

Riley Baker Educational Consulting

www.rileybaker.com

16 Green Bay Road

Winnetka, IL 60093

847.441.8687

rileybaker@rileybaker.com

November 2020

Seniors – File Early Decision/
Early Action applications

Work on remaining college
applications

Check College Board and ACT
websites for testing opportunities
in your area if you still wish to take
an SAT or ACT exam

December 2020

Check College Board and ACT
websites for available test dates
and sites in your area

SAT Reasoning and Subject Exams

ACT and ACT With Writing

Underclassmen — Review PSAT
report (if available) 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

Taking a Deep Dive Into a College Website

Pandemic or no pandemic, researching colleges is an imperative for high school students. Typically, it involves many modes of research, including in-person campus visits and tours by students and families, and attending college representatives' public information sessions and their visits to high schools. Gathering up all this information guides a student towards their short list of colleges, ranked in order of preference. Now, in the age of COVID, everything about college research has changed and teens must focus their efforts on online resources, the college website being the primary focus of that research. Fortunately, colleges have been enriching their websites and can provide students with a vast amount of information. Now, let's dive!

Home Page: Always start with the college's home page. Make sure you are not falling down a rabbit hole by entering sites without the .edu domain name. Typically, the header bar's navigation menu will quickly link you to About Us, Academics/Undergraduate/Graduate, Admission/Visit & Financial Aid, Research, Student Life and maybe Careers and/or Alumni, but let's be methodical.

Mission Statement: Read the mission statement. It can tell you a lot about the history and ethos of each college. You can often jump from this page to Fast Facts – read about class sizes, student/faculty ratios, graduation and retention rates. Explore the total number of undergraduate versus graduate students on campus and within your major, as this can impact your ease of access to faculty-led research.

Academics: Are you passionate about a particular major? Click on the Academics link and learn about undergraduate

schools and colleges and whether your chosen major is available. Dive deeper into your major's department - check out research options for first-year students; look at laboratory/computer/studio space; check in on what is the research focus within that department, and what minors are available? And if we assume that you may need extra academic support sometime, check out subject tutoring, writing support, and if you need it, LD support.

Admission: The Admission pages will probably become the link you frequent more than any other. It is from here that you'll be able to start putting yourself into the culture of each institution. Look for admissions requirements such as testing, average GPA (if provided), minimum entry requirements (foreign language required?), and the admit rate. How do you fit? You will find a link to the application whether Common Application, Coalition Application or the college's own application. Read the application checklist so you are aware of dates and deadlines, required supplements, auditions, essays, recommendations, interviews and maybe a resume. It is important to know all this well in advance, so you have time to prepare yourself properly, and avoid last minute surprises. Before you leave the AO links, join the mailing list. You'll start to receive targeted communications to which you should respond. Sign up for a virtual visit and tour and register for any online information sessions or open houses. 'Like' their social media pages and connect there with current students.

Connections: While you are on the Admission pages, seek out the counselor responsible for your high school. If this college is a top choice for you, send that representative an introductory email. Comment on something you (article continued on p. 3)

Career Paths for Communications Majors

- Journalist
- Public relations specialist
- Speechwriter
- Social media director
- Broadcast engineer
- Blogger
- Photographer/camera operator
- Video/audio producer
- Radio/podcast host
- Event planner
- Technical Writer
- Sales representative
- Broadcast journalist
- Newspaper editor
- Human resources specialist
- Politician
- Lobbyist
- Attorney
- Management consultant



Majoring in Communications

If you are interested in journalism, politics, public relations, blogging, or analyzing language, a communications major may be right for you. A communications major studies the ways in which information is spread in society. Majors will analyze political speeches, read religious sermons, and watch TV shows or films as well as examine the effects of media forms such as social media or mass media on the dissemination of information.

The major is studied through a variety of lenses. Students will typically begin with introductory courses about the history and theories of communication, and they will also learn about communications' research methods. They will also study the major through ethical and analytical lenses. Majors will also hone their own communication skills through courses in areas such as public speaking, performance, and interviewing.

Communications programs will often have concentrations that students may choose; these may include areas such as public relations, new media/Internet studies, film studies, or broadcasting. Concentrations allow students to take more courses within a focus of interest that may apply to a future job pursuit. Also, students will often be required to complete an internship. This can be anywhere from a radio station to a customer relations department to an advertising firm.

Because communications is applicable to so many fields, it is important to note that different college programs may emphasize certain fields over others, so some programs will focus strongly on broadcast media while others may instead concentrate on public relations or marketing. Once students graduate with a major in communications, they will have strong skills in writing, speaking, listening, and analysis. These abilities apply widely, so students will have a world of opportunities available to them.

For instance, graduates interested in writ-

ing may become reporters or editors for a newspaper. They may also go on to work for a radio broadcasting company. Students fascinated by social media and advertising may become social media managers who are in charge of creating and realizing goals to market a company's brand online. Managers typically must be comfortable with using technology.

Other graduates may pursue a job as a media planner who analyzes the behavioral tendencies of consumers - their clicking and viewing habits - in order to design successful advertising campaigns for companies.

Public relations is also within the field of advertising. The purpose of a public relations job is to persuade the media and the public that a certain organization is ethical or attractive. PR professionals do this by designing press releases, events, and press conferences.

Students who enjoy planning parties may become event planners. Communications majors are sought-after as event planners because they can analyze the desires of consumer groups and have the skills to design and promote appealing events. Event planners may also create a variety of advertising material for the events they plan, and they can work anywhere from a high school to Disneyland.

Majors may also pursue careers in the sales or human resources departments in companies. Human resources professionals deal with the spread of information within a company, and they often use their communications skills to resolve inter- or intradepartmental problems within a business. Alternatively, the sales department deals with promoting a company's service to customers.

Other students may go into the field of politics, although they may want to take supplementary classes in college.

Financial Matters: The CSS Profile



The bulk of college financial aid money comes from the federal government; this aid is distributed by colleges using information supplied by families when they complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), available on October 1st. About 400 colleges, universities and scholarship programs, however, use an additional form, the *CSS Profile*, to gather more information in order to award their own institutional funds to deserving students. Students apply-

ing to college should check to see if this form is required by schools on their list. Some scholarship programs also utilize the CSS Profile. It, too, becomes available on October 1st each year.

The *Profile* provides a more complete picture of your family's finances; it also provides a way for you to describe special circumstances right on your application. Begin by logging on to the College Board website at <https://cssprofile.collegeboard.org>.

Use your College Board student account and password to begin the *Profile* process. Alternatively, parents can create a separate account, since sensitive financial information will be collected. The first step after logging in to your account is to register for the correct year (2021-2022 for this year's

senior class). Now, complete the application—as you answer questions, the application will be tailored to your family's financial situation.

The application may be completed in one sitting or you can save information and come back to complete. You will need a number of financial documents, so get these ready before beginning the application. You will find a list of the needed documents once you sign in. Answer all questions carefully; answers are saved as you change screens. Unlike the FAFSA, there is a processing and reporting fee for this application. After an initial \$25 registration fee (includes one school report), you will be charged \$16 for each report required. After submitting, you will receive an acknowledgement and instructions for making any needed revisions or adding additional colleges.

Taking a Deep Dive Into a College Website (continued from p.1)

have learned, ask a question that isn't easily answered by spending a minute or two on the website and ask to speak with a student in your preferred major. Build on this connection. As you deepen your interests, ask that counselor for a video chat, or the email address of a professor who may be able to respond to some specific academic questions.

Student Life: Remember that you are exploring your new 'home' away from home, so dive into student life. Look for links to Study Abroad options, Student Clubs and Organizations, your personal faith community, Greek Life options, on-campus work and volunteer opportunities. Whatever matters to you now needs to be found on your new college campus; the college must fit you and not the other way around.

Housing and Dining: If you will be living on campus, check out all available options. Would you be able to have a single room (doubt it)?, how many typically share a first-year dorm room (2-4)?, do they offer the special needs housing you require?, are there suites

with shared facilities? Can you live with people who share your academic or personal interests in a living/learning type of environment? And where are the dining halls? Are there meal plans to suit your dietary requirements? Are vegan, kosher and halal dining options available? What about grabbing a quick sandwich and coffee in the morning? Can you get a pizza at midnight ?

Health and Safety: Take a look at the location and ease of access to the Student Health Center. Can they support your special health needs? What about a counseling center, addiction support groups, and is there a hospital close by, just in case? Is there a campus police force and how do they protect students on campus? Look for locked dorms and a blue light system or something similar. Ask about escorts for single students walking back to their dorms very late at night.

Transportation: If a vehicle is an imperative for you, make sure you look into whether first-year students are even allowed to bring a car to campus

and if so, where it can be parked. If you can't or don't want the liability of a car on campus, look into campus transport. Are there buses that circle campus day and night? Do they offer ease of movement between the dorms and the bulk of the classrooms? How early/late do they run? And can you use that campus bus to get off campus? Can it take you to the airport, the local mall or a dentist appointment downtown? Know before you go.

Money: Spend time researching the Financial Aid pages and use the online calculator to be sure that this college is a viable option for you and your family. Connect with a FA officer to ask your specific questions and keep your eyes open to scholarships and total costs.

Career: Finally, explore the Career Center and look for both internship and employment opportunities. It is always exciting to connect with alumni in the field of your interest. Does this college support students before graduation with job fairs, resume building workshops, and meetings with alumni?

Making the Most of Virtual Tours (part 2)

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Last month we talked about some of the ways students could use virtual options to learn more about prospective colleges. Here are some additional routes for making the most of the digital world.

Use other online campus tour programs: There are hundreds of campus tours available on [YouVisit](#), [Campus Reel](#) and [YouTube](#). Many of these are student generated and present a different outlook. Compare and contrast. Use these as a stepping-stone to narrowing down your college list, but always go back to Admission for up-to-date facts.

Target specific areas of interest to you: If you are going to be living on campus, as you 'tour', check out housing and dining options, on-campus transportation and student security. If you have an idea of your major, examine classrooms, laboratories, research facilities, libraries, and computer access. If you know you'll need some support—and almost every single student does at some point during their college career—check out the Writing Center, learning disability support services, counselling and health centers, tutoring and preprofessional advising. And, of course, check out the gymnasium, sports facilities, theaters, and Greek Life options.

Go macro: After you've done a thorough

tour around the campus and checked out all the aspects of interest to you, spread out. Use Google Maps to examine both distances around the campus and outside the campus. How far is it to an off-campus bus stop, shopping area, clubs and restaurants, airport, hospital, parks, hiking trails and other outdoor recreation areas? Is the area safe?

Now start talking: When you have a clear idea of both what you want from a college and find colleges with majors of interest, reach out directly to Admission Officers, faculty and students. Identify your high school/regional representative and connect with that person. Email interesting questions based upon your interests and research. Ask about speaking with an alum in your area, and request an introduction to students in your major and faculty in that department. Read about and then speak to a financial aid representative so you have a clear idea of the cost of attendance and possible scholarship options. Use the online calculator.

Use social media: The use of social media as part of your virtual tour is essential. Check out Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and even Twitter to see what's available to support your visits, your research and your connection with students. Social media is also a great place to explore students' clubs and organizations.