

Riley Baker Educational Consulting

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March 2015

14th – SAT Reasoning Exam

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

Prepare for spring SAT/ACT exams

April 2015

18th - ACT and ACT plus Writing

(register by 3/13- late registration 3/27)

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

Five Sure-fire Tips for a Better Campus Visit

It's a rite of spring – the spring break campus visit pilgrimage. If you are finding yourself in the throes of scheduling college visits, count yourself among the many high school students doing the same thing.

When organizing your visits, one of the first things that you'll notice is that you don't need to talk to anyone to make plans. Unlike the old days when you actually called a college admissions office, spoke with a person and scheduled a visit, that is no longer the case. Now, 100 percent of trip planning can be done online at each college website. Spring break is prime time, however, so schedule your visits as early as possible to reserve your spot on the tours.

Some thoughts to keep in mind once you are on campus:

1. Make sure they know you're there. Establish some contact with the admissions office because many colleges, though not all, track your **level of interest in their school. The campus visit is one of the most important factors in demonstrating interest that colleges track.**

2. Divide and conquer. Parents may want to separate from their child and go with a different tour guide. Students often take the visit a little more seriously when parents are not around and may be more comfortable asking their own questions. Compare your tours later—this can lead to a good conversation.

3. Get lost! Wander on your own and explore what makes each college unique. Go beyond the standard visit. Consider this mantra: "It is worth more than two hours of your time if you might be spending four years of your life there." If the college is worthy of your visit, then dedicate sufficient time to tour the area around the campus, sit in on a class, have a meal in the dining hall and visit buildings and areas

that weren't on the formal campus tour.

4. Ask good questions. Better yet, don't ask "stupid" questions that can be answered by doing your own basic research, such as "Do you require four years of a foreign language?" or "What are your middle-50 percent SAT scores?"

Some "good" questions might include: How many students work on research projects with faculty? What types of honors courses, learning communities, and other distinctive programs are offered?



5. Carve out time to meet with current students. If you don't have any pre-arranged connection with students at the school, head to the dining hall. Be fearless— walk up to a table of kids, tell them that you are touring colleges and ask a few questions.

College kids are usually thrilled to talk with prospective students and they will typically be unabashedly honest. Start with some basic questions: "Are you happy here? Why? Why not?" "How interesting are your classes/professors?" "How accessible and responsive are your professors?" "Is this college worth the price you pay?"

You will likely learn more in that 10-minute interchange with a group of current students than you did during the information session or the tours. So start now, and plan out some great college visits!

Majoring in the Fine Arts

Possible Career Paths for Art Majors

- Advertising Photographer
- Animator
- Antiques Appraiser
- Art Conservator/Framer
- Art Critic
- Art Gallery Owner
- Art Historian
- Art Restorer
- Art Therapist
- Arts Funder
- Book Designer
- Caricaturist
- Cartoonist
- Commissioned Portrait Painter
- Courtroom Artist
- Custom Linens Designer
- Glass Blower
- Graphic Designer
- Illustrator
- Jewelry Designer
- Magazine Art Director
- Mosaic Artist
- Natural History Artist
- Packaging Design Director
- Painter
- Paper Artist
- Pencil Artist
- Photographer
- Photojournalist
- Police Artist/Fingerprint Technician
- Product Designer
- Sculptor
- Set Designer
- Stained Glass Artist
- Toy Designer
- Web Site Designer
- Wildlife Photographer

Students interested in the visual arts may choose to pursue their passion either at a specialized art institute or as an art major at a more comprehensive college. Art schools generally award a Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.) degree, while liberal arts graduates earn a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) The art institute is most appropriate for those students who truly wish to immerse themselves in art. Most art schools are located in big cities where students have easy access to the artistic community. B.F.A. programs train students for art-based careers; students may be preparing for a future in fashion, auto or interior design, videogame development, animation or the graphic arts. Studio classes require hours of hard work and students at art institutes have little time or opportunity to gain the breadth of education possible at a liberal arts college.

You'll start with foundation courses such as basic design and history of art, and will have an opportunity to focus on your area of concentration during the later part of your studies. The emphasis of each art institute differs, even within the same medium such as painting or sculpture. You'll want to carefully check each program's philosophy before committing to attending. Art institutes do not offer the variety of extracurricular clubs, sports, and activities that most college students seek and expect. Also, dorms at art institutes may be pretty basic. Try to arrange for an extended visit before making a final decision.

If you're more interested in focusing on art but still want to have opportunities to explore other interests, consider pursuing an art major at a liberal arts college. Often, these interests serve as an inspiration for your art work and allow you to grow from exposure to a variety of issues and ideas. Career preparation is not the primary focus of B.A. programs. Over half of your education would be in areas other than art, with substantial study in the humani-

ties, social sciences and physical sciences. Typical programs for studio art majors include foundation courses in the arts, including work in sculpture, painting, drawing and photography, as well as classes in the history of art and modern art. Since upper level students will concentrate in a specific medium, you'll want to check the college catalogue to see the breadth of classes offered in your preferred field. Although students in Bachelor of Arts programs do not get the intensity of experience that B.F.A. graduates have, they do benefit from the more rounded college-life experience available at a comprehensive tertiary institution.



All fine arts majors should seek out internships in galleries or museums, apprenticeships with working artists, or employment in architectural or design firms in order to gain real-world experience. Both the B.F.A. and B.A. programs prepare students for graduate programs in the arts. A master's degree is generally required for those hoping for employment in museums and galleries or for teaching at the high school level. Museum curators and directors and college professors may have Ph.D.s.

Fine arts majors may go on to work in a variety of art-related fields. The major provides the initial preparation for careers as commercial artists, art therapists, art editors, critics, museum curators, art educators, art restorers, architects and designers. You can learn more about careers in the visual arts by using the Occupational Outlook Handbook found at www.bls.gov or by visiting the website www.collegeart.org.

Financial Matters: Comparing Financial Aid Packages



March brings decisions about both admissions and financial aid. An offer of admission is clear but financial aid packages can be confusing.

When comparing financial aid awards, the bottom line is the cost of education to you and your family. Since the total varies for each college, you'll need to compare your packages in terms of several factors. First, compare the ratio of grants (gift money) to loans for

each school. Packages with larger grants than loans are obviously more desirable. Next, consider how much you and your family are expected to contribute and compare this amount to your total grant award. Are you and your family comfortable with this *Expected Family Contribution*? Will your earnings help sufficiently toward meeting the expected amount?

Now, compare loan types offered and their terms. The most desirable loans are subsidized student loans with low, deferred interest; these loans do not have to be repaid until after you have completed your education. Private, unsubsidized family or student loans generally require that repayment begins within sixty days of receiving the loan money.

Most financial aid packages also include work-study. Keep in mind that you are free to decline this type of aid; some students prefer to find their own jobs on or off-campus, although there may be significant benefits to work-study employment.

Call the college's financial aid office to learn how outside scholarships may affect your financial aid package. While some colleges allow students to use these in place of loans, other colleges subtract this amount from grant aid. Ask, too, if you are likely to be awarded a similar package in succeeding years, assuming family finances remain at the same level. Some parts of your package may not be renewable, and this could affect your future cost of attendance.

Set Yourself Apart through Community Service

In this time of increasing competition, a stellar transcript and strong test scores are necessary, but not sufficient, for admission to selective colleges. Admissions officers are looking beyond academic qualifications to a student's interests, values and character. One way to explore your interests as well as demonstrate concern for others is by doing community service.

Ideally, your service expresses a genuine passion. A student who loves art might do art projects with sick kids in a hospital, or start an art therapy program for nursing home residents.

If you're involved in student government, or in a youth group at your church or temple, take advantage of the opportunity to initiate and complete a project that will demonstrate your leadership. It could be getting your class involved in a project to paint houses for low-income families, or recruiting students to serve as mentors to underprivileged elementary school children.

You don't have to be class president to

take the initiative. One computer whiz solicits used computers from corporations and refurbishes them before donating them to foster kids. Another student collected children's books, built bookcases and installed them at a shelter for battered women and their children. Then, the next spring, he organized a "read to children" program at the shelter. One student on vacation in Mexico saw children walking the streets of a small town without shoes and started a charity to deliver donated clothing and other goods to them.

These are some of the creative ways students have made a contribution to their communities, developed their own skills, increased their self-esteem, and ended up with impressive examples of leadership. It starts with identifying a need and knowing your skills, so you can find a way to meet that need.

Think about what you believe in, what you'd like to see changed in the world, and find a way to make an impact. What are you good at? Use your skills to make a difference. If you're a great cook, volunteer at a soup kitchen. A

strong writer could help senior citizens get their life stories written.

Although it's great to start a project, not everyone has to be a leader. Reading to children in a hospital every week for three years demonstrates commitment and compassion. One student who's an avid equestrian volunteers at a therapeutic riding program, where she helps people with developmental and physical handicaps to enjoy riding horses.

There's no single "best" community service activity. The key is to find something you love doing. When you're involved in an activity that makes you feel alive, you'll be able to communicate that excitement in your college applications.

Pursuing your genuine interests also makes it easier to stay involved in these service activities year after year. That kind of long-term commitment not only impresses admissions officers, but also helps you to develop a sense of competence and self-esteem. That's a good thing, wherever you choose to go to college.

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Best of the Web

Recently, college advisors across the U.S. were asked to nominate their favorite sites for college planning. You may already know about some of these sites, but check out those you have not yet visited.

Favorite college data sites:

- collegedata.com - especially helpful when you want data about cost, average student debt, percentage of need met, and retention rate. If you click on the “admissions” tab you can even discover if demonstrated interest is used in making admissions decisions.
- colleges.niche.com (formerly called collegeprowler) - student opinions about a wide range of factors, but like all “review” sites, take information with a grain of salt.

The three sites listed below offer college search capabilities, based on the college qualities you are seeking.

- cappex.com
- petersons.com
- Unigo.com

Favorite free SAT/ACT test prep site:

- number2.com

Favorite financial information site:

- studentaid.ed.gov

Favorite scholarship search sites:

- collegegreenlight.com - directed to first generation and underrepresented students
- fastweb.com
- nerdwallet.com/nerdscholar/scholarships/
- raise.me - get scholarships based on your achievements and activities while in high school

Favorite college video tour site:

- youuniversitytv.com

Favorite site for news from the admissions world:

- hscounselorweek.com - each week this site compiles recent articles about college admission from a wide variety of publications.