

College Counseling Guidebook



Statement of Philosophy

The BUA College Counseling Office offers an intentional and in-depth program that supports students at all phases of the college search and application process. Consistent with BUA's core values of *inquiry, knowledge, independence, belonging, and joy*, the office is guided by the following principles:

- We invite students to take **ownership** of the college process, which we view as a meaningful component of their BUA education.
- We honor and value students' **distinct voices and experiences** and want them to chart their own individual paths beyond BUA where they feel both challenged and supported.
- We encourage students to embrace the opportunities the process offers for **self-reflection and growth**; we invite them to think critically about their values and their goals, and to consider the pathways ahead of them with open, curious minds.
- We empower students to utilize the tools and resources available to them to understand the changing landscape of college admissions and to **make well-informed decisions**.
- We are committed to supporting, encouraging, and listening to students as they navigate a process that we understand can generate stress and uncertainty; when approached with **patience, kindness, collaboration, and humor**, we believe this journey can bring students a sense of joy, pride, and accomplishment.

Beginning formally in the fall of junior year, BUA students work closely with the College Counseling Office through group and individual meetings. The college counselors invite students into a learning process that moves both inward and outward. First, students think deeply about their own strengths, interests, and ambitions. Armed with this refined self-awareness, students are introduced to resources and strategies to explore the wide breadth of colleges and universities in the United States and around the world, identifying the options that will meet their needs and enable them to thrive.

Along the way, college counselors provide a range of resources:

- thoughtful guidance on course selection and standardized testing, beginning in sophomore year

- support and feedback on all components of the college application, including essays
- opportunities to connect with the 50+ college admissions officers who visit BUA annually
- counseling on extracurricular and summer opportunities
- programming for parents and guardians to equip them to support their children
- dedicated resources for families seeking financial aid and scholarships

At every stage, we strive for students to feel confident as they navigate the process and excited about the possibilities that lie ahead – and we feel privileged to be welcomed into their lives at this critical moment of transition and self-discovery.

Sincerely,

Jessica Jackson
Director of College Counseling
jdj0409@bu.edu

Bailey DiOrio
Associate Director of College Counseling
bdiorio@bu.edu

Sirena Davis
College Counseling Office Manager
spdavis@bu.edu

Table of Contents

<u>Academic Experience</u>	6-11
• <u>BUA Curriculum</u>	6-7
• <u>Freshman and Sophomore Years</u>	7-8
• <u>Junior Year</u>	8
• <u>Senior Year</u>	8-11
• <u>Senior Thesis</u>	10
• <u>Applying to Boston University</u>	10
• <u>BUA Profile and Transcript</u>	11
 <u>Life Beyond the Classroom</u>	 12-13
• <u>Summer Programs, Employment and Internships</u>	13
 <u>Standardized Testing</u>	 14-17
• <u>PSAT/NMSQT</u>	15
• <u>The SAT</u>	15-16
• <u>ACT</u>	16
• <u>Test Preparation</u>	16
• <u>Advanced Placement (AP) Exams</u>	17
 <u>Developing Your College List</u>	 18-22
• <u>SCOIR</u>	18
• <u>Self-Reflection</u>	19
• <u>The Campus Visit</u>	20
• <u>High School Visits</u>	22
• <u>Utilizing the BUA Alumni Network</u>	22
• <u>The Final List</u>	22
 <u>The Application Process</u>	 23-29
• <u>Academic Transcript</u>	23
• <u>Personal Statement</u>	24
• <u>Extracurricular Involvement</u>	25
• <u>Letters of Recommendations</u>	26
• <u>Interviews</u>	26
• <u>Demonstrated Interest</u>	28
• <u>Early Application Programs</u>	28
• <u>A Note about Independent College Consultants</u>	29
 <u>Financial Aid, Scholarships, Net Price Calculators</u>	 30-32

<u>College Planning Calendar</u>	33-39
<u>Helpful Websites and References</u>	40
<u>Appendix 1: Terminology</u>	41-46
<u>Appendix 2: Campus Visit Clusters</u>	46-48

The Academic Experience

Without a doubt, the most important part of the college admissions process is your academic profile. In most cases, your transcript is the single most important credential when colleges and universities review your application. How you do in your coursework and what academic program you choose to follow directly impacts the admissions process and which schools will think of you as a good match. Your application will be considered individually, but also within the context of BUA and the university's large and diverse applicant pool. Basically, although you are far more than your academic record, an institution of higher learning's first mission is to educate, thus they want to make sure you can be successful in their academic environment. Your grades and your curriculum are the most valued indicator in that assessment.

Boston University Academy Curriculum

BUA's strong admissions results demonstrate that colleges understand the BUA academic experience and want to enroll BUA students. They appreciate the breadth and depth of the academic program and the independent initiative students show in exploring their interests across the University. Many students wonder how BUA's program will be viewed because we don't offer Advanced Placement courses. Although AP courses are rigorous, college admissions counselors from domestic and international colleges and universities agree that we offer something different and equally – or even more, in some circumstances – compelling. Having a number of undergraduate courses under your belt is impressive to colleges and universities – especially when you have done well in those courses – because it demonstrates that you can excel within a challenging academic environment! So take advantage of this opportunity and push yourself, not only here at BUA, but also at BU.

In the final two years of a BUA student's career, they begin to have more opportunities to take classes at BU. With this privilege, however, comes a great deal of responsibility: responsibility to use free time effectively, attend classes even when a professor may not notice an absence, and make wise choices with regard to curriculum. To state the obvious, University classes are difficult and may pose challenges you do not expect or have not yet experienced. If you turn in work late, skip or arrive late to class, do not do the assigned reading and work, or do not demonstrate the maturity one needs to be successful in a University course, your grade will reflect this.

Just as important, students must be responsible enough to let BUA administrators and BU professors know if they are struggling. Through junior and senior college counseling seminars, as well as informal and formal one-on-one meetings, students check in frequently with the College Counseling Office. The Associate Head of School, Director of Student Support/University Liaison, college counselors, and individual BUA faculty advisors also strive to monitor academic difficulty, attendance, and appropriateness of placement through regular contact with individual professors and department chairs. But it is essential that we hear from you as soon as possible if you feel you are facing difficulties in your University courses.

Because of this exposure to University coursework, alumni tell us that they felt extraordinarily prepared for college, from day one; they already know how to study, meet high expectations, budget their time, approach a professor with questions after class, and make use of office hours. In the junior and senior years, the support of families, faculty, and administrators makes the transition to college courses go a bit more smoothly; when students head off on their own, they typically do not have the adjustment issues that other high school students may face.

Freshman and Sophomore Years

The best thing students can do in their first two years of high school is maximize their academic experience, build friendships, and explore new extracurricular activities – this will provide the foundation from which students will build when they enter the college process later in their BUA careers. That said, we understand questions about standardized testing, summer program applications, extracurricular activities, and course selection may arise. Students and parents/guardians should feel welcome to email, call, or schedule time to meet individually with the college counselors.

For many students who come to BUA (or any other academically rigorous high school), there is necessarily a period of adjustment. The expectations, workload, and level of academic rigor may seem overwhelming at first. It can take time for students to find their bearings and understand what teachers expect of them. This is completely understandable.

One of the most important aspects of your education is the interaction you will have with faculty members. At BUA, each student is an integral part of the classroom dynamic. Our best piece of advice is this: **be proactive in meeting with your teacher to discuss upcoming assessments or to review returned papers or tests.** Take advantage of the wonderful resource that is our faculty. The ability to approach teachers with questions and concerns, to contribute to classroom discussions, and to continue these dialogues outside of the classroom are all skills that will help you immensely as you continue at the University in the junior and senior years, and as you continue on to college.

All sophomores will have an individual course planning meeting with a college counselor in the spring semester. During the meeting, we will review the student's academic work to date, discuss areas of academic interest and strength, and develop a tentative course scheduling plan for their junior and senior year. A document summarizing the meeting will be shared with the student's parents/guardians and BUA advisor.

Putting effort into your classes and striving to reach your academic potential throughout high school will set you up for success and open up great opportunities for your future. Colleges recognize that the first year at a new high school represents a transition time, and pay attention to a student's overall grade trend in high school, often emphasizing the most recent grades available. An upward trend—showing growth and improvement

over time—demonstrates resilience and commitment to academic growth. However, all grades do appear on your transcript, and will be evaluated as part of a college application.

Junior Year

Although every year is important in the college process, the grades appearing during junior year can certainly hold more weight than the previous years; junior year grades, after all, are the final set of complete marks included in an application submitted in the senior year. The expectation is that students challenge themselves appropriately and perhaps even push themselves a bit more during this year as well as in the senior fall. The BUA curriculum lends itself to this expectation by introducing University options. Most students will have the opportunity to take two courses per semester at BU in their junior year.

Many highly selective colleges recommend that high school students take three years of laboratory science. Students take biology in their freshman year and chemistry in their sophomore year. Typically, students will take physics (depending on math level) or another lab science in junior year in addition to a foreign language. Those wishing to pursue a different path should discuss this option thoroughly with the college counselors.

Boston University offers a wide variety of language options, many that traditional high school students are not able to explore. An important note: if you enjoy your Classical language and would like to continue its study, you may do so at the University level once you've exhausted BUA's curriculum.

Because one semester of a college-level course is roughly equivalent to one year of high school level study, BUA graduates can demonstrate a fair amount of mastery in the area of language. The BUA curriculum offers students the opportunity to gain proficiency in both a Classical and modern language, which is compelling in the review process. Typically, colleges prefer to see students elect to take four full years of foreign language study. If you wish to pursue a different path, you should thoroughly discuss this option with the college counselors.

Senior Year

Senior year allows BUA students the opportunity to individualize their curriculum using the breadth of the Boston University course offerings. For college planning, we recommend students continue to take a balanced curriculum. Because senior thesis is the fifth course for all seniors, one of the five core subjects is dropped. Choose wisely, taking into consideration your future plans and academic interests. For example, if a student who wants to study economics drops math senior year, the admissions committee may have questions about their ability to succeed in a rigorous quantitative

program. Likewise, a student who plans to pursue a pre-med track should plan to enroll in a science course.

Think about the following when choosing your courses:

- Grades are still important. Be mindful of your abilities and your past record when choosing your courses.
- Students must complete four years of English to graduate from BUA. The senior year English requirement can be satisfied in one of four ways: 1) a senior English seminar at BUA (one-semester courses, offered in both the fall and spring semesters), 2) any EN course at BU (including Creative Writing), 3) a WR 120 or 150 course at BU, or 4) a Literature in (English) Translation course at BU.
- Students must complete calculus by the end of their senior year to graduate. Many students who finish calculus prior to senior year want to continue on with math study. Semester-long courses in Calculus II and Multivariate Calculus are offered at BUA, and many advanced math courses can be found at BU. Many colleges prefer to see four years of math study regardless of intended major, so please see the college counselors to discuss your options. Students wishing to take a math course at the University should consult with the Associate Head of School, the college counselors, and the BUA math department.
- Prospective science majors should consult with the Associate Head of School or the college counselors and BUA math and science faculty to determine an appropriate science course to take in senior year.
- Students thinking about following a pre-med and/or engineering track in college should know that medical schools will look at your BU courses in your application, paying particular attention to your math and science performance.

The most important thing to remember entering senior year is that it takes time to adjust to having an academic course load equivalent to a full-time undergraduate student. Although the BUA curriculum is rigorous and often as demanding as the University, students need to remember that BU professors have very different expectations for their students in terms of attendance, production, number of assessments, grading policies, and extra help. For example, at BUA, teachers might be more willing to extend a deadline if a student is sick; this may not be the case at the University. Overall, students are required to be self-advocates and to demonstrate independence. These skills will be indispensable after graduation from BUA, but when choosing courses, please be mindful that a class that “looks easy” may not be so easy - not because of the material, but because the instructor has a different style of teaching and learning. BUA attempts to connect with all University professors teaching BUA students about a student’s progress, but the professors are in no way obligated to tell us if a student is missing class or not understanding the material. It is vital that students be open and honest with parents and BUA to help assess if we need to intervene.

Senior Thesis

The Senior Thesis is the pinnacle of the academic experience at BUA. The amount of work required to produce this project is equivalent to any other academic course. BUA teachers will provide a specific structure and benchmarks for students to achieve, and a letter grade will be awarded each semester to assess the student's progress (the first semester letter grade does get reported to colleges when we send out midyear transcripts for seniors in mid-January). Students should choose a topic they want to invest a significant amount of time exploring. This topic can be grounded in any discipline and does not need to reflect a student's intended major. The thesis offers BUA students an opportunity few high school students have to distinguish themselves as true scholars. It is critical that students be prepared to discuss and highlight their thesis experience throughout the college admissions process, particularly in the interview.

Students will work with one BUA advisor and one outside advisor (often a BU professor, but if not, an individual considered a content expert) throughout their senior year as they complete their thesis. From a practical point of view, it is helpful if students choose advisors who have taught them previously, will instruct them during the senior year, or with whom they have worked in a lab. This allows students to see a professor on a regular basis and read materials relevant to their particular area of inquiry.

Applying to Boston University

Boston University Academy students must complete an application if they wish to be considered for admission to BU.

BUA students who apply to BU will be granted admission to most of BU's undergraduate 4-year programs if they meet the following criteria:

- Earn a 3.0 cumulative GPA in academic year University coursework by the time of application
- Have no grade of D or F in any BUA or BU course(s)
- Have no reportable disciplinary infraction(s)

Students not meeting these benchmarks may still apply to BU and will still be considered for admission, but they will not have the benefit of knowing whether they will be admitted before April of their senior year.

NOTE: The College of Fine Arts program requires additional review. BUA students are not eligible to apply for the College of General Studies or Metropolitan College.

Boston University Academy Profile and Transcript

Colleges and universities look at each applicant's academic experience in the context of their academic community and curricular offerings, and each high school sends a school profile with each application to better explain the academic experience. Our current year profile can be found on the BUA website.

BUA does not report class rank or grade point average, and as such, neither appear on the transcript. Likewise, standardized test scores are not included on the BUA transcript; if desired, students will self-report standardized test scores on the Common Application, or in rare cases, send them directly from their College Board and/or ACT account to the colleges to which they apply. To distinguish between BUA and University courses, BUA courses are clearly labeled 'Honors' level, while BU courses are marked 'Undergraduate' level. Only final grades appear for semester- or year-long courses; mid-semester and exam grades are not included. NOTE: For seniors applying to colleges, midyear transcripts sent during the application cycle may include midyear grades for year-long courses still in progress.

Life Beyond the Classroom

The college admissions process in the United States is about much more than a combination of academic achievement and standardized test scores. Colleges and universities are looking to bring in a group of students each year that will positively impact their community both in and out of the classroom. While building a class, many institutions hope that their incoming freshman cohort contains enough students to fill different niches around campus. Unfortunately for the applicant, it is impossible to assess the institutional needs of a college or university, which may change from year to year. Although intellectual endeavors are most important, many schools want to know who you are as a person, what interests and skills you will bring to the community, and how you distinguish yourself from other academically excellent applicants.

There is no secret formula for what you should do with your free time. There is no right answer, so we encourage you to join clubs and participate in activities that you have a genuine interest in and that bring you joy and satisfaction. Colleges are truly looking for what motivates you and what you find meaningful. Pursue your interests with gusto. If you love to write, join the newspaper or literary magazine. If you find whales fascinating, maybe a part-time job at the New England Aquarium is up your alley.

Some students have become specialists in a particular area. As an example, a student interested in environmental studies might choose to take oceanography and environmental science during their senior year, help refine a recycling program at BUA, do summer programs tagging sea turtles, and write a college essay about a camping experience. By doing this, the student is showing clear commitment and direction and has created a nice theme to the application. This student may seem desirable to some schools because of a clear and distinct passion.

Other students may be seen as generalists. As an example, a student might be undecided about a potential college major but has a passion for science. In school, the student is active with both the Robotics Team and Model United Nations. The student's senior thesis topic is about a particular poet, and their college essay makes connections between poetry and astronomy. This student's application highlights many different interests. This student is compelling to colleges for breadth of interest, whereas the first applicant is compelling for a more specific interest. As long as the interests are genuine, both applicants will demonstrate compelling extracurricular involvement to colleges.

Beyond formal activities, colleges also want to know about your interests and hobbies, and about your work experience and family obligations. Many times, a hobby might turn into a potential major or career. Sometimes an interesting hobby can make you stand out as an applicant. Getting a pilot's license, building custom surfboards, teaching yourself old English, knitting, photography, baking, collecting beetles – these are examples of activities that showcase a side of your personality that the admissions officers don't see by traditional standards. Similarly, colleges understand that part-time work, chores around the house, caring for a younger sibling or a grandparent, or

otherwise supporting your family could be a critical part of your life. Be sure to include all of these things in a resume, an essay, or an interview!

Finally, given the parameters at BU, it would be virtually impossible for you to exhaust the academic offerings, but colleges may be particularly impressed if you take advantage of what BU offers outside of the classroom. Have you attended lectures in your area of interest? Did you go the extra mile with your thesis and do research over the summer? Did you work in a laboratory to assess your interest in chemistry? Colleges recognize that you are privileged to attend a school like BUA and want to know that you have made the most of that opportunity.

Summer Programs, Employment, and Internships

Like every other aspect of the college application process, the media has placed a lot of emphasis on summer programs. A multi-million-dollar industry has emerged with special summer programs to help build resumes and boost college applications. The idea that these pricey programs are a ticket into prestigious school “X” is extremely misleading. What is most important is that you are doing *something* with your day other than playing video games or lounging by the pool (unless you’re a lifeguard!). Admission officers put these programs into the context of your application. Does it make sense that you spent the summer in Costa Rica tagging sea turtles or does it look like your parents made you go? When planning your summer, do something that makes sense. A student interested in science may secure a lab job, while another student may scoop ice cream. A student whose parents didn’t go to college may really benefit from a summer program offered at a university. As with all extracurricular endeavors, do something you want to do because you like it – not because it will look good on an application. And oftentimes, an old-fashioned summer job at McDonald’s or Dunkin’ goes just as far (if not further) with college admission officers as other summer programs.

Feel free to stop by the College Counseling Office for information, talk to teachers, talk to friends, and review the bulletin board outside the Office to gather some ideas of what to do over the summer.

Standardized Testing

Standardized testing will be part of most students' college application process. More and more colleges are becoming "test-optional" or flexible, which means that for some institutions the testing results don't always matter as much in their admission process as one might think. For more information about schools who are test-optional, please visit fairtest.org. There are many different testing policies and it's important to check each college/university's website for their specific policy around standardized testing requirements.

Even if a student plans to apply to a college where reporting scores is optional, it is still a good idea to take the exams seriously and prepare for them accordingly. As of Spring 2021, there are four types of exams a student can take during his or her time in high school. Not all are recommended, but they are described here in detail. Please note that all juniors should take the PSAT in October. We strongly recommend that sophomores take the Mock PSAT and Mock ACT that we offer in April.

Most colleges who require standardized test scores will accept either the SAT or the ACT. Students typically take their first official standardized test in the spring of their junior year.

Below is a timeline of exams that BUA students typically follow. During the sophomore course planning meeting, college counselors will discuss the testing timeline with students, and this individualized plan will be updated and evaluated accordingly through the student's junior and senior years.

Sophomore Year: Mock PSAT in April
 Mock ACT in May

Junior Year: PSAT in October
 Mock ACT (fall)
 SAT by March OR ACT by April

Senior Year: Testing in senior fall should be to raise a specific test score, if recommended in testing plan
 SAT: offered in August, October and November
 ACT: offered in September and October

To register for the SAT, visit www.collegeboard.com. Other important information about registration:

1. When setting up your College Board account, keep track of your username and password.
2. The BUA CEEB Code is 220202.

3. Always use your full legal name and address when registering for these exams; it is important that college admissions offices be able to match your test scores with your application.
4. Please feel free to stop by the College Counseling Office for assistance with SAT or ACT registration.

To create an account and register for the ACT, visit www.act.org. The above items are relevant when registering for the ACT, as well.

PSAT/NMSQT

The following is from the College Board website:

“PSAT/NMSQT stands for Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. It's a standardized test that provides firsthand practice for the SAT Reasoning Test™. It also gives you [as a high school junior] a chance to enter National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) scholarship programs.

The most common reasons for taking the PSAT/NMSQT are:

- to receive feedback on your strengths and weaknesses on skills necessary for college study. You can then focus your preparation on those areas that could most benefit from additional study or practice.
- to see how your performance on a standardized test possibly required for college admission consideration might compare with that of others applying to college.
- to enter the competition for scholarships from the National Merit Scholarship Corporation (junior year only).
- to help prepare for the SAT. You can become familiar with the kinds of questions and the exact directions you will see on the SAT.
- to receive information from colleges when you check "yes" to the Student Search Service.

Sophomores are strongly encouraged to take a Mock PSAT in April because it allows the student to become familiar with the format of the test. We also recommend that sophomores take a Mock ACT in April or May which will allow them to compare the two assessments to determine which is the better fit. Many students find that the greatest difficulty they have with testing is budgeting their time efficiently; practicing allows one to focus on the format rather than the substance, knowing there is nothing to lose.

Juniors taking the exam are automatically considered for participation in the National Merit Scholarship Competition. Students scoring in the top 2% of all test takers are recognized as Commended Scholars. Students may also be named as a Semifinalist and be asked to complete an application and essay to be considered as Finalists. The top one-half percent of test takers make it to Finalist status. Commended and Semifinalists are typically notified of these designations in September of the senior year.

The SAT

The SAT Test is not offered at BUA, as we are not a Test Center. Students should register for the test via the College Board website and select a testing site close to home (usually the local public high school).

Most colleges will ‘superscore’ the SAT (take the highest Evidence-Based Reading and Writing and Math scores from multiple exams) when determining the score they use to evaluate applications. This allows students to feel comfortable taking the exam more than once without fear of “doing worse.” However, studies routinely show that students do not score better after the second or third test sitting; any student planning to test more than that should speak with the college counselors for guidance.

The vast majority of colleges and universities allow students to self-report standardized test scores on the Common Application (or other application that they utilize). Students should consult the college counselors about reporting scores, as it may be the case that our guidance will vary for the different schools on their list.

If required by a college, official standardized test scores must be sent by the student – this is your responsibility and should be done well in advance of the deadline. The college counselors are happy to assist students in accessing their scores through the testing agencies and submitting them to colleges.

ACT

The ACT is not offered at BUA, as we are not a Test Center. Students should register for the test via the ACT website and select a testing site close to home (usually the local public high school).

The ACT also gives students the chance to report their ‘superscore’ (the highest scores from each section over multiple exams), however some colleges may not use superscoring in their review process. Refer to each college/university admission webpage for specific testing requirements. We recommend registering for the ACT **without the** optional writing (essay) section, since there are so few colleges and universities that consider it at this time. In 2025, the ACT made the science section optional, but since colleges are still determining if they’ll require and/or consider the science section, we recommend registering for the ACT **with** the optional science section.

If required by a college, official standardized test scores must be sent by the student – this is your responsibility and should be done well in advance of the

deadline. The college counselors are happy to assist students in accessing their scores through the testing agencies and submitting them to colleges.

Test Preparation

As more colleges and universities have implemented test-optional policies, it is important to keep in mind that standardized scores are just one part of your holistic application; admissions officers are also carefully considering your coursework, essays, extracurricular activities, recommendations, among other factors. While there may be value in spending time preparing for these assessments, we urge you to keep this part of the process in perspective.

Should students be interested in seeking support to prepare for standardized tests, BUA works with Compass Education Group and Revolution Prep, outside test prep companies, to provide resources during a student's junior year to prepare for the SAT and/or the ACT. We will share information with all BUA juniors in the fall with details on the fee-based courses. In addition, juniors have the opportunity to take free virtual full-length SAT and/or ACT practice tests through Compass and Revolution Prep.

Khan Academy offers free online resources for test preparation, as well; for more information, go to the College Board website. Some students also find that simply purchasing a test prep book and working diligently on an individual basis can be an effective and highly affordable way to prepare for the tests. Please see the college counselors for more information.

Advanced Placement (AP) Exams

Boston University Academy does not follow the Advanced Placement curriculum because students are enrolled in Boston University courses. This is a part of the mission and philosophy of BUA and, as such, our program doesn't teach to or align with AP exams. Students may hear on college tours that AP courses are "important" for the college process. Our admissions results at a wide range of colleges and universities show that they understand and appreciate the rigor of our program and know BUA students are well prepared to excel at the university level. The exception to this is the British University system – particularly students interested in Oxford and Cambridge. For most programs of study, both of these schools (and a few other UK universities) may require students to have a few AP exams under their belt prior to submitting an application.

Overall, very few BUA students take AP exams; if you think it makes sense to take an AP exam given your particular coursework and interests, please reach out to the college counselors.

Developing Your College List

The college process offers the opportunity to explore the incredible range of college and university programs around the country. There are close to 4,000 colleges in the United States alone, all with distinctive academic offerings, campus cultures, resources and opportunities – we encourage you to approach the exploration process ahead of you with a sense of optimism and adventure. A successful process begins with self-reflection: when do I feel most supported and challenged within an academic setting? When do I feel at home in a community? In the end we hope that each student has a balanced and well-researched list of colleges and universities that will leave the student with choices that align with their goals and values. Students who develop their list with an open mind to all the possibilities for the next phase of their academic journey systematically and with research should find applying to college easy...perhaps even fun!

Working with your college counselor closely to develop a balanced list of schools is crucial. The college counselors will provide a framework to understand your viability for admissions at different schools. Some schools will be considered an “unlikely” because of the sheer number and quality of applicants applying, but one school could be a “likely” to one student and a “reach” to another. Keep in mind that this is a highly personalized process and that the college counselors will work with you to determine an appropriate list. After self-reflection, students need to research schools by looking at viewbooks, taking advantage of virtual resources, and visiting campuses. Be very wary of relying solely on *US News and World Report*, *Princeton Review* and the *Fiske Guide*; approach your research with an open mind and consider the bias of any sources you are using.

BUA students generally apply to an average of eight to ten schools, and a balanced list typically includes options with a range of selectivity that will maximize a student’s potential: both schools that are appropriate reaches and others that are likely to offer admission and will help build confidence for students as they move through the process. Students should be sure that they have carefully researched all schools on their list and are excited about the possibility of attending any of them.

SCOIR

SCOIR is the platform BUA uses to help you in the college process. During the junior year, students (and their parents/guardians) will be granted access to college search tools, college list management, and useful admissions information about each college. In addition, students are able to store documents, keep ongoing journals, and fill out questionnaires that help inform college counselors about each student’s particular interests and background. Furthermore, the College Counseling Office manages the administrative functions of the process through the platform. It is incredibly important that students keep the information on SCOIR up-to-date and visit the platform regularly, especially during the second semester of junior year and all of senior year.

Self-Reflection

Before building a list, students should reflect deeply on the type of educational and social experience they want to have in college. This will help develop parameters for your college counselor to follow. Below you will see sample questions from the wish list activity we do with students, which help with this reflection. The major areas to think about are:

1. Field of study: undecided, liberal arts, or pre-professional?
2. Campus size and feel?
3. Social feel and school culture?
4. Geography?
5. Financial feasibility?

There are no “right answers,” but you need to find schools that are good “fits” across a range of viability.

Sample Junior Questionnaire Questions:

Academics

1. *How was your transition to high school academically?*
2. *What are your favorite classes so far in high school?*
3. *What, if any, field(s) of study do you think you might want to pursue in college and why?*
4. *Do your grades in school accurately reflect your academic ability?*
5. *Describe your ideal classroom experience.*
6. *Is there anything you would want to change about your BUA experience? If so, please describe.*
7. *What academic achievement are you most proud of and why?*
8. *Are there any outside intellectual interests you have pursued during high school? If so please describe.*

Extracurricular Activities

1. *What are your favorite/most meaningful extracurricular/arts/athletic activities? Why?*
2. *What are your hobbies and other interests?*
3. *What are some activities you do with your family?*
4. *What (if any) jobs have you had during high school (please describe)?*
5. *What (if any) research positions have you had during high school (please describe)?*
6. *What (if any) awards or recognitions have you won during high school?*
7. *What have you done during the summer months during high school (please describe)?*

Self-Reflection

1. *What does leadership mean to you?*
2. *How would your best friends and teachers describe you?*
3. *What is your favorite reading material outside of school and why?*
4. *Who is someone you look up to or inspires you? Why?*
5. *What is something you do well (this need not be academic in nature)?*
6. *Pick one of your unique identities (e.g. racial or ethnic background, gender identity, important extracurricular pursuit, religious affiliation, etc.) and describe its significance.*

7. *What do you want to be sure that a college admission officer knows about you? If you were to write your own recommendation, what would you absolutely include about yourself?*
8. *How can your college counselor best support you?*

College

1. *Why do you want to go to college?*
2. *What are the top three things you are looking for in a college?*
3. *What are you looking forward to in the college process? What do you fear most about the process?*
4. *Please describe the social atmosphere at your ideal college.*
5. *Please describe the academic atmosphere at your ideal college.*
6. *Would you consider going out of the country for college? If so, where?*
7. *What geographic regions would you consider in attending college?*
8. *What size student body would you consider when looking at college?*
9. *What type of environment, rural, suburban, urban (small city), urban (large city)?*

The Campus Visit

The campus visit can be one of the most helpful aspects of the college research process. In recent years, colleges and universities have greatly enhanced the virtual tools available for college exploration on their websites and there are a wide range of guides that provide helpful insight into college and university options. But many students find that actually stepping foot onto a specific campus is the best way to truly understand the atmosphere, spirit and culture of an institution. Although you may not be able to visit prior to being admitted, the College Counseling Office strongly recommends visiting schools during the spring of your junior year and the summer before senior year. There may be some select open house programs and interviews to attend in the fall of senior year, but the BUA curriculum does not lend itself well to missing school during senior year. Fall visits should be reserved for second trips, or long-distance trips that could only be planned at a specific time.

A secondary purpose to a visit, outside of understanding the particular campus, is called “demonstrated interest.” For many colleges, gauging an applicant’s interest in attending becomes a part of the discussion for the admissions committee. One of the best ways to let a school know you want to attend is to participate in the tour and information session. Be sure to register in advance online, since this will be reflected in their online system. Interviewing is also a way to show interest in a school and learn more about its culture and programs. Note that virtual engagement – participating in a Zoom information session and tour or a virtual interview – is another way to demonstrate interest.

It is important to plan ahead of time to schedule visits. Follow instructions on each university’s website for reserving a spot on a tour or to participate in a particular program. Some schools welcome “walk-ins,” some only have tours during particular times of day, some only offer information sessions during certain times of year, and some schools have different calendars and may not be holding classes when you think they might be. It is critical to do research ahead of time to maximize the effectiveness of

your visits. If, because of time, you are stuck with a choice between an information session and tour, always choose the tour. It is a better way to see more of the campus in a short amount of time. Keep an open mind on any campus tour; your guide is just one student of many attending that institution. If you are interested in Classics and your tour guide is a physics major who doesn't know much about the Classics department, don't get too discouraged; continue to get a sense of the school as you walk around, not just the personality of one tour guide.

In the Appendix, you will find a list of schools in "clusters" that can help as you plan visits to schools in close proximity to each other. We recommend that you not attempt to visit more than two schools a day, and it is wise to wear proper attire for walking and inclement weather (not all schools provide umbrellas, but they *will* keep you outside in the rain or snow during a tour).

If you are visiting colleges with your family, it is important to come up with a game plan and communicate this to each other prior to making the visit. Parents should note that it is important for students to make appointments on their own, sign in at the reception area on their own and take the opportunity to ask their own questions on the tour and info session. Students have different methods of determining if the school is a good fit for them. It is important for parents and students to give each other room to explore the campus from their own vantage point. Parents may ask embarrassing questions, and students may avoid asking questions they don't see as important. We suggest that each visitor (family member and student) keep a journal and after each visit write down their impressions BEFORE talking with each other about their perspectives. For example, consciously or not, a student might decide they didn't like a particular school only because their mother stated she was ready to move in on the tour. By having time to reflect on her own, the student may be able to really articulate why she enjoyed or disliked her visit. Parents are then able to read as well as listen to their children.

During your visit, do the official visit activities, but also plan to spend additional time on each stop. On certain campuses, you may want to schedule an appointment with a particular department, sit in on a class (if possible), sit in the dining hall or student union and talk to current students, or visit other areas of interest not shown on the tour (additional residence halls, art facilities, science labs, athletic fields, radio stations, etc.). The College Counseling Office can also put you in touch with BUA alumni attending various colleges, who might be willing to host you or take you to a class.

Missing BU classes requires a lot of planning. Talk to your professors well ahead of time about potential college visits that might require missed class time. Some courses have a limited number of excused absences. College visits may or may not be considered an excused absence, depending on the instructor.

Finally, have fun! This is a great opportunity to see different parts of the country, spend time with your family before leaving for four years, and a chance to really see places where you could end up living and studying. Make sure to take time in the evening to

see local sites, eat in area restaurants, relax and enjoy. There is no prize for most colleges seen.

High School Visits

Every fall, many colleges and universities visit BUA to meet with our students. Each college has a different approach and style to these sessions, but overall this is a tremendous opportunity to connect with a person who might very well read and evaluate your application. This is also an opportunity to demonstrate interest in a particular college. Because BUA is so small, representatives often take advantage of these meetings as a time to get to know students as individuals. It is common for them to remember a student's questions during these meetings when reviewing an application later in the winter. Students are **not** allowed to miss an academic commitment to meet with visiting college representatives, rather students should check in with the college counselors a few days before a visit to make known any conflicts. The college counselors will advise on appropriate steps.

The College Counseling Office will share the schedule of college visits in SCOIR and will remind students of the visit schedule each week.

Utilizing the BUA Alumni Network

The BUA Alumni Relations Office maintains a list of former BUA students interested in serving as a resource for current BUA students. If you are interested in connecting with a BUA alum who attends/attended a college that you're interested in, reach out to the college counselors and they'll provide you with their contact information.

The Final List

By the end of junior year, you should have a working list of about 15-25 schools. Nothing is set in stone, and your list can be completely different as you do research and visit colleges over the summer. In the fall, we will do our best to help you narrow the list to approximately 10 schools, with appropriate balance; in April of senior year, we want you to have options to consider that align well with your interests and goals. Where you are in September might be completely different than when you have decisions in hand in April. Having a balanced and diverse list of schools you are enthusiastic about will help avoid disappointment in the end. For most students, we encourage an application to Boston University because of our special relationship, especially if you meet the criteria for the Admission Agreement (see page 10).

The Application Process

Once you come up with your final list of schools, you will complete and submit applications. Application instructions can be found on a college's website. While nearly all colleges and universities in the U.S. use the Common Application, some require students to utilize a school-specific application. Schools who accept the Common Application require supplemental information, often including additional essays; this will be noted on the Common Application Member Section. Please proofread carefully and be sure to have the college counselors review your work before you submit any applications!

Many college admission offices break down application review by geographic region. Admission officers are assigned to certain territories, and are responsible for visiting high schools, interviewing, and serving as the primary reader for applicants from that area. The officer also is responsible for getting to know which high schools have unusual grading systems, curricular components or offerings. They can then present this relevant information if a committee is reviewing applications. At some institutions, the officer may be the key individual making the decision about a candidate's application, thus why it is so important to attend the high school visit at BUA; it is an opportunity to let the person reading your application put your face (and engaging personality) with your name.

Most applications have five primary components: the transcript (always the most important); standardized testing (if considered); one or more essays, extracurricular involvement, and recommendation letters. Admissions officers read all parts of the application carefully and do their best to understand each student's individual context. The strongest and most successful applications are those that authentically reflect the student's strengths, goals, and values; as you prepare your application, consider how you are utilizing each component of the application to tell your story.

Academic Transcript

The first thing colleges look at when reviewing an application is the transcript. Admissions officers consider both your level of achievement and the rigor of the courses you have taken. They will carefully review the BUA school profile along with your transcript to understand our context and the ways you have taken advantage of the opportunities available to you. Please review the section on "The Academic Experience" for more information on how this area of the application is evaluated in detail. In summary, you should strive to do your best work in courses that both appropriately challenge you and align with your interests and goals.

Personal Statement

The personal statement offers students the opportunity to share their voice and to give admissions committees a glimpse into what makes them who they are. The essay may help admissions committees distinguish between many academically qualified candidates, but no one aspect of the application will make or break your outcomes. Take the opportunity to expand on something already highlighted in your application, a particular activity or interest, or to share something that is not already apparent in the application. This is not an academic paper, so there is no required style or formula, but you should put your best foot forward. We encourage you to start the process early when you have the leisure to try different topics and find your voice. It goes without saying that the essay should be your own voice – while you may seek advice from your college counselor or from others who know you well, be wary of muddling your message with input from too many outside sources.

Prior to the start of senior year, we ask that you share a draft of your personal statement with your college counselor. Current essay prompts for the Common Application can be found at www.commonapp.org.

The essay prompts are typically reviewed each year and sometimes revised. Most students struggle with how to begin. Take a moment to brainstorm what you want the admissions office to know about you outside of the other application materials. Once you come up with those qualities, are there any experiences or moments in your life that illustrate them? Some of the best essays are about quiet moments in life where a simple connection is made or a small idea that “explodes” into something that gives insight into the author’s inner workings. You don’t have to try to be profound, but you do want to leave the reader with the feeling that they have learned something about you.

Here are a few tips regarding the essay that we believe can help you craft a strong personal statement.

1. Tell a story

This is a different challenge than the analytical essays that you may write for an English or history class. Invite the admissions officer into your life by sharing a story that offers insight into your background, experience, interests, or values. Having a narrative component to your essay is often an effective way to grab the reader’s attention. Show, don’t tell.

2. Choose a narrow topic.

You only have 650 words; you do not need to write an essay that tells your entire life story. Choose a moment, an experience, an example that is representative of who you are. The more focused you are able to be with your story, the more likely it will resonate with admissions officers.

3. Be authentic and have fun

Don't approach the personal statement by thinking you have to write what admissions officers want to read. If you had two minutes with the admissions committee, what would you tell them? Choose a topic that brings you joy to write about – if you are having fun and taking pride in what you produce, your essay will be the strongest it can be.

Supplemental Essays

In addition to the Common Application, many schools will ask you to respond to supplemental or Common Application 'member' questions. Typically these questions fall into three categories:

1. The most common supplemental question is “why do you want to attend?” When answering, be very specific, and show you have done your research on that school. Avoid regurgitating the university's homepage or the admissions office's information session. Dig deeper, and think about your interests and what skills, talents, or interests you have to contribute that make you a strong match for that particular institution.
2. Colleges frequently ask you to discuss your academic interests and goals. Be specific about your coursework and extracurricular engagement that has helped shape your interests. Convey your enthusiasm for the area of study and the kinds of questions you hope to explore at the university level.
3. Colleges also often ask more personal supplemental questions that help them gauge whether you understand and connect with their particular values and identity. They may ask you to write about how you contribute to or identity within your community, your impact in the extracurricular realm, or how you navigate challenging conversations or engage difficult issues.

To see examples of supplemental essay prompts students might be asked to respond to, click [here](#).

Extracurricular Involvement

Please review the section “Life Beyond the Classroom” for a more detailed look at how colleges view extracurricular involvement and developing your resume. In summary, admissions officers look to learn more about who you are through what you do with your free time; they consider your talent level, your leadership, and your commitment to activities in which you engage. Ultimately, your activity list is only as valuable as your ability to reflect on why you do what you do, how you impact those around you through your roles, and how this might shape your ability to contribute to your college community.

Letters of Recommendations

College applications typically require three letters of recommendation: a counselor recommendation and two teacher recommendations. The counselor recommendation is written by your college counselor and offers a summary of your overall experience in high school. The goal is to create a comprehensive picture of who the applicant is in the context of BUA and as a human being, highlighting personal qualities, anecdotes, and other information. To help your college counselor in this process, it is important to complete the questionnaires and other college counseling assignments completely and honestly, in addition to meeting with your college counselor regularly.

Students will work with their college counselor to select two BUA teachers by the end of their junior year to write their letters of recommendation. Teacher recommendations address primarily your performance in the classroom. Teachers are asked to evaluate your written and oral communication skills, motivation level, and contributions to classroom discussion. While the recommendation focuses on your achievements in the classroom, it adds a nice layer if you choose a teacher who has also supervised you in an activity or one with whom you frequently spend time. You need not ask the teacher in whose class you earned the highest grade; sometimes a teacher who has witnessed your willingness to put in extra effort and ask for help can better speak to your strengths as a student. Your college counselor will help you identify which two teachers may be your strongest advocates.

Additional Letters of Recommendation

Generally, we discourage additional letters of recommendation because many colleges discourage them. With significant jumps in the size of application pools, and little to no increase in staffing, admission offices are at full reading capacity, and extra letters of recommendation may be ignored. There are exceptional circumstances though that might warrant an extra recommendation; please see your college counselor to discuss whether your situation merits such a letter.

Interviews

Some universities require interviews, others recommend them, and others don't offer the opportunity at all. Most likely you will have to do at least one college interview during the process. Each institution is different in how they perform interviews and how they utilize them in the evaluation of candidates. Some schools rely on their network of alumni to do the bulk of the interviews; others employ current seniors to engage with applicants. Regardless of how and why they use the interview, it is important to take some time to prepare.

The College Counseling Office is happy to help you prepare for your interview; we offer 'mock' interviews each year for juniors and seniors as part of our program and are happy to offer them to any student upon request. For many, this could be the first time since your BUA interview that you have done a formal interview. The goal of the interview should be two-fold for the applicant: 1) to show the university who you are as a person (i.e. put a face and personality to the application they may receive), and 2) to learn more about the institution from someone intimately acquainted with the place. This means that in preparation, you need to not only think about what an interviewer might ask you, but also to prepare questions which show you have truly done some research on the college.

Overall, the best advice we can give you is to showcase your authentic self and treat this as the two-way conversation it is intended to be. Remember, the university is trying to see if you are a good match intellectually and socially for their community.

Frequently Asked Questions:

How should I sign up for the interview?

Visit the college's website – there you will find information about how to set up an on-campus or off-campus interview. For on-campus interviews, you may need to call the office, or select a certain "interview spot" on a given day at a given time. For off-campus interviews (usually conducted by alumni), you may need to fill out an online form.

How should I prepare for an interview?

Practice! Mock interviews will help you get used to talking about yourself in this setting. Schedule one with one of the college counselors or if a local college offers interviews during the summer – sign up! You might not apply to that particular college, but you could get in some good practice. Be sure to reflect on your experiences during high school and think about how you might want to talk about these things without rambling. Finally, read the college website and other publications and highlight the information that is of interest to you.

What should I wear?

Most interviewers appreciate when students look like they care about their appearance. Be comfortable, but presentable. A tie, suit, pantsuit or dress is not necessary. You do not need to change your personal style for an interview, but you certainly should look like you care about your appearance and the fact that you are interviewing.

Do I need to write a thank-you note?

You do not have to, but we would encourage it in most cases. Sending a thoughtful email or hand-written card can make a nice follow-up impression on an interviewer. Write something that indicates you were paying attention during your visit and interview.

Some sample questions that might be asked at a college interview:

- Tell me about yourself.

- Why are you interested in our institution?
- How have you contributed to your community?
- What do you think of our campus?
- Tell me more about the curriculum at your school?
- What have you enjoyed about your time at your high school?
- Is there a particular academic area that you find to be more interesting than others? Why?
- What was your favorite course in high school?
- Was there a particular paper or project you enjoyed during high school?
- What do you do with your free time?
- In what sorts of extracurricular activities do you participate? Why have you chosen to continue with them?
- How would your teachers describe you as a student?
- How would your friends describe you?
- What did you do over the summer?
- What have you read lately?
- Are there particular social issues about which you feel passionate?

Demonstrating Interest

Some colleges and universities want to admit the strongest students possible as well as students who are most likely to accept the offer of admission. In some cases, when you attend a recruitment event, or visit campus, admissions offices track these contacts. In general, this does not apply to most highly selective universities or to large public institutions who don't have the bandwidth for this kind of tracking. Be sure to take advantage of every opportunity – local receptions, representative visits to BUA, on-campus events when possible, interviews, college fairs – and remember that such contacts will also help you as an applicant to learn more about the college and determine whether or not the institution is the right place for you. Bear in mind that often the best way to demonstrate interest is by submitting a strong application and utilizing the supplemental essays to show why you are a strong match for the institution.

Early Application Programs

It is best to make the decision about whether or not to apply early action or early decision on an individual basis; please consult with your college counselor to see if this is the right process for you depending on the schools you are considering, and your particular strengths/interests. There can be differences in admissions rate particularly between Early Decision and other applications plans; if you are considering Early Decision (a binding commitment), you should be certain that you have carefully researched the school to know that it is the very best fit for you academically, socially, and financially.

Please refer to the terminology section for definitions and details on Early Decision (ED), Early Action (EA), Restrictive (or Single Choice) EA, Regular Decision, Rolling Admission and Waitlist (WL).

Generally, we are strong advocates of students applying Early Action (non-binding) whenever possible, as long as the student feels confident in their end-of-junior-year grades, has completed their testing, and can thoughtfully complete the application ahead of an early deadline. Depending on the school, Early Action can provide some advantage in the admission process, because students are demonstrating interest and are putting their best foot forward when all admissions places remain available. It can also be tremendously helpful to receive good news early in the process, which can help in finalizing your list.

Colleges use Early Decision in their process because they are able to admit students they are certain will attend due to the binding nature of the program, which allows them to more precisely manage their enrollment. As a result, the admit rate in the Early Decision round can be significantly higher, and there is a logistical benefit to presenting your application when admissions officers have more time to review a smaller applicant pool. However, just because the admit rate is higher, the bar for admission is not necessarily lower than in the Regular Decision pool – you should still target an Early Decision option where your academic credentials align with the profile of the admitted class. We encourage you to discuss any potential Early Decision options with your college counselor to determine where a binding application could be most impactful. While we understand there are strategic considerations when it comes to Early Decision, in the end we only want you to make a binding commitment to a school where you are sure you will thrive and be happy.

A Note about Independent College Consultants

The BUA College Counseling team is your student's primary and best-resourced advocate in the college process. We pride ourselves on providing honest, professional and thorough support to BUA students and families. The independent college counseling profession came into existence as a result of inadequate counseling resources at public high schools. Some BUA families wonder if they should hire an independent counselor, but given the breadth and depth of resources our office can provide, we do not feel this is a necessary use of your energy and resources. Time spent with an independent counselor can lead to conflicting and sometimes inaccurate advice, putting the student in a stressful and even detrimental position. The more time and effort a student puts into the process with us, the more significant an impact we can have on their journey. It is also important to keep in mind that we are the primary advocates for students in the process and have the opportunity to engage directly with admissions officers to ask questions and understand context.

In the case that you determine your child will benefit from the services of an independent counselor, we would ask that you share their contact information so that we can work collaboratively to support your child. It is also critical that students remain fully engaged with BUA's thoughtful and deliberate college counseling process.

Financial Aid and Scholarships

Forms

Two forms that families applying for financial assistance should be aware of are the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and the College Board's CSS (College Scholarship Service) Profile. The FAFSA is required by all US colleges and universities, and is usually available online by October 1. In recent years, the FAFSA was simplified from ~100 questions to 36 questions to make it easier for families to complete the form. Not all schools require the CSS Profile; a list of the institutions that utilize it can be accessed [here](#).

Both forms are available only online:

FAFSA – <https://fafsa.ed.gov>

CSS Profile – <https://student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile>

Sources and Purposes of Student Financial Aid

There are two primary sources of financial aid:

- 1) **Need-based aid**, which constitutes the major portion of assistance available for post- secondary education. Eligibility for need-based aid is based upon the difference between the cost-of-attendance and the family's calculated Student Aid Index.
- 2) **Merit-based aid**, which is generally given to students in recognition of special skills, talent and/or academic ability.

Within the category of need-based assistance, there are two types of aid:

- 1) **Grant aid** which, as the name implies, does not have to be repaid and does not require a service commitment.
- 2) **Self-help** assistance which consists of loans (which require repayment) and employment (part-time jobs, often within the institution).

These types of assistance, grant aid and self-help aid, are derived primarily from four sources – institutional, private, state, and federal. Institutional sources of aid are provided and controlled by the institution, while private sources of aid are derived from community organizations, foundations, professional associations, corporations and commercial lending institutions. To learn more about these opportunities, you may refer to www.fastweb.com.

State sources of aid are usually administered through a state agency and include grants and scholarships. The federal government is the largest single source of student financial aid funds. The programs include Federal Pell Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, and Federal Work-Study – as well as Federal Stafford Student Loans and Federal PLUS Loans. Funds for these programs are appropriated annually by congress and a brief description of each program follows:

1. Federal Pell Grant – Pell Grants, for many students, provide a “foundation” of financial aid, to which aid from other federal and non-federal sources may be added. Unlike loans, grants don’t have to be paid back. To apply for a Pell Grant, you simply file a FAFSA. By filing a FAFSA you will automatically be considered for the Pell Grant Program and the institutions that you list in the space provided on the form.

To determine if you are eligible, the Department of Education uses a standard formula, revised and approved every year by congress, to evaluate the information you report when you apply for a Pell Grant. The formula produces a Student Aid Index number. Your Student Aid Report (SAR) contains this number and will tell you whether you are eligible for a Pell Grant. Pell awards will continue to be limited with a ceiling which may vary each year.

2. Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants – A Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant is for undergraduate students having the greatest financial need (with priority given to Pell Grant recipients), and it does not have to be paid back.

The Department of Education guarantees that each participating school will receive enough money to pay the Pell Grants of its students. An SEOG is different. Each school receives a set amount of money for SEOGs, and when that money is gone, there are no more SEOGs for that year. Therefore, it is imperative to meet the school’s financial aid application deadlines.

3. Federal Work Study Program – The Federal Work Study Program provides jobs for undergraduate students who need financial aid. Your pay will be at least the current federal minimum wage, but it may also be related to the type of work you do and its difficulty. Your total FWS award depends on your financial need, the amount of money your school has for this program, and the amount of aid you get from other programs. The financial aid office at the college you plan to attend is responsible for determining your eligibility and will offer you the opportunity to apply for certain on-campus or off-campus FWS jobs.
4. Federal Direct Loans – Direct Loans are low-interest loans that are made to students. The idea is to provide loan options for students who might otherwise not be able to take out a loan with a private lender because of an insufficient credit history. There are two kinds of Federal Direct Loans - subsidized and unsubsidized. With a subsidized loan, the interest doesn't start adding up until after you leave school - the federal government pays the interest while you're in school. With an unsubsidized loan, you are responsible for the interest that accrues during your time in college. Unsubsidized loans are open to anyone, regardless of need, but subsidized loans are only offered to students who demonstrate financial need. Many students combine subsidized and unsubsidized loans to reach the maximum amount permitted each year.

5. Federal PLUS Loans - PLUS enables parents to borrow money for each dependent undergraduate student enrolled in school at least half time. Parents may finance up to the full cost of each student's education each academic year, minus grants and other financial aid received. Parents do not have to prove financial need; however, a credit check is required. Parents who do not pass the PLUS credit checks may still be eligible, if they have a credit-worthy, endorser. These loans have the highest interest rate of the federal loan programs.

Most institutions award financial aid as a “package,” which means that you receive a combination of scholarship or grant, loan and campus job. You can choose to accept none, some or all forms of assistance. Feel free to bring in your financial aid awards to the college counseling office if you’d like some assistance evaluating offers.

Net Price Calculators

All colleges are federally required to post a Net Price Calculator on their website. The NPC is intended to help families gain a sense of what a financial aid package might look like from individual colleges and can usually be found on the college’s financial aid page.

Not all NPCs are the same, though. Some NPCs ask very few questions and return less reliable results. Others ask many very specific questions and return clearer results. Some NPCs offer insight into how merit scholarships might impact a need-based financial aid decision, others don’t. In all cases, the resulting data is only as good as the data going in – so if you are estimating family income, asset values, etc., then the net price the calculator returns will be less reliable.

In the case of divorced parents, please know that common practice is to ask both parents to contribute to the cost of a student’s education. NPCs are not generally set up to calculate costs for divorced families – therefore each parent should expect to fill out the NPC separately, then adding together the two results to determine the total Student Aid Index.

Please save a copy of all NPC results, and file those away for comparison against actual financial aid packages – your copies may provide some leverage if a college offers your family less financial assistance than the NPC suggested.

[MyIntuition](#) is a quick online tool that provides a personalized estimate of college costs in three minutes by asking six basic questions. MyIntuition calculates the out-of-pocket cost for individual students by factoring in financial aid, grants, scholarships, loans, and work-study opportunities—making college affordability more transparent and accessible, especially for low- and middle-income students.

College Planning Calendar

JUNIORS

SEPTEMBER

- ___ Check College Counseling Office communications or SCOIR for colleges visiting BUA.
 - ___ Get a strong start on junior year classes.
 - ___ Get involved! Genuine investment in 1-2 activities is better than token participation in many.
 - ___ Register through BUA for the PSAT.
 - ___ Attend weekly junior college counseling seminars.
-

OCTOBER

- ___ Take the PSAT.
 - ___ Attend college representative visits at BUA; attend local receptions hosted by colleges.
-

NOVEMBER

- ___ Take advantage of a free Mock ACT for an unofficial early indication of ACT performance.
 - ___ Parents attend Junior Parent Night in mid-November.
 - ___ Register for AP exams, if recommended.
-

DECEMBER

- ___ Finish the fall semester strong in your BUA and BU courses.
- ___ Take advantage of the December break to relax and recharge.

JANUARY

- ___ Complete the first junior questionnaire.
 - ___ Attend First Junior Meeting with your college counselor.
 - ___ Continue college exploration and research.
 - ___ Parents attend Junior Parent Night in mid-to-late January.
-

FEBRUARY

- ___ Register for March SAT Test, if recommended.
 - ___ Attend Second Junior Meeting with your college counselor to develop a preliminary college research list that matches your interests and goals.
 - ___ Parents are encouraged to complete their Parent Narrative.
 - ___ Schedule spring break college visits if that works with your schedule.
-

MARCH

- ___ Register for April ACT, if recommended.
 - ___ Take SAT, if recommended.
 - ___ Register for SAT in May and/or June, if recommended.
 - ___ Use spring break as an opportunity to visit colleges; continue to research colleges on your preliminary college research list.
 - ___ Plan for summer job, volunteer experience, or research/internship opportunity.
-

APRIL

- ___ Attend Family Meeting with your college counselor.
- ___ Register for May SAT, if recommended.

- ___ Visit and research colleges. Attend BISCCA Fair in the Boston area.
 - ___ Work with your college counselor to identify two BUA teacher recommenders.
 - ___ Take ACT, if registered.
-

MAY

- ___ Register for June ACT or SAT Test, if recommended.
 - ___ Take SAT Test, if registered.
 - ___ Utilize SCOIR and other tools to research colleges of interest, note application types and deadlines.
-

JUNE

- ___ Take SAT Test, if registered.
 - ___ Continue to research colleges and plan summer visits, if possible.
 - ___ Attend the BUA college essay writing workshop.
 - ___ Register for July ACT, if recommended.
-

JULY

- ___ Register for August SAT, if recommended.
- ___ Take ACT exam, if registered.
- ___ Visit college campuses, participate in college interviews, work on college essay draft(s).
- ___ Have a conversation with your parent(s) about whether you will plan to apply for financial aid.

SENIORS

AUGUST

- ___ Register for September ACT, if recommended.
 - ___ Visit college campuses, participate in college interviews, work on college essay draft(s).
-

SEPTEMBER

- ___ Share your personal statement/college essay with your college counselor.
 - ___ Register for the October or November SAT, if recommended.
 - ___ Register for the October ACT, if recommended.
 - ___ Attend weekly senior college counseling seminars.
 - ___ Parents attend Senior Parent Night in mid-September.
 - ___ Attend meetings with college representatives visiting BUA.
 - ___ Attend September Senior Meeting with your college counselor.
 - ___ Edit and polish personal statement and begin working on school-specific essays.
 - ___ If applying to schools in the United Kingdom, complete the UCAS application.
 - ___ Reduce list of colleges keeping in mind balance.
 - ___ Take the ACT exam, if registered.
-

OCTOBER

- ___ Attend Common App Review Meeting with your college counselor.
- ___ Review your transcript and submit your Transcript Authorization Form.
- ___ Register and review for November SAT, if recommended.
- ___ Take SAT Test and/or ACT, if registered.
- ___ Attend college representative meetings.

___ Check financial aid requirements for schools to which you plan to apply EA or ED; begin FAFSA and/or CSS Profile, as needed.

___ Continue to work on college-specific essays.

NOVEMBER

___ Take the SAT Test, if registered.

___ Submit your Final College List to your college counselor.

___ Complete and submit University of California system application (open November 1-30), if interested.

___ Register for December ACT and/or SAT Tests, if needed.

___ Request interviews at colleges of interest, continue working on supplemental essays.

DECEMBER

___ Take ACT and/or SAT Tests, if registered.

___ Be aware of all application and financial aid deadlines.

___ Complete FAFSA and CSS Profile, if necessary.

___ Finish the fall semester strong in your BUA and BU courses.

___ Plan to submit all regular decision applications by mid-to-late December.

JANUARY

___ Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as needed for Regular Decision schools.

___ Attend college interviews by invitation.

FEBRUARY

___ Monitor application portals for application status. Let the College Counseling Office know if any credentials are missing from your admission files.

MARCH

- ___ Regular Decision results are released in mid-late March. Prepare for their arrival.
-

APRIL

- ___ Review your acceptances and financial aid offers with your college counselor.
 - ___ Visit the colleges of your choice before making the final decision.
 - ___ Notify the college of your choice. Submit enrollment deposit by May 1st (or by the college's enrollment deadline).
 - ___ Make decisions about any waitlist offers you may have received.
-

MAY

- ___ Notify schools you have decided not to attend.
 - ___ Ensure your SCOIR is updated with all of your college admission decisions.
 - ___ Send an official BU transcript from the BU registrar to your college destination once final grades are posted if you are interested in seeing if that will impact your placement in classes.
-

Helpful Websites and References

[SCOIR](#) – Web-based college research and application program (BUA students will receive log-in information in fall of junior year; parents are provided log-in information in January of child's junior year)

[Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority \(MEFA\)](#) – resource for students/families from Massachusetts applying for financial aid

[OSFA \(Office of Student Financial Assistance\)](#) – resource for students/families from Massachusetts applying for financial aid

[Fastweb](#) – personalized scholarship search tool

[College Board](#) – SAT, PSAT, CSS Profile, test registration, tools and tips

[ACT](#) – ACT registration, tools and tips

[National Association for College Admission Counseling](#) – web resources and national college fair information for students

[National Collegiate Athletic Association](#) - Information for the student athlete

[NCAA Eligibility Center](#) – Registration site for recruited athletes

[FAFSA](#) – Free Application for Federal Student Aid

[FAFSA FSA ID](#) – ID required for FAFSA application, submission

[CSS Profile](#) – Financial Aid form required by some private colleges

[FinAid](#) – personalized scholarship search tool

[FinAid calculator tool](#) – Loan, estimated family contribution calculations

[Common Application](#) – Home of the application, the list of schools accepting the application, additional requirements by each school

[Peterson's Guide](#) – Searchable database of college profiles, scholarships, etc.

[Cappex](#) – Search engine for scholarships

Appendix 1: Terminology

There are some terms and concepts with meanings specific to the college search and application process, including financial aid. Here are some we think are particularly helpful, originally edited from the Peterson's College Planner.

Accelerated study — This program allows you to graduate in less time than is usually required. For instance, by taking summer terms and extra courses during the academic year, you could finish a bachelor's degree in three years instead of four.

Admissions decisions:

- **Admit** — You're in! You are being offered admissions to the college to which you applied.
- **Deny** — You are not in. The decision is made by the college or university admissions committee and is forwarded to you and your high school.
- **Waitlist** — You are not in yet but have been placed on a waiting list in case an opening becomes available. Schools do not typically rank a waitlist; instead, they wait to see what "holes" they have in their freshman class before determining who to admit from the waitlist (if space is available). Sometimes a school might admit students from the waiting list who can erase a gender imbalance, or who have a particular academic or extracurricular interest. And oftentimes, schools are not able to offer (m)any students who are placed on the waiting list a spot in their class because they meet their enrollment targets through their initial offers of admission.
- **Defer** — You applied Early Decision or Early Action, but a final decision on your file is being postponed until the spring. Usually, this means a college wants to see your first semester grades from senior year, and/or they want an opportunity to reassess your candidacy in the context of their entire applicant pool.

American College Testing (ACT) Program Assessment — An alternative to the SAT, this test is offered at test centers. The ACT tests English, mathematics, and reading, and also offers an optional science reasoning section, which is recommended. An optional writing test is also available but it is not recommended to take it. The composite score is the average of all sections; the maximum score on each major section is 36.

Award package — This is the way colleges and universities deliver their news about student eligibility for financial aid or grants. The most common packages include Pell Grants, Loans, and Work Study.

Bachelor's or baccalaureate degree — The degree received after the satisfactory completion of a full-time program of study or its part-time equivalent at a college or university. The Bachelor of Arts (B.A) and the Bachelor of Science (B.S.) are the most common baccalaureates.

Candidates Reply Date Agreement (CRDA) — If admitted to a college (not in Early Decision), a student does not have to enroll until May 1. This allows time for a student to hear from all the colleges to which the student applied before having to make a commitment to any of them. This is especially important because financial aid packages vary from one school to another, and the CRDA allows time to compare packages before deciding. May 1 is a US reply date; students who have applied to schools outside of the US may be expected to make a final decision before that date.

College Scholarship Service (CSS) — When the federal government edited the FAFSA form many years ago, the College Board created this program to assist postsecondary institutions, state scholarship programs, and other organizations in measuring a family's financial strength and analyzing its ability to contribute to college costs. CSS processes the PROFILE financial form that students may use to apply for non-federal aid. This form is required by many private colleges and universities along with the FAFSA when seeking financial aid from these institutions. Participating colleges and universities indicate whether they require this form.

Common Application — The primary tool students use to apply to college. The Common Application is presently accepted by over 1,100 diverse institutions of higher education. Students complete the information on the standardized form and then submit it to any of the schools listed as accepting it. Some schools also require an additional supplementary application – consisting of school-specific questions and essays.

Cooperative education (co-op) — A college program that alternates between periods of full-time study and full-time employment in a related field. Students are paid for their work and gain practical experience in their major, which helps them apply for positions after graduation. It *can* take five years to obtain a baccalaureate degree through a co-op program.

Credit hours — The number of hours per week that courses meet are counted as equivalent credits for financial aid and used to determine your status as a full- or part-time student.

Cross-registration — The practice, through agreements between colleges, of permitting students enrolled at one college or university to enroll in courses at another institution without formally applying for admission to the second institution. This can be an advantage for students in a smaller college who might like to expand options or experience another learning environment.

Defer — the admissions decision is being moved to a later date.

Early Action (EA) — A non-binding application program through which a student applies to a college in the fall of senior year (typically by November), and receives a decision “early” (typically by mid-December). If accepted, the student is not obligated to attend that institution but can bank this admission and still apply to other colleges during the regular admission cycle.

Early Decision (ED) — A program through which a student applies to a college in the fall of senior year (typically by November), and receives a BINDING decision “early” (typically by mid-December). The student, a parent/guardian, and guidance counselor all must sign a contract with the school at the time of application that indicates that if accepted, the student is obligated to attend that institution. Some colleges offer two rounds of Early Decision with staggered deadlines. In some cases, applying ED I or ED II might offer a higher chance of admission than Regular Decision.

Federal Pell Grant Program — This is a federally sponsored and administered program that provides grants based on need to undergraduate students. Congress sets the appropriation each year, with maximum awards currently in the mid-\$6,000 range. This is “free” money because it does not need to be repaid.

Federal Direct Loan — A federal program based on need that allows a student to borrow money for educational expenses directly from the Department of Education. These loans may be either subsidized or unsubsidized.

Federal Work-Study Program — A federally financed program that arranges for students to combine employment and college study; the employment may be an integral part of the academic program (as in cooperative education or internships) or simply a means of paying for college.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) — This is the federal government’s instrument for calculating need-based aid. It is available online at studentaid.gov. The form is typically available in October; students should pay close attention to each school’s financial aid deadline to ensure they are given consideration for any aid for which they are eligible.

Financial aid gapping — The difference between the amount of a financial aid package and the cost of attending a college or university. The student and their family are expected to fill the gap through personal funds, loans, outside scholarship, etc.

Grants — These are financial awards that are usually dispensed by the financial aid offices of colleges and universities. The awards may be need- or merit-based. Most are need-based. Merit-based awards may be awarded on the basis of excellence in academics, leadership, volunteerism, athletic ability, or special talent, and are only available at certain colleges.

Greek life — This phrase refers to sororities and fraternities. These organizations can have great impact on the campus social life of a college or university.

Honors program — Honors programs offer an enriched, top-quality educational experience that often includes small class size, custom-designed courses, mentoring, enriched individualized learning, hands-on research, and publishing opportunities. A handpicked faculty guides students through the program. Honors programs are a great

way to attend a large school that offers enhanced social and recreational opportunities while receiving an Ivy League-like education at a reduced cost.

Independent study — This option allows students to complete some of their credit requirements by studying on their own. A student and his or her faculty adviser agree in advance on the topic and approach of the study program and meet periodically to discuss the student's progress. A final report is handed in for a grade at the end of the term.

Interdisciplinary — Faculty members from several disciplines contribute to the development of the course of study and may co-teach the course.

Internship — This is an experience-based opportunity, most often scheduled during breaks in the academic calendar, whereby a student receives credit for a supervised work experience related to his or her major.

Major/Concentration — The concentration of a number of credit hours in a specific subject. Colleges and universities often specify the number of credits needed to receive a major, the sequence of courses, and the level of course necessary to complete the requirements.

Merit awards, merit-based scholarships — More “free” money, these awards are based on excellence in academics, leadership, volunteerism, athletic ability, and other areas determined by the granting organization, which can be a college or university, an organization, or an individual. They are not based on financial need.

Need-blind — Admissions decisions made without reference to a student's financial aid request, that is, an applicant's financial need is not known to the committee at the time of decision.

Open admissions — A policy of admission that does not subject applicants to a review of their academic qualifications. Many public junior/community colleges admit students under this guideline, that is, any student with a high school diploma or its equivalent is admitted.

PSAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test — This test, given in October, duplicates the kinds of questions asked on the SAT but is shorter. Usually taken in the junior year, the test also acts as a qualifying instrument for the National Merit Scholarship Awards Program.

Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) — Each branch of the military sponsors an ROTC program. In exchange for a certain number of years on active duty, students can have their college education paid for up to a certain amount by the armed forces.

Residency requirement — The term has more than one meaning. It can refer to the fact that a college may require a specific number of courses to be taken on campus to

receive a degree from the school, or the phrase can mean the time, by law, that is required for a person to reside in the state to be considered eligible for in-state tuition at one of its public colleges or universities.

Restrictive (or Single Choice) Early Action — A type of Early Action, non-binding application which limits additional EA and ED applications an applicant can submit.

Retention rate — The number and percentage of students returning for the sophomore year.

Rolling admissions — Though there may be a deadline for application submission, a college's freshman class is filled as applications are read and as admission decisions are read. This concept is used most often by state universities. Responses are received within three to four weeks. If admitted, a student is not required to confirm, in most cases, until May 1. Out-of-state residents applying to state universities should apply as early as possible.

SAT Reasoning Test — Also known as “board scores” because the test was developed by the College Board. The SAT consists of two major categories (‘Evidence-Based Reading & Writing’ and ‘Math’). It is given throughout the academic year at test centers. The maximum combined score is 1600.

Single Choice Early Action — See ‘Restrictive’ Early Action entry above.

Student Aid Index — Previously known as the Expected Family Contribution (EFC), this is a number calculated using a federally mandated formula based on information in the FAFSA. The SAI represents the amount of money a family is expected to contribute toward the education and is used to determine one's eligibility for need-based federal financial aid programs.

Waiver to view recommendations — Students sign a form electronically for the Common Application to waive their right to see a recommendation letter during the application process. This is in line with BUA's policy of not sharing recommendation letters with students.

Yield — The percentage of accepted students who will enter a college or university in the freshman class; these students have received formal acceptance notices and must respond by May 1 with their intention to enroll. The more competitive the school, the higher the yield percentage.

Appendix 2: Campus Visit Clusters

Boston Area

Boston University
Northeastern University
Harvard University
Boston College
Brandeis University
Tufts University
MIT
Babson College
Bentley College
Emerson College
Wellesley College
Olin College
Simmons College
Wentworth Institute of Technology
Wheaton College

Western Massachusetts Area

UMass Amherst
Smith College
Mount Holyoke
Amherst College
Williams College

Upstate New York

Skidmore College
Union College
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Syracuse University
Colgate College
Hamilton College
Cornell University
Ithaca College
University of Rochester (and
Eastman/Music)
Rochester Institute of Technology
Clarkson University
Hobart and William Smith Colleges

Connecticut/Rhode Island

University of Connecticut – Storrs
Campus
Connecticut College
Wesleyan University
Fairfield University
Trinity College
Yale University
Brown University
Providence College
Roger Williams University
University of Rhode Island
Rhode Island School of Design

Worcester Area

Clark University
College of the Holy Cross
Assumption College
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Vermont/New Hampshire/Maine

Middlebury College
University of Vermont
Bennington College
Champlain College
University of New Hampshire
Dartmouth College
College of the Atlantic
Bates College
Bowdoin College
Colby College
St. Michael's College

New York City

Barnard College
Columbia University
Cooper Union
The New School
Fordham University
New York University
Pace University
Hofstra University (Long Island)
Stevens Institute of Technology (NJ)
Fairleigh Dickinson University (NJ)
Rutgers University (NJ)
Drew University (NJ)

Philadelphia and Suburbs

University of Delaware
Drexel University
University of Pennsylvania
Temple University
Princeton University
Lehigh University
Lafayette College
Villanova University
Bryn Mawr College
Haverford College
Swarthmore College
Dickinson College
Gettysburg College
Franklin & Marshall College
Muhlenberg College
Ursinus College
St. Joseph's University

Washington DC/Baltimore Area

The George Washington University
Georgetown University
American University
Howard University
The Catholic University of America
University of Maryland – College Park
George Mason University (NoVA)
Johns Hopkins University
St Johns College
Goucher College
Loyola College of Maryland

Virginia/North Carolina

University North Carolina – Chapel Hill
University of Virginia
Duke University
Elon University
Hampton University
Wake Forest University
College of William & Mary
University of Richmond
Washington & Lee University
Davidson College
Guilford College

Ohio/Pittsburgh

Case Western Reserve University
Carnegie Mellon University
Allegheny College
University of Pittsburgh
Denison University
Miami University of Ohio
Ohio Wesleyan University
Kenyon College
Oberlin College
The Ohio State University
College of Wooster
Ohio University

Chicago/Southern Wisconsin

DePaul University
University of Chicago
Northwestern University
University of Wisconsin – Madison
Marquette University
Lake Forest College
Beloit College
Lawrence University
Ripon College
Kalamazoo College

Minnesota/Iowa/Colorado

Carleton College
Macalester College
St. Olaf College
University of Minnesota – Minneapolis
Grinnell College
Cornell College
University of Iowa
Colorado College
University of Colorado – Boulder
University of Denver
Air Force Academy

Northern California

Stanford University
University of California – Berkeley
University of California – Davis
University of California – Santa Cruz
Santa Clara University

Pacific Northwest

Lewis and Clark College
Reed College
University of Oregon
Willamette University
Evergreen State College
University of Puget Sound
Whitman College
University of Washington – Seattle
University of British Columbia

Atlanta Metro

Emory University
Agnes Scott College
University of Georgia
Georgia Tech
Morehouse College
Clark Atlanta University
Spelman College
Oglethorpe University
Savannah College of Art and Design
Mercer University

Southern California

University of Southern California
University of California – Los Angeles
University of California – San Diego
University of California – Santa Barbara
Loyola Marymount University
University of San Diego
Chapman University
Claremont Colleges (Claremont
McKenna, Harvey Mudd, Pitzer,
Pomona, & Scripps)
Occidental College
Pepperdine University
California Institute of Technology
(CalTech)
Whittier College
University of Redlands