



An Introduction
to
The College Process at Taft

January 15, 2011

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Please feel free to contact any of us at any time.

Welcome to the college process!

Even if you've been through it, we know this process always feels a little overwhelming at the outset, but you should know that we will be with you every step of the way. Our goals are simple: to educate, serve, support, inform and assist you and your child as you work to find the right college. Ideally, this is a partnership between you, your child, and your child's counselor. That partnership is dependent upon open communication and a sincere effort on each of our parts. Let us share with you what our hopes are for each member of the partnership:

THE COUNSELOR'S ROLE

Our goal, as your child's counselor, is to support him or her fully and help find the 'right' school. That may be putting it simply, but that's really all it is. To reach that goal, we will:

- Meet with each child individually. We will be there to listen to his or her hopes and goals.
- Help them build a well-balanced and sensible list based on what they share with us as their priorities. We will help them examine those priorities.
- Remind them (and you) of all deadlines and requirements when it comes to standardized tests, college applications, and financial aid.
- Ensure they are informed of all opportunities to meet with admissions professionals on campus.
- Review their potential course selections and suggest changes if necessary.
- Help them decide which standardized tests to take.
- Provide each student with tips and suggestions about visiting colleges, writing essays, determining which teachers to ask for letters of recommendation, and completing their applications.
- Write a thoughtful, supportive, and comprehensive letter of recommendation for each student that is sent to each college.
- Continue to build and maintain professional relationships with college admissions officers across the country.

Ultimately, however, the most important thing we can do is to be there for our students and your children.

THE PARENTS' ROLE

As parents, you will certainly want to know all that you can do to help your child in this process. Here are a few things to remember:

- This process – itself – is constantly in flux. We will give you our best estimation of how things will work out, but the college admissions landscape can often change from one year to the next.
- Therefore, we encourage every student to build a well-balanced list – including reach, possible, and likely choices based upon historical admissions selectivity data and any other special considerations.
- Please remember that your child will continue to mature over the next eighteen months. Views can change radically from week to week or moment to moment.
- Each student knows, intuitively, that you have hopes and expectations about the end result. As the process unfolds it is not uncommon for a student to respond in individual, and sometimes unexpected, ways.
- Our partnership is in support of your child. So, again, open communication is essential. Please stay in touch throughout the coming year. And when family dynamics seem to be getting in the way of logical discussions, we'll be here to listen to each of you and help to assure that all opinions receive fair hearing.
- Please take the time necessary to familiarize yourself with the Naviance Family Connection - our online database and process management tool – it will provide you with a wealth of information. We introduce the Naviance system to the students during their initial meetings with us, and we will send a user name and password to you by email. Detailed instructions for logging into the Family Connection will either be given to you at our Upper Mid Parents Program or sent to you by mail if you are unable to join us in Watertown in January. Should you or your student lose the code and find that you are unable to access the Family Connection, we can easily re-set your account and send you a new code by email.
- You will find the “Colleges” section most helpful. It will give you access to various websites, e-mail, and contact information for colleges. This is also the place where you and your child can create “the list” of “Colleges I’m thinking about” and view active applications in the section called, “Colleges I’m applying to.” The “in box” will have messages from your child’s counselor, which will also go out via regular email as well.
- Please check your “profile” in the “About Me” section to assure that all of your contact information is current. This is our best way to keep in touch with you and to provide you with important and timely information and suggestions.
- Please take time to fill out the parent survey on the Naviance website. This survey is useful to your child’s college counselor particularly when it comes time to write the counselor letter of recommendation.
- While you will want/need to help your child manage this process, you will also want/need to be clear about which of you is managing which parts of this process. For example: who is responsible for testing registration, making appointments for college visits, sending test scores, etc. Those are the details.
- The most important thing you can do is to listen and to advise, without directing.

- And, of course, you get to be the chauffeur, assuming you have the ability to visit colleges. Visiting schools, if you are able, is a valuable way to confirm your child’s choices and your child’s thinking; to express interest in a college; and to spend invaluable time with your child. Have fun with it!

THE STUDENT’S ROLE

Obviously, this entire process centers on your child. Each will need to embrace the coming months and each will inevitably do so in his or her own way. Ultimately, your child is the one going to college, so he or she will need to be self-reflective, organized, thoughtful, thorough, and hard-working. Our hope is that our students will:

- Consider, with thoughtful introspection, what they really care about. Each student needs to give real consideration as to why he or she is going to college and what sort of school will be a good match.
- Work on an ongoing basis (by meeting regularly with their college counselor) to build a preliminary, and then a final, list of colleges and be responsible for researching the schools on the list.
- Keep their Naviance accounts up to date, particularly the “Colleges I’m thinking about,” and once they decide upon the schools to which they plan to apply, they must ask their counselor to move a school from the prospective list to the “Colleges I’m applying to” section.
- Complete applications, testing registration, and the submission of test scores in a timely fashion.
- Ask teachers for recommendations well in advance of all deadlines.
- Discuss with their counselors how to highlight and present their distinctive talents (artistic, athletic, musical, dramatic, leadership, volunteer, or academic) to their potential colleges. Careful, thorough completion of the Upper Mid Questionnaire will be of great help.
- And, most importantly, become fully engaged in their college search, application, and selection process. With our collective help and support as counselors and parents, they can successfully own and navigate their way through this exciting rite of passage.

THE BIG CAVEAT....

Each and every child’s process is unique. We will work, at every turn, to make sure that each student receives the individual attention he or she deserves. You (and they) will also get updates throughout the process to ensure that you are aware of what needs to be done.

THE INDIVIDUAL COLLEGE MEETING

Or HOW IT ALL BEGINS

At their first meeting with their counselor, students will talk about general goals for the process, in particular, what they hope to find in a college. That means they do need to give that issue some careful thought. A few potential factors and questions to consider are size, location (urban or rural, New England or California), potential majors, technical schools vs. liberal arts schools, single sex options, or even whether they want to head to college directly after graduation. What do they want their college experience to be like? Should it be similar to Taft or not? At this stage, some students have clear ideas of what they want, but the vast majority does not.

That's okay. It's the start of the process. Your child's counselor will also discuss appropriate testing options, potential senior year course selection, and how to use the Naviance Family Connection to his or her advantage.

Over the course of the spring term, students will meet with their college counselor at least three times, although they can and do typically meet much more often than that. They will establish a preliminary list, which should be fairly lengthy at the start. They will work together to assure that the list is well-balanced in terms of selectivity and that the choices address concerns such as distance from home, learning styles, cost of attendance, and ethos. Each student will also learn different ways to research individual schools.

VISITING COLLEGES

Many students choose to visit colleges over the March vacation. It is advised that students see a college while school is in session; however, missing school in order to do so is not advised. Thus, many students choose to take some time over March vacation to make their initial visits. These visits should be more exploratory in nature. Again, one should strive to see a range of different types of schools in different locations and settings with varying levels of admissions selectivity.

Summer visits should be more focused in their approach, ultimately helping students to decide the schools to which they will apply. Be sure to plan visits in advance and to schedule appointments. Some schools offer interviews, some don't. Some will help schedule meetings with individual professors and/or coaches, and virtually all offer group information sessions. Students should try to learn as much as possible about a school in advance of their visit so that they can ask more specific questions when they get there. We also realize that not everyone may have the time, or resources, to visit large groups of colleges; consequently, we look forward to offering our own insights about specific schools based upon our direct knowledge of and experience with them, and of the types of students who have chosen to attend them in the past.

COLLEGE VISIT DAYS

Students are allowed to miss class for three college days over the course of their Taft career. While these days are almost always taken during the Senior year, there are rare cases in which students request to use one of their college days during the Upper Middle year. Green college cards, available in the Dean's office, must be signed by one of the college counselors and then signed by the teachers whose classes will be missed. Cards should then be brought to the Dean's Office for final approval at least 48 hours before departure.

Students are encouraged to use School vacations, Free Day Weekends, and Long Weekends for college visits so that they can save their college days for visits in late April of the senior year after college admissions decisions have been received.

COLLEGES VISITING TAFT

Taft hosts a college fair each spring that is attended by 120+ colleges and universities. This program provides a great opportunity for a student to gather large amounts of information quickly and to meet admissions representatives who are often the "first reader" of Taft students' applications. In preparation for this event, we will work with your child to help him or her make the most of that opportunity.

During the fall of their senior year, students will also be able to meet college representatives who make individual visits to our campus. This past fall over 90 colleges and universities came to Taft. Their visits are usually scheduled around the lunch periods; during meeting blocks at the end of the class day; or in the early

evening before study hours. Because school work comes first, students are not permitted to miss a class to meet with a college representative, but they are often allowed a few minutes at the beginning or end of a class to stop by to say “hello.”

SHOWING INTEREST IN COLLEGES

Over the last several years, many colleges and universities have been recording and using a student’s “demonstrated interest” in their school as a factor in the admissions decisions. Multiple “contacts” with a student are noted. These contacts include: attending a college fair; sending SAT or ACT score reports in advance of an application; visiting their campus; attending area receptions; meeting representatives during their visits to Taft; requesting additional materials; and scheduling alumni interviews. In addition to demonstrating one’s interest as described above, students should also consider keeping in touch with admissions counselors via email and be sure that their contact information is on file with all of their prospective colleges and universities.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

In this day and age, many students feel the pressure to present themselves as unique. In fact, they are all unique, but sometimes they don’t feel that way. By this point in their high school career, most have begun to focus on extra and co-curricular activities that are very important to them. Some students have special athletic talents; some have special artistic bents; others do a lot of community service; and some care about writing, music, research, etc. We will work to help each student find appropriate ways to highlight his or her unique set of passions for presentation to colleges and universities.

STANDARDIZED TESTING

We strongly suggest that Upper Mids take the SAT in January, the ACT in April, the SAT again in May, and one or more Subject Tests in June. In the senior year, students may elect to take the SAT or Subject Tests again in October, November, December or January and the ACT in October or December. Decisions about which tests to take in the senior year (if any) should be made in consultation with your college counselor.

SAT AND ACT PREPARATION

While SAT and ACT preparation is offered on campus during second semester of the Upper Mid year, some families prefer to protect academic time and pursue that option in the summer. Philosophically, we encourage preparation, but do not feel that it needs to be an expensive course. There are many options available – work books, personalized on-line programs, one-on-one tutoring, and group classes. For specific, individual suggestions, please contact your college counselor.

Testing Schedule at Taft 2011-2012

January 22	SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests for UM/Seniors
April 9	ACT Examinations for Upper Middlers
May 7	SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests for Upper Middlers
June 4	SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests for Upper Middlers
September 10	ACT Examinations for Seniors
October 10	SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests for Seniors
October 22	ACT Examinations for Seniors
November 7	SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests for Seniors (Only time language with listening is offered)
December 5	<i>SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests for Seniors</i>
December 10	<i>ACT Examinations for Seniors</i>

January 21, 2012 **SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests for UM/Seniors**

Test dates listed in “**Bold**” type are offered at Taft. Test dates listed in *Italics* are not offered at Taft, but travel arrangement can be made to other test sites.

USEFUL WEBSITES

SAT registration: <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/reg.html>

ACT registration: <http://www.actstudent.org/regist/index.html>

TOEFL registration: www.toeflgoanywhere.org

APPLYING TO COLLEGES

EARLY ACTION OR EARLY DECISION

When students return to school in the fall of their senior year, many (nearly 77% in the recent past) will choose to make an “early” application to college. This decision should be made carefully and in close consultation their college counselor. There are two main types of early programs: Early Action – which is a non-binding program, and Early Decision – which is binding. In the former case, a student applies to a school (usually by November 1st) and receives an admissions decision by mid-December. He or she may then apply to other schools under Regular Decision plans and have until May 1st to decide where to enroll. Under an Early Decision plan the deadlines and notification dates are the same, but if admitted, a student must withdraw any other applications that are already on file and may not apply to any new schools. Students can be released from this binding obligation if, upon receipt of their financial aid estimate, they feel that the net cost of attendance would be too burdensome for the family.

STUDENTS’ RESPONSIBILITIES

Students are responsible for knowing all requirements for admission and for completing their portions of each college application and submitting it with all required supplemental material to each college on or before each school’s stated deadline. **Students are also responsible for having all standardized test scores sent directly from the SAT or ACT corporations to each of their colleges.**

COMPLETING THE COMMON APPLICATION

The vast majority of the schools to which Taft students apply accept the Common Application. A student establishes a personal account; completes the application on-line; checks the colleges to which he or she wants to apply; adds a credit card number; and hits “submit.” Many schools also require supplemental material, such as an additional essay, a copy of a graded paper, or explanations about why a student has chosen to apply to a specific school. These supplements are also completed on-line. All Taft students are strongly advised to establish a Common Application account before their senior year and to spend time completing the basic form before returning to school in September.

THE ESSAY

Each student is strongly encouraged to write one or more college essays over the summer. The Common Application (mentioned above) offers a number of different essay “prompts” from which to choose. We hold an annual Essay Writing Workshop in April of the Upper Mid year during which we have a college admissions dean share insights about what admissions officers look for in student writing. Students are then invited and encouraged to share their essay drafts by email with their college counselor during the summer for feedback. A thoughtfully crafted college essay can provide a “window to the soul” of an applicant. As they write, students should strive to be themselves; to think about what they want to share about themselves; and not fret over what they think a college wants to read. Most of the best essays are written about everyday life/occurrences. Senior fall is an incredibly busy time; so, the more writing a student can do over the summer the better.

TEACHERS’ RECOMMENDATIONS

In early fall meetings with their counselors, students will confirm whom they have selected to write their teachers’ letters of recommendation. These personal, confidential recommendations are uploaded by each teacher into students’ Naviance accounts and are then sent electronically to colleges and universities as a part of the school packet. Students should be sure to keep the teachers who write on their behalf informed of college decisions and to thank them for the time and energy they put into writing their letters of recommendation.

SUPPORTING CREDENTIALS

Supporting materials that are sent by the College Office include: the Counselor’s Letter of Recommendation, the Secondary School Report Form, the Official School Transcript, Teachers’ Recommendations, and a School Profile that describes Taft’s curriculum, graduation requirements, grading scale, testing profile, special programs, and recent college matriculation choices.

Online Applications:

Common Application: www.commonapp.org

CollegeNet: <http://cnsearch.collegenet.com/cgi-bin/APPLY/index>

Universal Application: <https://www.universalcollegeapp.com>

Additional Resources:

In addition to Naviance, you might find the following sites helpful in your search:

Princeton Review: www.princetonreview.com

Peterson's Guides: www.petersons.com

Index of American Universities: www.clas.ufl.edu/au/

Campus Tours: www.campustours.com

Colleges That Change Lives: www.ctcl.com

NCAA Eligibility Center registration: https://web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/student/index_student.html

FINANCING YOUR EDUCATION: SOME PRELIMINARY INFORMATION

When students begin to think about choosing colleges, parents begin to think about paying for them. It is still early in the game, and we will help you with financial aid and financing issues along the way. Following are a few issues to consider at this initial phase of the college process. We will continue to give you information and updates over the next few months.

SCHOLARSHIPS: IT'S NOT TOO EARLY TO LOOK

There are a few ways to find out about scholarship offerings; here we offer two. The first way is to go on-line to one of the search engines on the web. The second may actually yield greater results: think very carefully about the affiliations you and your family have. If your child played baseball on the town team see what types of scholarships they might offer. If you attend a church, synagogue or mosque there may be local or nationwide scholarships available to people in your denomination.

Think about your ethnicity and its affiliations. For instance, if you are of Armenian heritage you may find a scholarship through your local or nationwide Armenian association. If you do not attend but your grandmother is heavily involved, investigate to see what might be available to you. This extends to any ethnic group or nationality. Be creative; ask your parents and your grandparents. Check the local service organizations: Rotary, Lions, Elks, etc. Ask your parents to check with the industry in which they work. Labor unions and trade associations often have scholarship opportunities available. The scholarship associations that send information to Taft are listed in Naviance, and updated as we receive information. This is a time for exploring options; the actual scholarship search will start in the Fall.

LOANS: FEDERAL LOANS ARE STILL AVAILABLE

There has been a lot of talk about the current credit crisis and its impact on the student loan industry in the past few months. Although some of the private alternative loan companies have stopped lending or have gone out of business, the federally insured Stafford Student Loan and Parent (PLUS) Loan programs are still available. These have always been the most dependable loans with the best rates.

HELPFUL WEBSITES

www.fafsa.ed.gov - The Free Application for Federal Student Aid required by almost all colleges as a financial aid application.

www.profileonline.collegeboard.com – The College Board financial aid application used by many private colleges and universities.

www.finaid.org – A broad overview of everything related to financial aid: loans, grants, etc.

www.fastweb.com – A comprehensive search engine for scholarships of all types.

<http://www.scholarships.com/>

Don't forget to check the Document Library in Naviance (under College Hints) for a full description of Financial Aid Procedures, Timetables, Terms, etc.

Financial Aid Calculators

There are several on-line calculators to help you determine your “financial need”. These calculators are simple tools, but some families do not always use them properly. When that happens, they often get a rosier picture from the calculators than they would from an actual financial aid application. One of the better financial aid calculators can be found on www.finaid.org if you want to give it a try, but remember to read all of the caveats in the process to get best estimate of your financial need.

Questions and Concerns: Please feel free to contact Catherine Ganung (our financial aid specialist) with any questions about financial aid and financing at cganung@taftschool.org or 860-945-7983.

GLOSSARY

Application Types

Common Application: Allows a student to complete one main application form that is accepted by over 400 colleges and universities. Students establish an on-line account from which they send their completed applications, including school-specific supplements, to their chosen colleges via the website.

www.commonapp.org

School-Specific Applications: A variety of school-specific applications exist, ranging from on-line applications that can be found on a school’s website, to VIP or Fast-Apps that are sent by email from the colleges to students. We suggest that students use the Common Application whenever possible.

Application Plans

Early Action (EA): A non-binding admission program in which the student applies by a stated early deadline and receives a decision early (usually mid-December). If admitted EA, students are under no obligation to enroll at the college. Typically, students who are not offered admission under early action are deferred; however, it is possible for an applicant to be denied outright and not automatically deferred for later consideration.

Early Decision (ED): A binding admission program in which the student applies usually by November 1st or November 15th and receives a decision by mid-December. If accepted ED, the student must enroll. Some schools have a second but later ED date, called ED2.

Early Decision 2 (ED2): A binding admission program with a January deadline. Students submit multiple applications but apply to one college under an ED2 plan. Usually decisions are received within a month of receipt of the ED2 application. If offered admission under the ED2 plan, the student is required to enroll and must withdraw all other college applications.

Early Evaluation: A non-binding admission process in which a student is tentatively notified of their admission decision in January or February, receives their official offer in late March, yet does not need to respond to the college until May 1st. Offered by very few colleges (Wellesley is one of them).

Regular Decision: A term used to describe the application process in which an institution reviews most of its applicants prior to notifying the majority of its candidates. Regular decision deadlines fall in January or February for most colleges.

Rolling Admissions: A term used to describe the application process in which a university or college reviews applications as they are received and offers decisions to students as applications are reviewed. NOTE: Some rolling admission institutions may defer students initially. This does not mean that the student has been denied or placed on a wait list. A deferral simply means that the admission committee will review the student again later on in the cycle once new grades and standardized test scores are available.

Single Choice Early Action: Same as Early Action, but students may not apply to any other Schools via their early plans. In other words, schools with Single Choice Early Action ask students to apply to one school EA, and do not allow them to apply anywhere else ED or EA. If admitted, however, students are not committed to attend their Single Choice Early Action school.

Financial Aid

CSS Profile: Used by many selective colleges in addition to FAFSA to award financial aid funds. The CSS Profile is similar to the FAFSA, but is customized by the colleges to supply additional financial information. <http://profileonline.collegeboard.com>

Demonstrated Financial Need: Amount, as determined through federal, private and/or institutional financial aid forms, which is the difference between the total cost of attendance at a college and the estimated family contribution.

Estimated Family Contribution (EFC): The amount of money, determined through information submitted with federal and institutional financial aid forms, that a family is expected to contribute toward the total cost of attendance. This figure will appear on your Student Aid Report (SAR).

FAFSA: The Free Application for Federal Student Aid is required of all applicants who seek financial aid from U.S. colleges and universities. It is used to determine a family's eligibility for all financial aid programs that are supported by the federal government (Pell Grants, Stafford Loans, Perkins Loans, and Work Study). www.fafsa.ed.gov

Fee Waivers: Forms which document a student's inability to pay for college admission related fees, such as SAT registration fees, score report fees, and college application fees. Students must meet the guidelines for eligibility as determined by the College Board. Fee waivers for eligible students are available through the College Counseling Office.

Grants: Financial aid money from the federal and state governments, scholarship programs, or colleges which, unlike loans, does not require repayment.

Need Blind: The practice of admitting students purely on the strength of their academic records without taking into account their ability to pay.

Need Aware or Need Sensitive: The practice of taking into account an applicant's ability to pay before admitting him or her to college.

Pell Grant: Named in honor of Sen. Claibourne Pell (RI), a Pell Grant is a federally funded grant designed to help students with the lowest Estimated Family Contribution (EFC). Eligibility is determined through the information provided through the FAFSA.

Perkins Loans: Federally-funded college loan with a low interest rate and deferred repayment programs. Eligibility is determined through the information provided on the FAFSA.

Stafford Loan: Formerly know as “Guaranteed Student Loans” and renamed in honor of former Sen. Robert Stafford (VT), Stafford Loans are low-interest loans sponsored by the federal government for students enrolled at least part-time in college. Loans can be both subsidized (for students with demonstrated financial need) and unsubsidized (for students who do not qualify for need-based financial aid). While the U.S. government will pay the annual interest on subsidized Stafford Loans until six months following a student's graduation, students with unsubsidized loans pay the interest from the initial date of disbursement.

Student Aid Report (SAR): The form returned to a student following an evaluation of the FAFSA by the U.S. Government’s Central Processing Agency. Copies of the SAR are emailed to the student and can be reviewed through the FAFSA website, www.fafsa.ed.gov , as well. The SAR includes a student’s EFC and any further instructions that the central processing agency may have for a particular student.

Standardized Testing

ACT: American College Test. This is a standardized college admission test that is accepted in place of (or in addition to) the SAT by all colleges. The test measures a student's abilities in English, mathematics, science reasoning, and reading. It also includes an optional writing section. Students receive a score in each of the four areas that ranges from 0-36. A composite score is also reported which is the average of each of the four sub-scores.

Advanced Placement (AP) Exams: Tests sponsored by the College Board for students who have taken college-level (AP) courses at Taft. Resulting high scores can then lead to full course credit or allow a student to avoid introductory level classes in that subject.

College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB): Another name for the College Board. In filling out applications and other college forms, students are frequently asked for Taft’s **CEEB Code** which is **070-880**.

Educational Testing Service: The ETS is the company that produces standardized tests for the College Board. They also produce and own the TOEFL.

Language Proficiency Examination: An examination in a foreign language used to determine whether a student has satisfied a college’s foreign language requirement and, if not, which level of foreign language course is appropriate for the student.

SAT Reasoning Test: Originally called the Scholastic Assessment Test (hence the acronym SAT), the SAT Reasoning Test is owned and produced by The College Board and is required by most colleges in the U.S. to assess verbal and mathematical reasoning abilities and writing skills. Scores on each section range from 200 to 800; composite scores range from 600 to 2400.

SAT Subject Tests: These are tests offered by the College Board in specific academic areas like U.S. History, Literature, Spanish, Math, Biology, etc. Required by

some highly selective colleges as a part of the application process, they are often recommended by other colleges and are used for course placement purposes once a student enrolls.

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL): Examination administered by ETS that assesses the fluency in English of a non-native English speaker. The TOEFL tests reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English.

Special Interests

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA): National organization which supervises and regulates most intercollegiate athletic programs. Based upon size of institution and level of competition, these programs are divided into three divisions: Division I, II and III. Division I and II schools generally award athletic scholarships; Division III colleges do not. Student athletes who wish to play DI and DII sports will need to submit information online to the NCAA Eligibility Center to establish eligibility for recruiting and subsequent play.

Studio or Performing Art Portfolio: Students applying to arts focused programs may be required to submit an art portfolio, a CD, or perform an audition. It is essential that students seek the counsel of Taft faculty members from the Arts Department for their advice about how best to prepare work for submission or how to prepare for an audition.