

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!](#)

S U M M E R O P P O R T U N I T I E S

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

- February 18th—BUA/BU closed for **Presidents' Day** holiday
- February 26—8:15-9:30am, GSU Academy lunchroom. **Sophomore Parent Meeting** to review junior year curriculum and college counseling program.
- March 9—SAT test (with essay) date for BUA juniors
- March 19—3pm Senior Parent Meeting (BUA building) to discuss Regular Decision news, wait-lists, April college visits and enrollment plans

Is your child interested in a summer opportunity? Many formal programs have applications due within the next month or two, and some internship positions post openings in the near future.

There is no one "right" way to impress colleges or to ensure a great summer experience. Rather, each student should assess summer goals (build resume? Academic improvement? Develop a new talent? Hone athletic ability? Refine leadership skills?) and weigh appropriate options—classes? Camps? International excursions? Lab work? Recreational sports teams? Community theater? Volunteerism?).

US Colleges are interested in seeing a balance of academic AND extracurricular (out of

class) strength, and, as such, offers of admission are based on BOTH, not solely on strong academic performance. Truth be told, colleges may have concerns about deficiencies in extracurricular talent or interpersonal connections if a student focuses only on additional academic classes in the summer months.

Students should identify interests and passions, do something they deem meaningful (other than play video games or read, though both of these things are fine in moderation AND when balanced with other commitments), and develop a sense of the world outside of BUA and BU classrooms.

Some students spend summers doing community service, while others spend time hon-

ing their musical skills. Some spend summer bagging groceries at Roche Brothers while others will get involved in Alzheimer's research in a lab. Each example has merit, and frankly, colleges find retail/food service/hospitality jobs as compelling as research work, if not more so!

Need suggestions? We post information about programs of interest on our bulletin board, forward information to students via email, and maintain lists of reputable programs to share. Come see us!

****Please see end of newsletter for information on Advanced Placement (AP) exam registration. Very few of our students take AP exams, but your child might be a good candidate.**

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Advanced Placement Test Registration Letter

A T T E N T I O N S E N I O R P A R E N T S !

Prior to the next batch of college decisions in mid-March to early April, we will hold a meeting with all seniors. At this meeting, we will touch base about continued expectations for academic performance and senior thesis progress. We will also review college decisions—when/how

they will be received, how to address Waitlist decisions, comparing financial aid awards, etc. We will discuss the logistics of spring visits to campuses and other factors to consider that will help make an informed enrollment decision by May 1. We'll touch briefly on graduation

(approaching soon!) as well as some details about how other colleges may view BU credit.

After BU's Spring Break, we will also be hosting a meeting on March 19 at 3pm (at BUA) for their parents to discuss many of these same concepts! Stay tuned for more info.

COLLEGE DECISION TIMEFRAME

Most applicants to colleges through a Regular Decision process will receive their decisions between mid-March and early April. Generally, colleges will announce on their websites or via an e-mail what date/time decisions will be available online, or when they might be mailed. Other colleges will say "April 1" as a default date, even though they will actually mail/post a few days before or after that date.

As mentioned on Page 1, we will hold a pre-Spring Break meeting with seniors to prepare the class (even those who have already finalized their college plans) for the release of decisions. The weeks leading up to this timeframe can be fraught with worry; we want to try to focus the seniors' energies, and to remind them to support each other, regardless of individual outcomes. We will

also address the waitlist process, and answer any group-level questions they may have at that meeting.

May 1 is a universal response date for US colleges—the date by which students must submit their enrollment deposit to ONE school. We will work with seniors in the month of April to ensure that everyone finalizes their college plans by that date.

Financial Aid Forms

Be sure to follow each college's schedule for submitting financial aid forms. Many colleges have February deadlines for submitting the FAFSA and/or CSS/Profile.

Please contact college financial aid offices directly with any questions.

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ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH

We've recently submitted Mid-Year Reports to the colleges on each senior's list. Next we begin even more focused communication with each in order to advocate on our students' behalf. One of the perks of our small school is that we know each of the seniors very well and have the resources to connect with our peers in college admissions to help make sure that each

senior's file gets a fair and thorough read.

We do not have a magic wand that compels admission officers to admit every student for whom we advocate. Rather, we use these opportunities as an additional effort to frame BUA's unique curriculum and program, contextualize a student's performance, update the admission office of any

recent accolades, and try to persuade admission folks just how wonderful our seniors are, even in their very competitive applicant pools. This part of the process is more art than science.

We will ask seniors for information that will help inform these phone calls very soon, including grade updates and recent awards.

SPRING CAMPUS VISITS

Virtually every college holds some form of "admitted student" event in April, ahead of the May 1 notification date.

NOTE—these events are NOT for waitlisted students.

Some of these events are on weekends, others are on weekdays, and many compete with each other.

Students may not be able to visit or re-visit every college to which they are admitted; as such, they should make wise choices about which schools to visit and when.

Some students may need to visit a college at a time other than when an official admitted student event occurs.

In addition to notifying BUA of

a planned absence, as usual, students must clear any University absences well in advance (a good attendance record to date helps make this possible); BU faculty do not need to excuse an absence for college visits.

We can work with students on any absences (within reason) that may arise.

Senior Thesis

The senior class is under a bit of extra pressure this month as they work toward completion of the first draft of their senior thesis. For some seniors, that means composing 1,000 words each week until late February!

Please check in with your child about his/her progress.

JUNIOR PARENTS

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

About 50% of the junior class has worked with us to develop a preliminary college list. These lists range from 20-35 schools, and are based on conversations with each student and on information gathered from student (and parent, if completed) surveys in Naviance. In most cases, the lists represent schools at various points on the selectivity spectrum that tend to match your child's identified potential in-

terests in major/program, location, campus climate, culture, and size.

As your child evolves, so will these lists; interests change, and new parameters might be set. Ultimately, we will work with each child to narrow their list down to about 15 schools by late August, and ideally no more than 10 by early December.

As students visit college

campuses and do research on each school, the lists will naturally change, and we are here to act as guides and sounding boards for you and your child about schools on the list.

We encourage you to keep an open mind about the list, and help your child focus on more than just the uber-selective colleges on the list. And, if you have not yet done so, please complete the parent survey in Naviance!

P R E P P I N G F O R T H E S A T O R A C T

We are just a few weeks away from the March 9th SAT and April 13th ACT. While some juniors engage in formal test preparation with a tutor or through an online course, others prepare individually. Some, frankly, may be trying their best to forget these exams even exist!

While there is no simple trick or guaranteed method to prepare successfully for the SAT or ACT, there are things each

student can do: make use of preparation materials through the College Board website (Khan Academy tools, sample questions and practice tests), and the PSAT report (a good diagnostic tool), consider purchasing an SAT or ACT guide which include practice tests, ask us for a practice exam or to borrow one of many study guides in our office, etc. Students should plan to take at least one practice test before

test day and be familiar with the format and concepts covered on each major section. Consistent prep can go a long way toward helping a student feel confident on test day.

Test scores are but one piece of a student's overall academic profile (of which the transcript is usually the MOST important), but they are a way that students can demonstrate areas of academic strength.

C O L L E G E V I S I T S O V E R B R E A K

Many juniors wisely plan to visit a few colleges over Spring Break. Students should ensure that admission offices are "open for business", however; some may have spring break in common with BU. Even if campuses are quiet, tours may still be offered.

Students should take the initiative to set up/register for tours and information sessions

themselves; the information is usually very easy to find on a college's admission website. Parents should NOT do this.

You may not be able to visit more than 1 or 2 campuses in a day. It takes time to soak in a campus/college and to travel between schools.

Students should separate from parents for at least part of each visit, to see what it feels

like when they are on their own. They should also take copious notes during/after a visit: people they met, quirks/strengths of programs of interest, campus culture, things they didn't like. These notes will come in handy in the fall when writing essays. Though most colleges are not ready to offer interviews to juniors yet, we'll soon discuss interviews in Junior Meeting!

This Week in Junior Meeting

We talked about the importance of college visits and interviews, and what to expect. Visiting campuses is the ideal way to learn more about schools and a great way to "demonstrate interest". Demonstrated interest can be a factor in some admissions decisions.

On Tap for Next Junior Meetings

We will review the Academic Index, or the ratings systems employed by admission officers when assessing each candidate's academic profile. This will tie into the information that was presented at the College Colloquium on how highly selective colleges read applications.

Spring College Board Test Dates for Juniors

March 9
SAT only (most juniors should take AND opt for the essay)

May 4 & June 1
SAT (with essay, strongly recommended) & SAT Subject Tests

April 13 June 8 & July 13
ACT

THOUGHTS ON SUMMER PROGRAMS FOR SOPHOMORES

At BUA, we have many very bright, academically ambitious students. Some students use the summer months as a chance to take college courses (either at BU, or another local university). Some do this out of passion for a subject, others because they think it might impress colleges. For what it is worth, most colleges really are interested in seeing students develop a full non-academic sense of self. If all a student does is academic work, many highly selective colleges will become concerned about whether the student has developed friend networks, leadership skills, or a robust extracurricular life. Yes, there are valid reasons to take coursework in the summer, but it is not always the best path toward success in the college admission process. Per the front-page article, it really is worth exploring non-academic opportunities and helping your child discover out-of-class passions which round out their experiences and help them achieve a healthy balance.

S O P H O M O R E P A R E N T B R E A K F A S T : F E B 2 6 @ 8 : 1 5 A M

On Tuesday, Feb. 26, we will meet with sophomore parents in attendance to discuss several things: the transition to University classes, the Biology and language offerings at BU, the Junior research seminars (HAL and STEM), the junior/senior advising program, and the relationship we have with BU faculty members. In addition, we will discuss some timely aspects of the college process which center mostly around making broad and careful curricular choices (not abandoning a subject this early in high school), the importance of strong classroom performance (grades), standardized testing expectations (students should take the PSAT in October of junior year, and most take the SAT in March of junior year), and how we work with students through the college search and application processes. We'll be meeting in the Academy Room in the GSU. Coffee, tea and light refreshments will be served.

COLLEGE PROCESS TIMELINE

Though too early for freshmen to be thinking about college applications, it is important for our Academy students to keep some important timeline factors in mind:

End of 9th grade—speak with teacher/consider taking the Physics Subject test.

October of 10th grade—students should consider sitting for the PSAT.

End of 10th grade—speak with teachers/consider sitting for Latin, Chemistry and/or Math Subject tests.

October of 11th grade—all BUA juniors are expected to sit for the PSAT.

January of 11th grade—students begin weekly group meetings with the college counselors to discuss various aspects of the college search process, as well as individual meetings to develop a preliminary college list, and spend much of the spring

FRESHMAN PARENTS

researching various colleges.

March/April of 11th grade—Juniors should sit for the SAT or ACT for the first time. Many will do some college visits over Spring Break.

March/April of 11th grade—Juniors brainstorm college essay topics, finalize course selection for senior fall, and work with counselors to select two BUA teachers to write letters of recommendation.

May/June of 11th grade—Juniors take 1-2 Subject tests, as needed.

Summer after 11th grade—Juniors visit several college campuses, sit for interviews if applicable, research colleges, and begin work on their college essay.

Students receive a printed copy of their current college lists with “chances of admission” based on final junior grades, curriculum, scores, possible majors, writing samples, etc.

September of 12th grade—students complete

a first—and then final—draft of their college essay. Students work on college applications, sit for weekly senior meetings, and narrow their college lists down to 15 or fewer schools.

September/October of 12th grade—As needed, students re-sit for the SAT, ACT and/or Subject Tests, complete Early Action or Decision applications, prepare Regular applications, and begin work on short-answer college essays.

November of 12th grade—Students sit for SAT, ACT or Subject tests, as needed, finalize college lists, submit Early applications.

December of 12th grade—Students complete applications before break, receive Early application decisions.

We will tweak the process for each student, as needed, but this broad timeline works well for most of our students. It breaks the process into manageable pieces, and allows us to work with and guide each student appropriately.

AP Exam Information

Each year, Academy students have the opportunity to take Advanced Placement (AP) exams. **These exams – administered by the College Board – are different from the SAT Subject Tests, which we will be discussing with your students throughout their time at BUA.** AP tests are evaluation tools used upon completion of coursework in a particular subject. Each exam is approximately three hours (plus) long and administered on a specific date in May. Depending on a student's score, he or she may receive credit, advanced placement, both, or neither for college.

Because Academy students take many credits worth of Boston University courses, very few take AP exams. Colleges have varying transfer credit policies. Some colleges may accept a limited amount of Boston University credits; others accept all the credit Academy students earn through BU. Some colleges (Harvard and Williams come to mind) do not accept any transfer credit from incoming first year students. For a student who wishes to accelerate his or her time in college, and attends a school with restrictions on transferring college credit, taking an AP exam might afford the possibility of doing so. It should be noted, however, that not all colleges grant course credit for AP exams.

The following students may want to consider taking AP Exams in certain subjects:

- Students enrolled in Math 95 are well aligned to take the Calculus BC exam
- Students who plan to apply to schools in the U.K. or overseas (for example, Oxford and Cambridge have AP requirements)
- Students who want to demonstrate a strong proficiency in a subject area pursued outside of the Academy (language or computer science, for example)

Students who feel their grades may not accurately reflect their proficiency in an area of strength

If students have questions about whether or not to take AP exams, we strongly encourage them to come by the College Counseling Office to discuss the matter. The following factors should be taken into account:

- 1) Students taking these tests are typically enrolled in an AP course. Academy courses do not adhere to nor approximate the standard AP curriculum. If your child does not do well on the test, his or her score can be withheld from colleges.
- 2) Students should speak with their BUA instructors regarding the appropriateness of the test, particular to their personal strengths in the subject. Additionally, students should consult with their teacher for an assessment of which curricular areas might warrant extra effort.
- 3) Students should plan to do a fair amount of preparatory work before taking the test. We recommend purchasing a College Board prep book specific to the test(s) your child wishes to take.
- 4) AP tests are offered during very specific times on specific dates in [May](#).

Please check the College Board website for details. **Your child may have a conflict with Academy or University commitments, and he or she would need to request alternate arrangements if necessary.** There is an additional fee (\$55) involved in this re-scheduling. We will **only** consider late testing for extenuating circumstances as highlighted on the College Board [website](#).

- 5) AP tests cost \$94.00 per exam. **If your child decides not to take the test, the fee is non-refundable.** Fee reductions of \$32 per exam are available from the College Board for students with financial need who qualify. In addition, the \$9 processing fee is waived for fee-reduced exams, making the final fee for these students \$53 per exam. BUA students may also be able to use their incidentals grant for this testing.
- 6) AP tests are offered in a number of subjects. Academy students might be best prepared to take English Language or BC-level calculus. Depending on individual preparation, students could consider physics, a foreign language exam or others. Again, please consult with the individual instructor and the College Counseling Office to determine the appropriateness of testing for your individual child.
- 7) Just one more reminder that **most BUA students do NOT take AP exams.** They fall at a very hectic time of year, and the pressure of taking an additional three-hour exam, beyond University/Academy work, College Board or ACT testing, and balancing extracurricular activities, can add undue stress to a student's plate.
- 8) Though certain international universities may require applicants to submit multiple AP exam scores, they are not a required part of applications to U.S. colleges and universities (though students may elect to send them if they are strong).

Students who plan to take the AP exams should email Ellen Evans (erevans@bu.edu) with their preliminary plans **by Tuesday, March 19** (please include the specific AP exam, date of testing and parents/guardian on the email.) I will then send additional information to complete the registration process. BUA accounts will be charged on March 20. Orders placed after this time may incur late fees, or may not be accepted.