

# College Counseling Newsletter

B O S T O N U N I V E R S I T Y A C A D E M Y

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Check out BUA's comprehensive [College Admission Guidebook!](#)

## U N I V E R S I T Y C O U R S E P R O G R E S S U P D A T E S

### I M P O R T A N T D A T E S

- October 10—PSAT; 8am at BUA
- October 16—Senior Parent Coffee @ 3pm at BUA
- October 27—ACT offered
- November 1—A common EA/ED application deadline
- November 3—SAT & Subject Tests offered (Only month Language with Listening for Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean and Spanish offered)

### I N S I D E T H I S I S S U E :

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Several times each year, the Academy reaches out to faculty at Boston University who teach our students for the purpose of soliciting feedback on each student's progress in his or her University classes.

As you know, parents are not permitted to engage with BU faculty about a student, but Ellen Evans regularly reaches out to BU faculty as the BUA Liaison to those at BU who teach our students, and they tend to be very forthcoming. During those communications, we tend to see some common themes. The most frequent, perhaps, is that our students are doing well in their classes. They show up on time, are engaged in the class, are prepared for discussions, and are good ambassadors of BUA.

We also frequently hear that the professor would assess the Academy student as being in the top echelon of classroom performance.

And sometimes, we receive a surprised response—surprise that the student is a high school student and not already an undergraduate!

Less frequently, we hear worrisome news—news that the student is struggling in the class, not showing up on time (or at all), or has done particularly poorly on assignments or assessments. These reports are infrequent—but we do sometimes receive them.

When we do receive a report like this, someone from the Academy (Ellen, Jill, a student's advisor, etc.) will follow up with the student and—

depending on the seriousness of the situation—with the parent. As students move into the University, we expect them to be good self-advocates. Our process of reaching out to students directly encourages them to take responsibility for any missteps.

We can not share progress reports from BU faculty directly with parents or students. They are considered confidential exchanges between Academy officials and BU professors. But we can share the sentiment or factual updates on progress as needed.

As we approach the mid-point of the semester, we have already received feedback from BU faculty. We can happily report that the news is overwhelmingly positive!

## C H E C K I N G I N W I T H Y O U R C H I L D

By this point in the year, most students have received some graded assessment in each/most of their courses. We encourage you to check in with your child to see how s/he feels they are doing in their classes. Be sure to celebrate successes, and to probe carefully around perceived weak-

nesses or areas for improvement.

If you have any questions following a discussion, please feel free to reach out to your child's advisor or Academy teacher (but do not contact BU professors directly, of course) to inquire about what your

child could do to improve his or her performance.

We want to help students perform their best this year, and we have several ways in which we can provide support. Catching potential problems early on in the year is an important part of that process.

## SENIOR PARENT COFFEE

Tuesday, October 16, 2017  
@ 3pm at BUA

Parents of BUA seniors are invited to join us for an informal chat over coffee and cookies. We will talk generally about how we are working with seniors on completing each piece of the college application process, how to approach Early Decision or Early Action application options, ways to support your child (when they may appear

to disregard your advice!), and timely considerations for financial aid.

This is an opportunity to learn from other parents who are experiencing the same concerns you are about a student's process, and to ask group level questions.

Senior parents—please also seek us out for individual family meetings throughout the fall, as needed.

If you have not already filled out the parent survey in Naviance (made public in February) or wish to add additional information, please take a moment to do so (let us know if you need help accessing it). We want to work with each family to ensure proper guidance for each senior.

Haven't let us know your plans to attend the coffee? Email Jill: jillatk@bu.edu by Noon on 10/15.

Fall College Board  
Test Dates  
for Seniors

**October 27**  
ACT

**November 3**  
SAT & SAT Subject Tests  
(only month when Language w/Listening tests offered)

**December 1**  
SAT & SAT Subject Tests

College  
Counseling  
NewsletterCollege Rep visits  
to BUA

Be sure to visit Naviance to see the ever-developing list of college representatives visiting BUA this fall.

We expect between 60-75 visitors to meet with our 37 seniors on campus this fall.

## SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAYS

A printed draft of the Common Application was due to us by 10/3; we provide thorough feedback so students can incorporate it in their final version. In addition to the Common Application, many colleges expect students to do a little bit of extra work for their particular college. That extra work takes the form of "supplements" or additional school-specific "Member Questions". The 10/3 draft included one school's full set of Member Questions.

Seniors should now be focusing on the supplements, which usually include a few college-specific questions (i.e. which academic department interests you, have family members attended our school, etc.). Often (but, not always) they include extra writing requests/essays.

Recently in Senior Meeting,

we talked about how to approach supplemental essays. There are three broad categories into which the essays usually fall:

*"Why X college?"* – The college expects students to articulate why s/he wants to attend that particular college. We expect students to write extremely specific, detailed, engaging responses to these questions, identifying specific reasons why the student likes this particular college. If the same response works for more than one college (because it's too generic), it's not a good response. Admission decisions that are toss-ups can be decided on how well a student answers these questions.

*"Why do you want to study what you want to study?"* – Colleges sometimes look for students to articulate and explain their academic inter-

ests. Oftentimes, these essays are reviewed by faculty members, ones who can easily dismiss fluff and figure out which students know what they are talking about.

*Finally—students may encounter a host of "wacky" questions:* listing out websites they visit, identifying important world events, writing a creative response to a zany question, listing books read over the last year, etc.

For these non-traditional questions, we encourage students to be creative and authentic, not to write what they think an admission officer would want to read, and feel confident in sharing their true selves. We think of all of a student's writing as a package; we will review it for the writing quality and the overall message a student is sending the colleges to which s/he is applying.

# JUNIOR PARENTS

## UNIVERSITY ASSESSMENTS

By this point in the semester, most students are facing their first round of University tests and major assignments. As you know, there are fewer assignments in most University classes than in classes at the Academy, and the courses conclude in early December (rather than in late May). To that end, please check in with your child about their courses.

Grades from the first Biology

test will arrive soon. This is often the first 'wake-up call' of junior year for our students. It is a moment for many of the juniors when they realize they are able to successfully navigate their first University class. For others, it becomes clear that they need to buckle down, seek out the professor during open office hours, and begin reviewing their notes in earnest well ahead of exams.

Ms. Evans meets with the junior class regularly to discuss their progress in University courses, and all juniors should always seek out their Academy advisors for discussions and to seek support (for example, tutoring at BUA or through the ERC) if needed. The semester will end before you know it, and we want to make sure each junior performs to their full potential.

## PSAT

*The PSAT is just around the corner!*

All juniors are expected to sit for the PSAT, either at BUA (on October 10) or a test site closer to home, as it serves as the qualifier for the National Merit Scholarship competition.

BUA's testing will take place in the BUA building this year, starting promptly at 8am. Students should report for the test by 7:45am. We expect the test

should conclude around 12:00pm.

The PSAT is aligned to the 'revised' SAT, which was offered for the first time in March 2016. Though this newer SAT format includes an optional essay, an essay is not a part of the PSAT.

Sitting for the PSAT is a useful way to prepare for the SAT; it exposes students to test day conditions, especially in a

timed setting. Students receive a detailed score report in December designed to help students figure out which concepts they need to focus on to earn stronger SAT scores. We will meet with the juniors to review these score reports.

Students should plan on getting a good night's sleep the night before and to eat a healthy breakfast the morning of the exam.

**SAT:  
March 9, 2019**

The majority of BUA students take the SAT for the first time in March of the junior year. If a junior is unable to take the test in March (and this year, that is the case for students planning to go on the BUA Spring Break trip to Greece), May 2019—or in some rare cases December 2018—should be considered. Students should speak with the college counselors to decide the optimal alternative date.

College admission officers become concerned if students take the SAT more than 3 times during high school. To limit that, we expect students to take the test in March, and if needed, one more time in late spring, or in the fall of senior year.

Most BUA students take the SAT twice throughout the process.

## TEACHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

During spring semester, we'll work with juniors to identify two BUA teachers to write college recommendation letters to support their applications.

Some colleges may ask that students seek out junior and senior year teachers to write for them, so it may be that your child asks two of their junior year BUA teachers to serve as recommenders.

With that in mind, it is important to encourage your child to participate in class, seek out their teachers after class, and be aware of how the teacher might view them. Teachers collect anecdotes and stories that might find their way into recommendation letters next fall. Students should consider: do they come to class prepared? Do they participate in—

and help to advance—classroom discussion? Are they a positive presence in the classroom?

In a few weeks, you'll have the chance to meet with your child's teachers on Parent's Day. You'll hear more about how your child is doing in each class, and at that time may ask any questions you have about class content or teaching style.

**Spring Test Date Possibilities for Juniors**

**SAT & Subject Tests**  
 March 9 (SAT only)  
 May 4  
 June 1

**ACT**  
 February 9  
 April 13  
 June 8  
 July 13

## SOPHOMORE PARENTS

While it is still early in your child's high school tenure, sophomore year is an important benchmark in a child's academic progress. For those who did not earn the grades they were hoping for in their freshman year, this is the year to go above and beyond in efforts to improve, whether meeting with teachers, working in study groups, or taking the initiative to do extra work for classes beyond what is assigned. Colleges will see only the final grades for each of a student's freshman year classes. So while first-semester missteps can be softened through strong end-of-year work, it's advantageous to put in solid work from the start.

Occasionally, we hear from sophomores that they don't think this year's grades matter much... that junior year grades are what matter most. Our experience is that most college admission officers review all grades a student earns, including those in 9th and 10th grades, since they do appear on a student's transcript.

## PSAT

Sophomores who have registered for the PSAT received a study guide for the test in their mailboxes back in September. This guide, produced by the College Board, includes sample questions students can expect to see on the test, tips and test strategies for the day of the test, and a full-length practice test.

For sophomores taking the PSAT, the test does not carry any weight whatsoever in their college applications or for scholarship consideration. Colleges do not see PSAT scores, rather it is intended to be a practice opportunity for SAT. For those who want a preview of the types of questions they will be asked, these study guides are a helpful window into what the test will be like. Students can also find useful guidance on the PSAT section of the College Board website.

## GRADES VS. TESTING

Parents sometimes ask us which is more important in the college application process: grades or standardized testing.

The truth? Grades. But grades are looked at relative to curricular rigor as well as within the context of a particular high school and the student's academic strengths and interests. In other words, a 'B' at BU Academy is different than a 'B' at Brookline High School or Commonwealth School. The Academy has a reputation of being a school where A's are hard-won, so colleges are not expecting that all BUA students will have earned straight 'A's. That being said, the most selective colleges are looking for students who have more A's than B's, and virtually no grades lower than a 'B'.

But all of that depends on rigor of the curriculum. Because all Academy courses are

## FRESHMAN PARENTS

taught at the Honors level, there is little opportunity for students to take the "easy" path. And because we expect our students to enter BU's classrooms, colleges typically heavily reward our students when evaluating curriculum. It is much harder at BUA to go soft on one area of study, the way a student could at another high school with a more varied level of courses. That our students all complete Honors Calculus (at least), write a senior thesis, take Physics and Chemistry, study a classical language, and enroll in BU courses all factor in favorably with admission officers.

Test scores can also matter, though, particularly at the most selective colleges. There are plenty of colleges in the US that are test-optional, but our students generally look at test-optional AND test-required colleges. Generally, BUA students tend to test well—this is demonstrated in part by SSAT performance, but also by "peer effects": the impact that

bright kids have on other bright kids.

The top 4 or 5% of the most selective colleges really do expect high testing, rigorous classes *and* high grades, even from BU Academy.

But generally, selective colleges are more excited about admitting students with strong grades and decent scores, than students with decent grades and strong scores. Grades in rigorous courses are seen as the true "performance" measure, while scores are seen more as a sign of innate ability. There is often a correlation between grades and scores (the higher the grades, the higher the scores), but not always.

So if you or your child are hoping that high test scores will drive the college process in a few years, it is time to rethink that assumption. Be sure to encourage your child to perform to their best ability in their classes, as that performance—and the resulting transcript—is the single most important academic piece of the college application.