

Our College Planning Process



This document explains our process for supporting high school seniors in applying to colleges and for scholarships. This is a process that we have developed over the course of many years that has resulted in great college and scholarship outcomes for many students. Each step in the process is designed to assist in developing and supporting a holistic approach to college planning. The [Stanford University Admission Overview](#) provides important insight into how college applications are reviewed at selective colleges and universities.

My Plan Document: The My Plan document is used to keep a record of conversations and other pertinent information to which we may refer throughout the application process.

Google Calendar: A Google Calendar is created and shared with the student and parents to assist in keeping track of deadlines and important milestones such as finalizing your college list, completing the FAFSA, completing the Common Application, and writing and reviewing essays. Meeting the deadlines as posted in the calendar will assist in reducing the stress typically associated with a student's senior year of high school and avoid missing important deadlines. The calendar will be updated throughout the application process and may be viewed at any time by students and parents.

The Résumé: The résumé is a core document in our process and serves many purposes. In its typical one-page format, the résumé provides a quick glimpse into how a student has spent his or her time throughout high school in the areas of academics, employment, extracurricular activities, leadership, and service. The honors/awards section reveals the impact that a student has had in these areas that resulted in special recognition.

Unpacking Your Résumé: This activity gives a voice, through the descriptions, to the activities reflected on the résumé and is designed to develop language and descriptions that are copied first into the Common Application Table, which serves as a point review, and later into the Common Application, which allows posting 10 activities.

Common Application Table: Activity, leadership, and award descriptions are placed into the Common Application Table to facilitate the review and editing process to ensure language, punctuation, grammar, and character count prior to posting into the Common Application.

My Story Essay: The My Story essay is an autobiographical essay profiling the student's life from birth through today. The natural process of writing such an essay reveals significant events, experiences, and milestones in a student's journey throughout their k - 11 schooling. Some of these revelations may provide the focus of the Common Application essay or a supplemental essay. In rare cases, the My Story essay may serve as the focal point of the student's Common Application essay.

FAFSA Estimator: The FAFSA Estimator provides insight into what the US Department of Education determines to be the appropriate family contribution to a student's college costs. This does not mean that a college will provide scholarships to cover the cost of attendance beyond the expected family contribution, only that the US Department of Education will authorize the amount of student loans needed to close any financial aid gap. For lower income families, closing the financial aid gap will require either applying to colleges with need-based financial aid policies or receiving a sufficient amount of private or merit scholarships. For high income families, it means either paying for college or the student receiving a sufficient amount of private or merit scholarships.

Estimating a family's financial need is a cornerstone of our process and directs our college focus. This means that a student's college list should reflect schools that reflect a family's financial need.

Net Price Calculator: Completing the Net Price Calculator for each school on a student's final college list is required prior to our supporting a college application. Once the Net Price Calculator has been completed and the parents agree to pay the college costs if the student is offered admission, without any additional scholarship money, then the parents are confirming that the investment of time and resources is approved.

Common Data Set: The Common Data Set is published by almost all US colleges and universities. The CDS provides important admissions data in such areas as total applicants, expected GPA and test scores, and the areas during the application review process considered 'very important' to 'not considered.' When a student compares their résumé against the areas considered 'very important' by the college, they are able to project their competitiveness as an applicant. For example, if the CDS indicates that the rigor of a student's high school course schedule is 'very important,' the student is able to review the level of rigor reflected on their transcript as a predictor of their competitiveness during the college's application review process.

Mission, Vision, and Core Values of the Colleges: Colleges provide many clues as to their mission, vision, and core values on their website and through their Common Data Set. Colleges also provide insight into how their institutional scholarships are awarded and typically provide an implicit statement on their website as to whether or not they have a need-based financial aid policy. These factors are accounted in developing an essay writing strategy.

Essays and Writing Supplements: Our approach to developing the Common Application essay, writing supplements, and/or personal statements is "strategic." A strategic approach to essay writing requires considering the type of students individual colleges are looking for in developing their freshman class, the attributes of the student, and using the essays and writing supplements to present the student as a high quality applicant. While college admission is never guaranteed, no matter what a student's grades, test scores, and gifts and talents, the goal is to present the student in a manner in which college admissions officers view the student as bringing value to their campus and meets their institutional priorities, which might be to admit students from different geographical areas, sociocultural backgrounds, socioeconomic backgrounds, first generation status, or to fill the seats in a particular college major.

College and Scholarship Application Document: This document is used to track deadlines and monitor the development of essays throughout the application process. Essays should never be deleted. We track each version of an essay throughout the process to document the evolution of essays and to keep content that may be recycled into other essays. Through this process we expect students to experience growth in their writing.

High Quality Applications: Our process is not driven by applying to “safety schools,” or “reach schools,” but applying to “match” schools based on a student’s body or work and family’s financial need. Consequently, our process relies on quality not quantity. The final step in our process is to submit high quality college and scholarship applications that were strategically conceived and have the best chance of resulting in favorable outcomes. This process is typically accomplished with submitting 3 - 5 college applications. While students are free to submit as many applications as they like, our process supports 3 - 5 applications. Editing or reviewing additional college or scholarship applications will require additional fees.

To learn more about the type of outcomes achieved through this process, please review the student testimonials on our homepage: <https://www.accessandequity.org/>

Sharing College Decisions and Financial Aid Awards: Students with whom we are supporting are required to share all college decisions and financial aid award letters. These documents provide us with insight into any changes in admissions considerations or financial aid awards, which assists us in expanding our understanding of each college and scholarship program.

Confidentiality Notice: Our documents and our process reflect our intellectual property and may not be shared with anyone or any organization outside of the student’s immediate family. Any essays that are reviewed or edited by others are no longer part of our process and no longer qualify for our review or editing. Our documents, résumé template, and essay development process are protected by copyright and trademarks and may not be used, replicated, or reproduced for profit by any persons or organizations.

Guarantees and Warrantees: College planning, college admissions, and scholarship considerations are highly subjective by admissions officers and scholarship reviewers. As such, while we provide our best guidance and recommendations, we cannot guarantee any particular college admission or scholarship outcome and cannot be held responsible for any adverse outcome.