
- The Gates Millennium Scholars Program ([www.gmsp.org](http://www.gmsp.org))

- Aspira ([www.aspira.org](http://www.aspira.org)) focuses on Latino youth.
- The American Indian College Fund ([www.collegefund.org](http://www.collegefund.org)) offers scholarships for Native American students.
- The Ronald MacDonald Scholarship Program also provides many diversity scholarships. ([www.aboutmcdonalds.com](http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com))

Trade and professional organizations such as the Association of Black or Hispanic Engineers also offer diversity scholarships. You can also search for minority scholarships at websites like [www.ScholarshipAmerica.org](http://www.ScholarshipAmerica.org) or [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com). Black Excel also maintains a list of over 200 websites that offer scholarships for minority students. Visit them at [www.blackexcel.org](http://www.blackexcel.org).

## A Look at HBCUs

105 colleges comprise the group of schools known as HBCUs—*historically black colleges and universities*. Most were established after the Civil War with the express purpose of providing higher education opportunities to African-American students. Nearly all of them were founded in states that formerly supported slavery. Since the Civil Rights laws of the 1960s, some state-supported HBCUs have sought to increase diversity, and, at a few of these colleges, Black students are no longer in the majority. Most, however, are still predominantly African-American in make-up.

While the HBCUs represent just 3% of all of the Nation's colleges, they graduate nearly 20% of African-American students who earn a bachelor's degree. In addition, nearly half of African-American professionals and public school teachers earned their degree at an HBCU. Also, nearly 70% of African-

American doctors and dentists attended a HBCU.

It's clear that HBCUs have played a unique role in educating students to be competitive in the corporate, professional, academic, military, and govern-



Spellman College

mental worlds. They provide a strong sense of community, a place at which students can find the security of being members of the majority, and often offer courses and cultural experiences that speak directly to the needs of the African-American community.

## Website Review

The U.S. Department of Education has established a new website—The College Affordability and Transparency Center. The goal of the website is to provide a place for families to learn how much it costs to attend different colleges, to get a handle on how fast those costs are rising, and to understand the reasons for this rise. *The College Affordability and Transparency List* highlights schools with high and low tuitions and fees. *The Net Price Calculator* provides links to each college's net price calculator to help families estimate their net cost for that college after scholarships and grants. *College Navigator* allows families to search for colleges by characteristics such as size, cost, majors, and retention rates. You can access the overall website at [www.collegecost.ed.gov](http://www.collegecost.ed.gov).

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## Using Your PSAT Scores in College Planning

Underclassmen who took the PSAT in October will be receiving their score reports sometime this month. Students tend to focus solely on their score, but a careful review of the entire report can be really helpful in planning your next moves.

Scores for each section are reported on a scale of 20 to 80. An average score for an eleventh grade student will be approximately 48 in critical reading, 49 in math, and 46 in writing. For tenth graders, the average scores are about 43 in reading, 43 in math, and 41 in writing. If you add scores for all three sections together, you'll get your *selection index*. This score is used to identify the top-scoring juniors who will qualify for the National Merit Scholarship program.

*Percentiles* allow you to compare your scores to other college-bound students who also took this exam. Scores are presented as a *range*, since you personally could expect some variation if you were to take similar tests on different days.

The *review your answers* section shows

the question number, the correct answer, your answer, and the level of difficulty of each question. Since your original test booklet will also be returned to you, you should review each question again and discover why a particular answer was correct.

The *improve your skills* section will provide personalized feedback on your academic skills as measured by this exam. Two or three skills are highlighted for improvement for each section, and you'll receive suggestions for improving your performance.

College Board has also provided all PSAT test-takers with free access to *My College QuickStart*. By entering your e-mail on the PSAT page of [www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org](http://www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org) you will receive notice as soon as test scores become available, and will be able to view your score report online. A study plan for the SAT based on your performance will also be available for you to discuss with your college counselor. You can learn more and begin using My College QuickStart at [www.quickstart.collegeboard.org](http://www.quickstart.collegeboard.org).

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