



Doing College
And beyond

College Find

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Compliments of Elizabeth LaScala PhD

May 2012

Keeping on Track During May

— Calendar for Juniors —

SATs on Sat., May 5.

AP Exams: 5/7-5/11 and
5/14-5/18.

Register for June 2 SAT
by May 8.

Register for June 9 ACT
by May 4.

Plan summer college trips.

— Calendar for Seniors —

*May 1: Candidates' reply date, Class of 2012.

AP exams: 5/7-5/11 and
5/14-5/18.

Choose an orientation date
to visit your campus.

The *College Find Newsletter*
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How to Get a Great Recommendation Letter

by Carolee Gravina



You've already got two teachers in mind and you know that May is a good time to pop the question, "Would you be willing to write me a GREAT letter of recommendation?" If you get a whole-hearted "Yes!," you are on your way. The next challenge is to aid those teachers in completing that task. Colleges prefer that letters of recommendation be confidential, so chances are you will never see what your teachers have written. But there are some things you can do to help ensure that those letters will be notable, informative additions to your application package.

First, find out if your teacher has specific requirements. Some post exactly

what they need from you on the school website faculty page. Fulfill those requirements exactly – the sooner the better! You should expect to provide your teacher with a quick reference or *cheat sheet* about yourself, listing experiences you have shared with your teacher, including classes, clubs and events. You'll also want to list your favorite or best paper, project or classroom activity with a brief description about what it was and why it was important to you.

In order to get a better understanding about what to highlight on this *cheat sheet*, you should know what admissions readers are looking for. In a recent informal survey, admissions officers

agreed that helpful letters showed them what made the student special, how the student grew over the year, and how the student contributed. Readers also appreciated specific anecdotes that illustrated the student's helpfulness to others, sense of humor, conceptual thinking or the student's ability to deal with challenges.

So now, knowing more about what is most helpful to admissions readers, think about the reference sheet you are preparing for your teacher. Is there a project you did when you clearly helped another stu-

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Smart College Financial Aid Strategies

by Elizabeth LaScala



Your student is halfway through high school and the gap between what you can pay and what a college education costs has widened. You hope for as much financial aid as possible, preferably in the form of grants and awards you do not have to pay back. Several strategies make sense:

- Save in your name, not in your child's. The federal formula for financial aid assesses the student's assets at 20%, and parental assets at 2.64% up to 5.64%.
- Pay off debt before applying for financial aid. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) requires that you report income from the prior year, but you may report assets as of the day you submit your application. Consider carefully which debts you can use assets to pay down or pay off.
- Apply for financial aid early. Grant money is scarce and the earlier you apply, the better.
- Don't fudge the numbers, but don't make yourself richer than you are. If you file your FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1st you are not likely to have all your tax-related documents on hand. You must estimate your income, taking care not to overstate the amount. You will need to update your forms once you file your current year returns.

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Recommendations

dent? A paper you wrote that emphasized your ability to shed new light on a subject? A class discussion when you used wit or humor to illustrate a point? You'll want to make sure you include those scenarios. You may also want to reevaluate your choice of teachers. A teacher who watched you breeze through a course may not have as compelling a story to tell as one who watched you struggle and grow.

Financial Aid Strategies

- Special circumstances. Use the special circumstances space and/or attach an additional letter spelling out any unusual situations such as support for an elderly parent.
- Use Net Price Calculators. Colleges that receive federal funding post a NPC on the college websites. The tool can help you determine what kind of award families in your circumstances may expect to receive.

Perhaps the most important advice is to avoid an exclusive focus on getting the most aid from a college. A balanced college list includes colleges that fit your student's interests and needs as well as your pocketbook.

Antibiotics Won't Beat This Virus! Senioritis Beginning to Spread

by Jenyth Gearhart Utchen

As the rains stop and the sun begins to coax the daffodils, tulips and irises out of the ground, smart seniors everywhere are beginning to avoid anyone with the signs of a dreaded spring virus: *senioritis*. This highly communicable disease can be acquired through air-borne means, although it has been transmitted in cafeterias or locker rooms. Here are the ABCs of the most common symptoms:

A. Missing assignments: often lost in friends' cars or left behind at the park, or eaten by the dog (if the work was actually done)

Think of every moment of not knowing as an opportunity to learn.

Bell Hooks

B. Bored attitude: nothing is interesting after the admissions letters stop arriving in the mail

C. Classroom attendance: caused by "better offers" of lunch off campus with friends you won't be seeing next year, time at the lake/river/beach or ski slopes, or simply sleeping late

D. Dropping grades: a result of the first three symptoms

E. Everyone gets in: so why should I worry? You should worry! Two or more of these symptoms may result in the following:

F. Failure to graduate or keep a spot in college.



School of the Month

U. of Maryland

by Shelly O'Neill

If California students are looking for a strong alternative to a UC campus, University of Maryland in College Park could be a great option. A sprawling, gorgeous 1,200 acre campus, University of Maryland offers diversity, school spirit and a top-notch education. The campus has renovated one third of all of their buildings since 2000, including the Stamp Student Union, a new Bioscience Research Building and upgrades to the Chemical/Nuclear Engineering Building.

Maryland offers 110 majors across 12 schools and colleges. The strongest

and most competitive majors are engineering, business and journalism. When applying to the undergraduate business program, be aware that only a small percent gain direct admission into business while the rest go into pre-business. About 70% of this second group has success in moving into the business program. The rigorous coursework within each major is complemented with a third of the classes falling within the general education requirements, including writing and an upper-class on cultural diversity. The honors program, which also encompasses a living and learning experience, is quite impressive with six different programs to choose from: Digital Cultures & Creativity, Entrepreneurship & Innovation, Gemstone (most intense), Humanities, Integrated Life Sciences and University Honors (most flexible curriculum). Honors classes are limited to 15 students.

Public: 26,876 undergrads; 10,719 grad students

45% acceptance rate; mid-SAT: CR 580-680, M 620-710; mid-ACT: 28-32

37% diversity; 2% intl.; 30% out-of-state; 18/1 student/faculty

Location is a big advantage for students. Washington DC is a 30 minute metro ride away and many students take advantage of the proximity to the capital by engaging in an abundance of internship opportunities. According to some students we spoke with the town of College Park is a bit boring; but there seems to be enough happening on campus during the weekends that the students find plenty to do. If not, they head to DC.

The current mean GPA for admission is 3.9, although my impression is that students from California could possibly gain admission with a lower GPA due to geographic diversity. They admit major blind, meaning admissions look first at GPA, test scores and all the elements of the application prior to considering your major of choice; this avoids applicants trying to "game the system."