

Riley Baker Educational Consulting

www.rileybaker.com

16 Green Bay Road

Winnetka, IL 60093

847.441.8687

rileybaker@rileybaker.com

February 2015

7th – ACT and ACT plus Writing

Juniors – Begin your college search.

Juniors - Map out dates and prepare for spring SAT and/or ACT exams.

Seniors – Contact colleges to be sure your applications are complete. Send mid-year grades if required. Update colleges with any new information that might affect admission.

March 2015

14th – SAT Reasoning Exam

U.S. Students Only
(register by 2/13 - late registration 3/3)

1st and 2nd year students - Make plans for a productive summer. Investigate summer programs, jobs, internships, and opportunities to visit colleges.

Juniors – Create an initial list of colleges.

Juniors - Prepare for spring SAT/ACT exams.

So Many Numbers, So Much Confusion

When it comes to researching colleges, the plethora of numbers are enough to send one back to Instagram. College profiles, guidebooks and websites drown the researcher in statistics. What's a student to do?

College profiles obviously contain lots of useful information. However, they're also cluttered with numbers that **are largely irrelevant and distracting**. Do you really care how many volumes are contained in the library, what percent of the campus is accessible (students with physical limitations may find this stat interesting but not particularly informative), or how many clubs are registered on campus? Hopefully not. All that should matter is whether the resources *you'll* need will be available, whether *you'll* be able to access campus resources, and whether the clubs *you* might be interested in will be available. Look for information that applies to you and try to ignore the rest.

Other profile numbers can be misleading. When considering statistics, a healthy dose of skepticism is helpful. Think critically about the source of the information you're analyzing. Who is providing the information, what is the source's agenda, and is that agenda the same as yours?

Many people think that the percent of applicants admitted to a college is indicative of the institution's quality and/or one's chance of admission. Think again. That statistic is actually a statement about popularity, not quality. Further, without knowing the qualifications of the applicant pool, the statistic offers little insight into the likelihood of your being accepted.

Understanding the classroom environment is crucial to understanding a college. Stu-

dent/faculty ratios seem relevant, but actually communicate little about what you'll encounter academically. At many schools, there are faculty members who don't teach classes or interact much with students. Counting them in the ratio is misleading, though not inaccurate. If you turn to average class sizes instead, you won't do much better.

If you really want to try to get a handle on what you'll encounter on campus, the stats to consider are the breakdown of class sizes, especially first-year/100 level lectures and the percent of entry level classes that are taught by graduate assistants. Considering the ratio of full-time/tenure track faculty to part-time/adjunct faculty can give you some idea of how accessible to you your teachers may be. Part-time instructors often teach on more than one campus and may be less available for consultation. Although these numbers may be more challenging to come by, they'll give you a better idea of what you'll actually find in the classroom.

Financial aid statistics can also be misleading. Average indebtedness at graduation is simply a mathematical mean that, by taking into account widely disparate figures, can distort actual reality. If you're "average", then your debt at graduation might be similar, but without quite a bit more information, the average itself is less-than-helpful. Likewise, college profiles may include the percent of financial need met by financial aid. A college can honestly state that it meets 100% of need, but unless you know how much of the financial aid award is gift aid (grants and scholarships) and how much is self-help aid (work study and loans), you actually know very little.

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Possible Career Paths for Classics Majors

- Museum researcher
- Attorney
- Architect
- Theatrical actor/Manager
- Publisher/Editor
- Screenwriter
- Journalist
- TV reporter
- Public relations associate
- Editing assistant
- Writer's agent
- Financial planner
- Internet specialist
- Marketing account executive
- Entrepreneur
- State Legislator
- Consultant
- Investment analyst
- Language instructor
- Radio producer
- Psychologist
- Legislative assistant
- Research analyst
- Mediator
- Policy analyst
- Community organizer
- Surgeon
- Caseworker
- Government relations associate
- Paralegal Teacher
- College Professor
- Affirmative action officer
- Student services administrator
- Copywriter
- Writer
- Physician

Majoring in Classics

Humanities departments at colleges across the U.S. have seen their budgets shrinking and the number of students who major in the humanities falling. As a result, many humanities courses have been cut and faculties of these departments reduced. For those interested in a classics major, things look even worse. In today's technological age, does majoring in the classics make sense?

Classics majors study the languages, literatures and cultures of ancient Greece and Rome. Students explore the beliefs and achievements of these worlds, and discover just how much they still affect contemporary civilization. Besides learning Greek or Latin (or both), you'll also read the great literary and philosophical works written in these languages. Classics majors study ancient art, architecture and technology, and learn about Greco-Roman legal systems, social institutions, religious practices and class distinctions. Typical courses in addition to Greek and Latin include ancient philosophy, classical art and archeology, classical mythology, tragedy and comedy, lyric poetry, Athenian democracy, and classes that focus on such figures as Homer, Virgil, Herodotus, Horace, Livy and Tacitus. Many classics students double-major or take an additional concentration in history, philosophy or comparative literature.

Looking at this, you might assume that people who major in classics want to prepare for careers as college professors or language teachers. While classics is an appropriate choice for those career paths, it is also an excellent choice to prepare you for a wide variety of occupations. Classics majors commonly go on to become doctors, lawyers, teachers and administrators, members of the diplomatic service, engineers, computer programmers, clergy, businesswomen and men and entrepreneurs of all types.

A study by the Association of American Medical Colleges found that students who major or double-major in classics have a better success rate getting into medical school than do students who concentrate solely in one of the branches of science. According to *Harvard Magazine*, classics majors (along with math majors) have the highest success rates of any majors in law school. In addition, classics majors achieve some of the highest scores on GREs (Graduate Record Exam) and LSATs (Law School Admissions Test) of all undergraduates. What is it about the study of classics that prepares students so well for success in their chosen field?

One reason classics majors are so successful is that they completely master grammar. Medical terminology, legal terminology as well as all those impossible vocabulary words on the GRE (and the SAT) have their roots in Greek and Latin. Ultimately, though, classics majors do well in life because they develop intellectual rigor, enhance their communication and analytical skills, hone their ability to handle complex information, and gain a breadth of view which few other disciplines can provide.



To learn more about how a classics major might suit your needs, check out the website of the Society for Classical Studies at www.apaclassics.org, that of the National Committee for Latin & Greek (NCLG) at www.promotelatin.org, and the American Classical League (ACL) at www.aclclassics.org.

Financial Matters: Merit Scholarships



Last month we looked at the types of merit scholarships that colleges may offer to admitted students. Colleges themselves provide the bulk of scholarship money awarded in the United States, mostly to U.S. citizens. Institutional merit scholarships can range from a few hundred dollars to the full cost of attendance. When considering merit aid, you'll want to also take a look at money that may be offered from private sources.

Private Scholarships -- In addition to scholarships awarded by colleges, many organizations offer scholarships to students who plan to attend college. These types of scholarships are available nationally and locally, with some specifically for international students. Some national scholarships such as the Gates Millennium Scholarship or

the Coca-Cola Foundation scholarships offer large awards but are very competitive. Other national scholarships and most local scholarships offer relatively smaller monetary awards. Most private scholarships have specific eligibility criteria; demonstrated financial need is a common requirement. Others are sponsored by ethnic or religious groups and may require recipients to be a member of these communities. Still, there are many private scholarships – especially at the local level – that are not based on family need or group participation.

There are many scholarship search websites available online where American students and parents can identify national scholarship opportunities. For local scholarships, check with your school counselor. Most U.S. high schools receive numerous announcements about local opportunities each year. Keep alert for announcements in local newspapers and on community bulletin boards as well. Many local scholarships may require an essay; community service and leadership are often highly regarded by scholarship committees. Local scholarships may

be relatively small in dollars, but combine several such awards and the amount can be significant.

An important thing to know about private scholarships is that the scholarship money is generally given directly to the college that the student will be attending. Colleges differ in how they apply outside scholarship monies to a student's bill. Some colleges apply any outside scholarship money towards reducing the amount of loans in a student's financial aid package, while other colleges deduct the amount of outside scholarships from a student's grants and even from any institutional scholarships the college has awarded the student. Therefore, outside scholarships generally do not help much in terms of reducing the family's expected contribution. If your family isn't eligible for need-based aid, however, the full outside scholarship amount will be applied to your college tuition bill. International students should carefully check their colleges' websites to determine whether any international scholarships are offered.

So Many Numbers, So Much Confusion (continued from page 1)

What hidden gems are contained in college profiles? You're looking for numbers/stats that will help you understand what colleges are actually like and what *your* experience as a student might resemble. Take notice of such entries as:

1. The retention rate of students who continue beyond their first year. If this number seems low, it should raise red flags and prompt you to ask serious questions of admission personnel.
2. The ratio of undergraduate to graduate students. This, along with the institutional mission/philosophy, can give you some sense of the value the institution places on teaching under-

grads. Is the institution primarily in the business of educating undergrads, or is it heavily invested in research and producing PhDs?

3. The percent of students (both lower and upper division) who live on campus and how many of those remain on campus during the weekends. Even if you think you'd eventually like to live off-campus, this is a stat to consider. Generally, the more residential a college is, the more invested the institution is in providing resources to enrich their students' non-academic experience. If huge numbers of students move off-campus once they've met their housing requirement, ask why. Is the housing substandard or too expen-

sive? Are regulations highly restrictive?

4. The percent of students who graduate with research, internships or other work experience in their chosen field. Few college profiles include this information, but you'd be wise to inquire. Ask what resources the college has to assist students in gaining the background and skills they need to become employable at graduation.

When carefully considered, each of these statistics can help you understand colleges more thoroughly, and more importantly, can help you develop meaningful questions to ask both admissions professionals and current students.

Military Academies

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Phone:

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E-mail:

rileybaker@rileybaker.com

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Want an outstanding education and lots of leadership training? Take a look at the U.S. Service Academies. The four service academies offer challenging academics that emphasize engineering and history along with courses unique to their particular branch of the military. At the Air Force Academy, students can study flight and space operations or learn to fly, while majoring in math, engineering, behavioral science, economics or counseling. The Coast Guard Academy offers such majors as humanities and management and leadership, along with several types of engineering, math and science majors. At the Military Academy at West Point, cadets study a core curriculum that includes physical education and military science in addition to a choice of major. Naval Academy students spend summers at sea and the academic year majoring in computer science, oceanography, math, science or engineering.

Common to all of the academies are small classes and an emphasis on military, physical and leadership training. Students are cadets and, as such, subject to the rules of military life. Strong bonds are commonly forged between students; teamwork is stressed. All incoming students complete basic training in the summer before their freshman year, and spend succeeding summers in additional field training.

Cadets receive full scholarships to pay their college tuition and living expenses. They also receive additional stipends. In return, cadets are required to serve after graduation in their branch of the military. Admission to all of the service academies is competitive. In addition to grades and test scores, applicants must demonstrate physical fitness and (except for the Coast Guard Academy) receive a congressional nomination to be considered. Typical applicants rank in the top quarter of their high school class, have a 1200+ (M + CR) score on the SAT, are involved in varsity level sports and are active in school or community activities.

If you think you might be interested in attending a service academy, investigate requirements early. Speak to recruiters at college fairs and learn about the process of obtaining a congressional nomination. Check out academy websites and consider attending one of their summer sessions after junior year to preview cadet life. For more information, log on to www.usma.edu for the Military Academy at West Point; to www.usafa.af.mil for the Air Force Academy; to www.usna.edu for the Naval Academy; or to www.cga.edu for the Coast Guard Academy. Those interested in the Merchant Marines should go to www.usmma.edu for more information. Completing the pre-candidate questionnaire at the website gets you into their database and they'll follow-up with you.

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