

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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COLLEGE LIST DEVELOPMENT AND EVOLUTION

IMPORTANT DATES

- November 3—SAT and Subject Test Date
- November 1 & 15—Common EA/ED application deadlines
- November 13—Seniors finalize college lists with 10 or fewer colleges
- December 10—Seniors will have all applications ready to submit
- December 1—Priority application deadline for certain BU scholarships
- December 1—SAT and Subject Test Date

Each January, we begin working with the junior class on the college search & application processes. One of the very first things we do with students is ask them to complete a lengthy questionnaire (we also ask parents to complete one!) that provides insight into their educational path, academic interests, extra-curricular activities, and current thoughts about college. From that survey, and through individual meetings, we start to develop a list of colleges for them to research.

By mid-February, virtually all juniors will have a list of 25-30 colleges at varying levels of selectivity to begin to research. Many students will head out over Spring Break to visit a few college campuses, or spend

time throughout the spring visiting campuses within reasonable driving distance. By far, however, the summer after junior year is the most common time to visit campuses.

By early September of their senior year (following visits, conversations with parents, conversations with us), students will narrow their lists down to 15 or fewer colleges. This more succinct list is easier to manage as students plan interviews, meet with college representatives who visit BUA, ensure they have the required testing, etc.

By early to mid-November, we ask students to narrow their lists down to 10 or fewer colleges. In recent years, the average number of applications submitted by a BUA stu-

dent has been around 7. Some students submit just 3 or 4 applications (which is easy to do here if a student is strongly interested in BU and has met the 'guaranteed admission' protocol), while others apply to 9 or 10 colleges.

We want students to be genuinely interested in attending each of the schools to which they apply, have good options and to develop the strongest possible applications. The shorter the list, the easier this is to do. We help families understand the student's chances of admission, so that the final list is a well-balanced one, representing a range of schools whose selectivity level covers the span between highly selective schools and those with a high probability of admission.

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APPLICATION SEASON

The Class of 2019 has begun submitting college applications! In a typical year, about 80% of the senior class submits an "early" application—usually through a non-binding 'Early Action' process. Many schools that are of interest to our students offer this non-binding process: MIT, Universi-

ty of Chicago, University of Massachusetts, Northeastern University, Harvard University, Stanford University, Yale University, and Boston College, as examples. A smaller number of seniors each year apply to colleges through binding Early Decision programs, and if admitted, the student is expected

to enroll.

BUA students are well prepared to apply to the most selective colleges out there, but they are also very thoughtful about 'fit'. It's an exciting time for our seniors; we are happy to play a role in helping them complete their college applications.

S U P P L E M E N T A L C O L L E G E E S S A Y S

Seniors should be working on “supplemental” essays at this time. These additional college-specific short answer essays are required by many schools, above and beyond the main college essay.

We have instructed seniors in how to approach these essays: make a list of all the supplemental essays they may have to write, and write engaging, descriptive essays

with the specific college in mind.

Most of our seniors apply somewhere by 11/1 so most will know how to approach supplemental essay writing and our feedback process.

Students who wait until late November to share essays with us will find our response time slowed, and will run the risk of submitting a weaker application than they other-

wise might if they worked on essays earlier (or dragging the writing process into mid-December when we are less available to help).

These essays are incredibly important—admission officers see these as more raw and personal than the main essay, and they hope to see interesting, well-written responses, especially from BUA students.

Fall Test Dates for Seniors

November 3

SAT & SAT Subject Tests (NOTE: Languages w/Listening offered ONLY in November)

December 1

SAT & SAT Subject Tests

December 8

ACT

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C O M P L E T I N G A P P L I C A T I O N S

It is each student’s responsibility to submit his/her application before the target deadline and to make sure that the application becomes complete. After submitting each application, students should track the status to make sure that all materials (including all application parts, official test scores, transcripts, letters of recommendation, etc.)

are submitted and received in a timely fashion. Students can track the submission of the Secondary School Report (SSR), BUA transcript, counselor recommendation letter, school profile and two Academy teacher recommendations through Naviance.

Colleges may give students access to an online web portal that allows him/her to see what materials have arrived in an admis-

sion office and when they have been matched with the file. Often this portal is also where the college may later post their admission decision, if done electronically. If credentials are missing two weeks after a stated deadline, the student should work with us and the college to make sure that the application becomes complete.

F I N A N C I A L A I D & E A R L Y A P P L I C A T I O N S

We have talked with the seniors about the process of applying for financial aid. There are two forms colleges use to determine need-based financial aid: the FAFSA (or Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and the CSS/Profile, both of which became available on October 1st. (Some colleges may also have their own financial aid

form, in addition to the others.) Students must determine which forms each college needs, and submit them by all stated deadlines. Students applying EA or ED should submit the required forms soon; given the ‘prior’ year tax form data for FAFSA, students admitted via an EA or ED application should receive offers of aid (if

eligible) with their acceptance letter.

As the name would imply, sending the FAFSA is free of charge.

Submitting the CSS/Profile costs \$25 for the first college, and \$16 for each additional college; fee waivers are available to those who qualify for SAT waivers.

December 1 applications

Several colleges have December 1 priority deadlines for special opportunities/consideration—including Boston University—for top merit scholarship opportunities. Students should know all scholarship deadlines for the schools to which they are applying.

JUNIOR PARENTS

STANDARDIZED TESTING

Juniors took the PSAT in October, getting an early glimpse at the SAT format. Scores are typically available in early to mid-December. Upon receipt of said scores, we will be reaching out to schedule small group meetings with the juniors to discuss how to retrieve their score reports and remind the students how these results should be interpreted.

PSAT results might certainly help students formulate some

opinions about a testing plan, and students should seek out the college counselors for advice on developing their plan. SAT, ACT or both? It will likely depend on a student's strengths and might also be informed by how they performed on the PSAT.

For several years now, BUA has worked with **Revolution Prep** to offer specialized test prep tools for our students. This year, they will again

offer free practice ACT (11/7/18) and SAT (1/10/19) exams. They also offer one-on-one tutoring, for either test. For interested students, Revolution Prep offers Small Group Courses (online) for both exams, leading up to the March 9th SAT and April 13 ACT, when most of our juniors will first take one of these exams. Not every student needs formal test prep, but for those who might benefit, it is worth investigating.

SWITCHING GEARS IN JANUARY

Several junior parents have thoughtfully reached out to us with questions about the college search process. Generally, we have encouraged families to wait just a tad longer to fully begin the college search process.

Each fall, our primary role is to work with seniors on their college applications. We have reserved the bulk of our time and meeting availability for

senior parent and students. Next fall, we will do the same for you—protect our time and energy for our work with you and your child on this process.

In January, we switch gears. By mid-January, seniors will be finished submitting applications, and we will turn more of our attention to the junior class. We will host a morning meeting in late January for all junior parents—dedicated to

senior year course selection and to the college search and application processes.

We will begin meeting weekly with juniors in January to discuss various pieces of the college search process and work with them to build initial college lists in February.

We are excited to get to know you and your child even better in just a few months!

TEACHER RECOMMENDATIONS

In April, we will work with juniors to identify two Academy teachers to write letters of recommendation in support of the student's college applications. In most cases, students will ask at least one junior year teacher. Depending on the colleges a student is considering, s/he may need to ask teachers from specific classes, disciplines or academic years. To that end, we want to remind

you that your child's 'citizenship' - in AND out of class - is being 'noticed' (for lack of a better word) by Academy adults. Our faculty members know that they will be asked to write for these students in just a few months, so they are already preparing anecdotes and superlatives in their heads.

If your child is quiet in class, consumed more by grades

than by mastering the academic material, or always late with assignments, this could really work against them when our teachers are writing their letters of recommendation.

Encourage your child to be his or her "best self" in and out of the classroom. It will increase the likelihood that a teacher agrees to write on behalf of a student!

College Essay Workshop in June 2019

Each June, we host a college essay writing workshop for interested juniors. The "essay" is a 250-650 word piece in response to a specific Common Application prompt.

This spring, we will work with juniors to brainstorm topics, and then help them develop one of those topics into an essay. First drafts are due to us by the time school starts in the fall.

The essay workshop helps students get going. Typically, we host about a dozen students for 6 hours of discussion, writing and feedback on a day in June. And we invite a college admission officer to talk with the students about essays. In recent years, we have hosted admission officers from MIT, Tufts, Brown, Harvard, BU, NYU and Brandeis and BC.

Spring 2019 College Board Test Dates for Juniors

SAT
March 9 (no Subject Tests)
May 4
June 1

ACT
February 9
April 13
June 8
July 13

TEACHER
RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR COLLEGE
APPLICATIONS

**SOPHOMORE
PARENTS**

Toward the end of junior year, we work with juniors to identify two Academy teachers to write letters of recommendation to support their college applications. Many highly selective colleges require two letters of recommendation from academic instructors. Some colleges specifically instruct who must write: Harvey Mudd College, for example, requires one humanities and one math/science recommendation. Other schools are not as specific about which departments must be represented by letter.

In all cases, our faculty write engaging, thoughtful, and honest assessments of our students that are meant to position each student well in competitive admission processes. Their recommendation letters are very different than the teacher comments students receive four times a year via PORTA, which are meant for an internal audience only. The recipient colleges ask teachers to comment on a multitude of factors, including: academic achievement, intellectual prom-

ise, creative & original thought, motivation, disciplined work habits, reaction to setbacks, self-confidence, concern for others, etc. The qualities on which teachers comment are not limited to academic qualities, in other words. Teachers are asked by colleges to assess students on a variety of characteristics that matter to their individual campus communities, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Some of our students believe it is enough to do well on tests, and that the process of engaging in class, meeting deadlines, supporting classmates, and being a good school citizen do not count toward the college admission process. We want to quash that notion here and now! Teacher recommendations help admission officers assess whether or not a student might be—in addition to a welcome presence in the classroom—a respectful roommate, a good teammate, an engaged club member, and a positive contributor to the community.

TAKING RISKS

**FRESHMAN
PARENTS**

As the school year advances, we encourage first-year students to take the occasional risk in their out-of-class involvements.

Trying out a new activity or attending an event put on by a club or student group could be an exciting way to develop new interests. A student who never considered themselves an athlete might try out for fencing, or a student who has always been curious about Model UN might decide to attend one of the club's meetings.

For first-year students, this kind of extra-curricular risk-taking can open paths to new student friendships, help students figure out their hidden talents, and perhaps even help students learn better time management skills as additional activities force students to better budget their time.

While we would not want students to get

involved in activities solely for the sake of college applications, we do see a few juniors every year who suddenly scramble to join clubs because they realize the "Extra-Curricular Activities" section of their college applications looks anemic. College admission officers are trained to understand when involvement in an activity is long-standing and genuine versus when it is added to strengthen an application. When students fill out college applications, they are asked to list several of their most meaningful activities, number of years and weekly hours of involvement, titles and positions held, and which activities they are likely to continue in college.

Admission officers are looking for consistency over time, not sudden involvement in clubs in a student's junior and senior year (though, of course, students sometimes do genuinely develop new interests and involvement in activities in these important years).

If, in a college application, a student is able to point to a few activities that they have been committed to since freshman year, it helps build a picture of a student who consistently pursues an interest, and places a student in better position to gain a leadership position in that activity by senior year.

One of the Academy's strengths is the ease in which a student may access a multitude of activities. The process of joining clubs at BUA is generally not competitive. Students with an interest (and the time!) can try out new activities handily.

Encourage your child to pursue new activities and clubs, develop their passions and interests, and make meaningful out-of-class contributions to the Academy. This is an important part of being a member of the Academy community, and it is likely to be something that the colleges to which they apply will also value.