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Making Final Decisions

April 2021

17th—ACT

Seniors should have their final letters of acceptance by the beginning of April

Juniors—Visit colleges virtually
Prepare for AP Exams

Seniors—Compare offers of admission; revisit top choices using virtual options and social media

Evaluate financial aid packages and consider college funding options

Notify the colleges that you will not attend and take some time to thank those who wrote your letters of recommendation

May 2021

1st – Common reply deadline for college enrollment (check college websites; some colleges have delayed this until June 1st)

8th—SAT

AP exams

Juniors – work on resume and college list

The waiting is over. Admission decisions have been made. And some very happy students now have the enviable problem of deciding which college they want to attend.

From now until the May 1 notification deadline, the tables are turned as admission officers try to win over newly admitted students. There will be flattering letters, phone calls and invitations to fun-filled programs designed to get prospective freshmen excited about attending their school.

Remember that these programs will paint the school in the best light. Since you want to learn everything you can before making a final decision, it's a good idea to look beyond the nice receptions and speeches. Some students skip these events, preferring to see the college on a more typical day. Others have been clear about their first choice school from the start and know where they want to be.

Ideally, you'll be able to visit the colleges on your final list, walk across each campus and eat lunch in the dining hall and see if you can picture yourself at this school next year. Many colleges, however, still have strict restrictions on campus visits, so be sure to check the school policy before planning a trip. If the campus is closed to visitors, you will have to use virtual visits and conversations to get a better feel for each school. If they are allowing in-person visits, set up a visit time well in advance of your trip.

If you can visit, spend some time in the student union or library talking with students about the college. It's better to find out now exactly how hard it is to get into

popular classes, or that everyone goes home on weekends, or that you'll have no social life if you don't join a fraternity. This is also the time to sit in on a couple of classes and talk to students in your major.

If you've grown up in Los Angeles and are considering a college in Chicago, you might have the admission office arrange for you to meet with a student from California, so you can find out what it's like to adjust to long cold winters. Talk to friends who have gone off to college on the East Coast and ask how they manage being far from home. Preferences can change during senior year, and students who start their college applications thinking they want to go across the country sometimes realize later that they want to be able to easily come home for a weekend. If any students from your high school are currently attending the colleges you're considering, get in touch and ask if they'd make the same choice today. A new website, thecollegget.com, connects high school students with current students at a wide variety of colleges. Getting as much information as possible will help you make an informed decision.

Comparing financial aid offers is another major factor in making your final decision. If attending your third choice college means you'll graduate with little or no debt, that college might move up to first choice. Financial considerations could be especially important if you're planning to go on to law, medical or graduate school or will be embarking on a lower-paying career right after graduation.

It may seem like a huge decision, but if you applied to colleges that are good matches, there are no wrong decisions. You should have a great experience at any of the schools that have admitted you.

Career Paths for Biology Majors

- Biologist
- Biomedical engineer
- Botanist
- Community health worker
- Dentist
- Epidemiologist
- Environmental conservationist / activist
- Genetic counselor
- High school science teacher
- Hydrologist
- Marine biologist
- Medical manager
- Medical researcher
- Microbiologist
- Nurse
- Pharmacologist
- Physician
- Physician assistant
- Quality control inspector
- Science writer
- Researcher
- Veterinarian
- Zoologist



Majoring in Biology

If you are fascinated by the nature of living things, enjoy conducting experiments, and like math and science, a major in biology may be right for you. As a biology major, you will study the beginnings of both plant and animal life forms and analyze their structures, functions, and traits. The study of biology has many areas of specialization, allowing students multiple career paths in a wide variety of fields after completing the major.

The biology major program consists of both lab-based and lecture-based courses. Students will typically spend the first two years forming a solid knowledge base in chemistry, biology, and calculus. They will often have to take multiple introductory level courses in topics such as ecology, evolution, biostatistics, genetics, biochemistry, and human anatomy and physiology.

There will be a strong hands-on component to the major. Students will be required to conduct both individual and group research and lab projects throughout the course of the major. This will give them hands-on experience designing, conducting, analyzing and communicating the results of experiments. They will learn necessary collaboration skills as well as hone their abilities to accurately collect data, take detailed notes, analyze results, and participate in the scientific field.

As students progress, they will focus their courses under a concentration. Concentrations may include biotechnology, microbiology, bioinformatics, or molecular biology. Concentrations offered vary depending on the college program.

Biology majors have many choices upon graduation. They may choose to continue their studies and obtain a graduate degree. This would be necessary for the student who wishes to become a professor or specialize in a field such as epidemiology.

Students who wish to become doctors, nurses, pediatricians, veterinarians, or some other professional in the medical field will need to attend a post-graduate program. Biology is a common preparatory major for medical school as it provides students with a strong knowledge base

and many skills required in the field.

With further study, biology majors may become pharmacists, dentists, optometrists, physical therapists, or assistants or researchers in any of these fields.

Students may also choose to become high school or middle school educators, teaching biology or marine biology. If majors want to educate the public but do not want to work as a teacher in schools, they may choose to become health educators or community health workers.

For graduates who are skilled in writing, there is demand for science journalists either at science magazines, newspapers, and journals or in the science section of general news.

Students interested in the environment may find jobs as forest rangers, zoo workers or botanists. They may become environmental scientists or researchers focused on the environment. They may also find jobs at nonprofit organizations or in government agencies interested in environmental protection and management.

Those who enjoy lab work may become biological technicians, who aid in laboratory research in universities and research organizations.

Others who enjoy designing products may enter the field of biotechnology. Biotechnologists design and improve existing technology in a vast array of fields. In medicine, they may design new medicinal treatments such as protein drugs. They may also work in agriculture to improve the production, quality, or preservation of various agricultural commodities, or in cosmetics designing new makeup or skin-care products.

Finally, if students are interested in law, they can apply their major in a few different ways. They may become medical malpractice lawyers, using their understanding to determine whether doctors have acted ethically. They may also become lawyers fighting for or against environmental policies, using their knowledge of ecosystems.

Financial Matters: Comparing Financial Aid Packages



If you've applied for financial aid and filed all the paperwork by the appropriate deadline, an award letter outlining a college's offer of financial assistance should arrive close on the heels of your notification of acceptance. Here's a guide to understanding what that package really means.

The bottom line in comparing financial aid packages is the final cost of your education to you and your family. Since the total cost of education 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 fami-

ly 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 you be able to provide the expected amount?

Now, compare loan types offered and their terms. The most desirable loans are federal direct 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 receipt of funds. Even when offered loans as part of your financial aid package, you are free to decline them. Many colleges offer Parent PLUS loans to help fill in the difference between the rest of the aid they offer and the cost of attendance. Parents should be careful not to take out loans that might impact their ability to retire.

Most financial aid packages also include work-study. Keep in mind that you are also free to decline this type of

aid; although there may be significant benefits to work-study employment, some students prefer to find their own jobs outside of the work-study program on or near campus.

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 any grant aid that you've been awarded. 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 cost of attendance in subsequent years.

The final decision about college choice is a family decision, made by weighing numerous factors to determine the best choice for all of you. With skyrocketing college costs, finances may rightly count heavily in your final college selection.

Getting Good Recommendations in a Virtual World

There are many components to a college application, most of which are required. These may include completion of the actual application, an official academic transcript, one or more essays, standardized test scores, a resume, and letters of recommendation. If you consider these components, the only aspect that addresses not just what you have accomplished but who you are as a person and a student are those personalized recommendations.

Colleges vary in what they each require, and your first step is to go online and verify exactly what your particular

colleges require with regards to letters of recommendation. Most require the School Report from your counselor and at least one recommendation from a teacher. Some more selective colleges require two teacher recommendations plus the counselor report. Given that many colleges have suspended test score requirements and more high schools are adopting Pass/Fail grading systems, admission officers will probably lean more heavily on recommendation letters in making decisions.

Once you have verified exactly how many letters are required, you must

move to the next step of figuring out which teachers to approach. These letters represent the part of your application that makes you "real", helps you stand out, and adds insights into your academic strengths and learning style. Recommendations application to life and provides an opportunity for someone to consider you in classroom. In order to provide your recommenders with more ways of getting to know you in the virtual classroom, here are some things to do:

(continued on p.4)

Getting Good Recommendations (cont. from p.3)

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Turn on your camera when appropriate. Let him/her recognize your face and get to know the person behind the voice.

Participate in the virtual classroom. Ask questions, interact and if s/he creates online break-out groups, participate in a leadership role.

Let your teachers see that you are eager to engage and learn, however challenging the new environment feels.

Be respectful in the virtual classroom. Don't engage in silly comments on the chat/conversation function.

Do more: ask the teacher for an after class conversation about material that is challenging, offer to create an extracurricular club, ask for book or podcast recommendations to supplement the online materials.

COVID-19 has changed the typical manner by which students have historically obtained their all-important teacher recommendations. Many high school students have not sat in the classroom for most of 2020, and still now, in early 2021, many are still not attending school in person. In this case, your approach to gaining good recommendations must adapt. It is still important to create a document or resume that lists your important personal

and academic achievements. Provide good information to your teachers about things you have accomplished while outside the classroom and learning virtually. Shed light on your career goals so your teachers can see your ambitions and why that matters, and tell them which colleges and majors you are applying to. Once you have prepared this informative document, consider which teacher to approach. If you are applying to a STEM program, you may want to select a Math/Science teachers and an Arts/Language teacher. If you have struggled in a particular class and that teacher has coached you and you've improved your grades through hard work and determination, consider approaching her or him. If you've been particularly involved with any specific class, ask that teacher. You will need to submit your request for a recommendation by email so above all, be polite, use good grammar, spelling and punctuation, personalize each one and attach your previously prepared document. While juniors do not generally have to ask their teachers for recommendations until fall of senior year, it's a good idea to reach out to teachers now and give them a heads-up that you hope they will be willing to write on your behalf.