INTRODUCTION

You may have already received a lot of advice about getting into college. That’s because everyone who has either applied or helped a son or daughter apply to college considers him or herself an expert. As with everything else, don’t believe everything you hear. If you’d like to drive your counselor crazy, start each college-related conversation with “I heard that...” Rest assured that the SAS counselors are connected to the world of college admissions through their relationships with admission officers, leadership positions and participation in professional organizations, and years of experience in this ever-changing field.

The goal of this Guide is to help identify and maximize your admissions chances to several “good fit” schools. By knowing what application readers look for, you’ll have an easier time presenting yourself in the best light, and therefore be the sort of student they want to admit. You’ll also learn ways to maximize the chances that you will stand out as an applicant.

Unfortunately, there is no guide, person, or website with a foolproof, step-by-step strategy for getting into college. Even if you could be completely mathematical in determining where you want to go and what you need to do to get in, your application would still be in the hands of subjective admissions officers. No matter how rational you are, you will never know of particular admission goals that a college might have that year. Perhaps the year you are applying they are trying to increase the number of males - or females.

This Guide assumes you’ll apply to one or more fairly “selective” colleges, which reject a significant number of applicants. You’ll also apply to other colleges, which admit a fairly high proportion of applicants. “Less selective” simply means that the college admits a high number of students. Choosing a college isn’t about the number of students it admits; it’s about finding the college which is the best match.

The SAS Counselors hope you will find this guide helpful. We are here to help you as you make your decisions about higher education. Feel free to call on us.

High School Counseling Department
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Choosing a Country

If you were attending a public or private school in your home country, the odds are that you would apply to universities within a couple of hours from your home. But being at SAS has probably made you realize there is a world of opportunity waiting for you. In fact, you have so many choices; it’s often difficult to know where to begin. While the majority of SAS graduates matriculate to the US, others go to the UK, Canada, Australia or their “home” country. The following provides a brief overview of universities in these countries. Additional information and links can be found on the SAS counseling website.

US Universities

As you may have noticed, the words “college” and “university” are used interchangeably when referring to US institutions. To be precise, college usually refers to an institution devoted primarily to undergraduate education. You are an undergraduate until you graduate with a degree (called a bachelor’s degree). A university, on the other hand, is usually a larger institution offering a combination of undergraduate and graduate (master’s or doctorate) degrees. Universities are frequently committed to research as well as teaching. One is not better than the other - they both offer four-year bachelors degrees.

So you’re not sure which major to choose. No problem. The majority of students who begin college in the US do not declare a major. There is latitude to try different courses in the first year or two and choose a major later. Many students apply as “undecided,” waiting until sophomore year to declare a major. Except for certain majors—such as engineering—most students take a variety of courses during this time. General education or “core” requirements help insure all students have a breadth of knowledge when they graduate, in addition to their specialized area.

The flexibility of changing majors also allows students to transfer between different institutions. If a student chooses to transfer at the end of sophomore year, for example, the new school may accept almost all earned credits. Transfer acceptance decisions are usually based on grades earned in college.

In the US, colleges and universities each set their own criteria for determining who gets admitted. Each one designs its own application, asks different questions, has a variety of deadlines, and sets its own policies. This can become rather complicated as you attempt to keep track of what each school wants. Even schools accepting the “Common Application” usually ask for individualized supplements specific to the college.

US universities think the best predictor of college success is high school performance. Therefore, grades earned and high school courses taken and the rigor of these courses are the most important factors considered. Standardized test scores, if the college requires them (many don’t - a list is at www.fairtest.org), are always considered less important than your transcript.

UK Universities

There are several major differences between the UK and US university systems. The majority of degree programs in the UK (except for Scotland) take three years to complete, and students focus solely on the one or two subjects they have chosen to study. Thus, there are no general education requirements in university as there are in the US. If you are someone who is certain of the subject you want to study in college, a UK university could be a good choice for you. Particularly if you are someone who loves one or two subjects, but doesn’t ever want to take another class in some other area, the UK system would provide you with that very specific type of education. If you are undecided about your major, be aware that in order to apply to the UK, you would have to make a decision about what to study, and that transferring to a different subject usually entails starting your degree over from the beginning.
In Scotland, degrees generally take four years to complete, and can be more general – for example, a student can study humanities or social sciences in general, rather than needing to focus on a specific field such as psychology.

The cost of attending university for a year in the UK is evolving upward – although one less year is required to obtain a degree.

Generally, students would only be admitted if they have earned good scores in AP exams by the end of high school. Students without these scores can apply to a one-year foundation course in order to qualify later for entry to a degree program.

If you are interested in learning more about the process of researching and applying to UK universities, complete information is available in Chapter 10.

Canadian Universities
In Canada, there is a very real distinction between a university and a college. Institutions granting bachelors and advanced degrees are universities. Colleges only focus on vocational and technical training. To make it just a little more confusing, a school within a Canadian university (such as arts, science, or commerce) is called a faculty or a college, similar to the system in US and UK universities.

Each university in Canada has a general minimum admission standard based on Canadian grading standards. These minimum GPA and course requirements vary from faculty to faculty. If you are interested in being admitted to an engineering program, you may read you’re required to earn a particular grade in specific courses like science and Pre-Calculus. Note that the Canadian percent scale is different than the US grade scale. Since you are from an American school you should always check the requirements for an American school educated student regardless of your citizenship.

If you’re looking at Canada, it’s important to look at the university’s website to understand application requirements, such as transcript and SAT scores. Some universities also require SAT Subject Tests or AP results in particular subjects. Check the university’s website, speak with your counselor, and talk to visiting Canadian university representatives.

Universities in Ontario use a centralized application process much like the UK, called Ontario Universities Application Centre (OUAC). Students submit a single application to OUAC, which is then forwarded to students’ chosen universities. The OUAC application should be filed no later than the end of November in order to ensure it reaches the university in plenty of time for them to request supporting documentation. In other provinces, students apply directly to the university.

After applying, each university will send an email or acknowledging receipt of your application and requesting transcripts and other documents. That letter will contain your personal student number. Be sure to provide this number to the counseling office, because it should be written on your transcript and any other documents to ensure these important items are filed correctly. It may be necessary to send transcript updates at the end of third quarter senior year and, in some cases, after graduation, so be sure to keep your grades up throughout senior year!

Australian Universities
Because Australia is in the southern hemisphere, the school year begins in February except for a small mid-year intake in July. Applications are usually submitted in October, a few months after you have graduated from high school. If you are considering Australia, think about how you would occupy yourself from the time you graduate until university begins.

With a little extra work, it is possible to enter Australian universities with an American high school diploma. Contact International Development Program (IDP) Education Australia, a semiprivate company established by the Australian schools and government, which serves as a “one stop shop for Australian education.” Located at 30 Orange Grove Road (www.singapore.idp.com), IDP has knowledgeable counselors in addition to materials and viewbooks. The mission of IDP is to recruit international students, so not all counselors can help Australian citizens. Australian citizens should consult their SAS counselor for a recommended IDP contact.
The more selective universities will only accept a student with high SAT scores and two to four strong AP scores. Others will say, “Send us what you have (transcript, letters of recommendation, and SAT Reasoning Test scores) and we’ll take a look at it.” If your qualifications are not sufficient to gain admission, you may enroll in a six to twelve month “Foundation Year.” Success in this program usually gains entry into a university. Many courses in Australia are three years long, so taking the Foundation Year still provides a comparable four-year US experience.

For further information, check Australian links on the Counseling website. With its close proximity to Singapore and lower costs than most American colleges, Australia could be worth considering.

Japanese Universities
Sophia University and International Christian University (ICU) are the major universities in Japan designed specifically for English-speaking students from international schools. Waseda also has an international program that attracts students from outside of Japan. For Japanese students applying to Japanese universities, admission decisions are primarily based on examination results.

We urge you to consult the notes in Family Connection that contain up-to-date information on the different requirements of the different Japanese Universities that offer English language programs.

Traditional Japanese Universities
SAS students who are Japanese citizens are ordinarily classified as kikokushijo or “returning students.” Students must travel to Japan to take university examinations scheduled during the months of October, November, or December. A few Japanese universities, such as Waseda University, now have international departments with courses taught in English. Like Sophia and ICU, they have a different admission process for students interested in these specialized programs.

In addition to the above universities, the Japanese government selected 13 universities to be members in its “Global 30” initiative, which is designed to provide international students the opportunity to obtain degrees from prestigious Japanese universities by taking programs taught in English. For more information, go to www.uni.international.mext.go.jp.

Other Countries
If you are interested in learning about universities in other parts of the world, contact these universities directly. Most have a home page accessible via SAS’s Counseling website. Since frequently the information is written in the language of the country (and since your counselor does not read all of the languages of the world), you are pretty much on your own as far as finding out the application requirements. Of course, your counselor will help you prepare your application and gather all necessary supporting materials.

Gap Year
Are you ready to begin college immediately after high school? If you are not sure about going to college, doing something different for a year gives you time to think things over. Of course, this can have its downsides. You fall a year behind your classmates and you could wind up wasting the entire year (but then, you might have wasted your first year at college, too).

Even if you plan to take a year off, it is recommended that you apply to college during your senior year. Take the required tests, request recommendations, and explore college choices while in school. Once you have been admitted, defer the starting date for a year. Almost all colleges will allow deferment if you write a letter of explanation and give them proper notice (usually by May 1). The only stipulation is that you cannot attend another college during your year off.

National Service (NS) in Singapore
If you are a male Singaporean citizen or permanent resident, you must complete National Service (NS) before beginning university. Regardless of whether you plan to apply to university during your senior year and defer your start date, or if you plan to apply while in NS, you must request your recommendations and complete testing while still in high school.

Note that your year of birth will be a determining factor in when your NS commitment begins, and thus when it ends. Current Min-
istry of Defense policy, suggests that if your birthday comes before January 1 of your senior year, you will likely start your NS, complete your commitment, and begin university after two years. If, however, your birthday is after January 1, then anticipate a late NS start date and a likely three years before beginning university. A few universities offer mid-year intakes, which could mean a two and a half year delay. All NS policies are subject to change.

Apply and Defer
If you apply to a college as a senior, your admission decision will be made based upon your seventh semester transcript which shows grades earned through the first half of your senior year. If your academic record has been consistent throughout high school, the admission office will assume that you will continue to be academically successful. However, if you are a late-blooming student, be aware that if you apply as a senior, colleges won’t have senior-year AP exam results, nor will they know of any honors or awards you may receive as a senior. If those would be positive additions to your application, you might want to wait and apply while in NS.

There are several colleges that will not allow a two year deferral (e.g., University of Illinois, UK universities, the University of California, etc.). And even more will not grant three year deferrals. If one of the colleges you would like to attend does not allow a two year deferral, or if you will have a late start date necessitating a three year deferral, you may need to postpone applying until you are in NS. However, colleges with large international student populations understand Singaporean males are required to complete NS and many will allow you to defer your start date.

One of the main disadvantages of applying and deferring is that your interest or love for a particular school may change during NS. If you defer, you and SAS counselors are bound ethically by the terms of deferral the college communicates to you. In other words, if the college tells you that you may not apply elsewhere, then SAS counselors cannot send further transcripts on your behalf.

Apply During NS
For students whose grades improved considerably in their final year of high school, it may be better to apply during the second year of NS. Applying then means senior-year grades, AP scores, and your NS experiences can be taken into account.

Admission officers understand that a student completing NS will be more mature and responsible as a college student and this may be helpful to your chances of admission. As long as you have requested your recommendations and completed your testing, you will only need to write your essays and complete the online application forms. Even though you will no longer be a student, the SAS counselors will continue to assist you with your applications.

NS Application Obligations
The following are the SAS expectations for graduates serving in NS:

• At the time of application you must indicate that you will be requesting a two year deferral. Prior to applying it is wise to determine whether a two year deferral is possible.

• You should only hold a space for two years if you are confident you will ultimately matriculate to that institution. If you have been accepted, been given a deferral stipulating that you must matriculate, then you must do so. SAS will not support further applications.

• If you have been given a deferral that does not indicate that you are bound to matriculate, and in your concluding year of NS you change your mind and wish to submit additional applications to other colleges, SAS will support those applications and send necessary documents.

• The maximum number of applications remains 10 for all students, whether this is done during the senior year, during NS or a combination.
SELECTING COLLEGES

Deciding where to apply can be complicated. Your decision will be heavily influenced by high school grades earned so far. It will also be influenced by personal factors and it’s completely normal to change your mind several times during this decision-making process! Some college guides and websites provide complex charts which supposedly help determine which one school is right for you. In reality, these charts often don’t help very much. A precise step-by-step process allowing you to choose one mythical perfect college doesn’t exist. For almost every student, there are several institutions where you would be happy and successful.

If the process of choosing a college seems unsystematic and haphazard—you’re right. In the end, every decision about which college to attend is subjective. Most colleges offer a great education, so keep an open mind as you begin the search. Cast your net widely as your begin; understanding that most SAS students apply to about six institutions with the maximum being ten. While the following topics are in no particular order and may not be the only ones important to you, give each one careful consideration.

Where to Start
You may have a few schools in mind as you begin to think about college. Your father wants you to go to Williams; your mother went to the University of Michigan; your brother is at Tufts; and one of your friends is at Chapman. You start by thinking about these schools. For example, if you don’t want to go to Williams, you’re going to have to give a reasonable explanation. (“Dad, my grades are just too low. Besides, Williams is too rural.”) In thinking about why you don’t want to go to Williams, you will make a lot of discoveries about where you do want to go.

Web Resources
All SAS students and parents have access to Family Connection (FC), a college and career information website. FC allows students to take a personality test called “Do What You Are,” complete a career interest inventory, look at specific careers, and so much more. Students can create a list of prospective colleges, look at graphs (called “scattergrams”) to predict their chances of admission, and follow the progress of submitted applications. The use of scattergrams is described in more detail in Chapter 3. If you are unsure how to access Family Connection, see your counselor.

The counseling department’s extensive website is full of other information about the college application process. Spend time browsing pages and links. Begin on the page, “Overview,” which includes links to several college related pages. The “News and Information” page is updated weekly and includes the latest news along with media articles. When the SAS counselors find a website of interest, it is added to the counseling website. It contains nearly everything you could possibly want to know about selecting and applying to college. Our website has been replicated at several other high schools around the world.

Facebook is another way in which you can keep up with news about SAS counseling and college admission. It’s a private group so you will need to go to Facebook, search for “SAS High School Counseling” and ask to join.

Reference Materials
The SAS high school library also has an up-to-date collection of independent college handbooks. You’ll also find some of the more popular references on the book shelves in the back of the counseling office. Providing basic facts, guidebooks such as the College Handbook and the Peterson’s Guides are well-researched and respected. Rugg’s Recommendations on the Colleges lists colleges with strong majors in particular fields. One of the best independent guides is the Fiske Guide to Colleges, which is easy to read, interesting, and accurate. While other independent guides are also fun to read, more effort may be put into being interesting rather than accurate. These guides are typically developed by distributing surveys to students attending colleges. The opinions are compiled, and a reviewer molds a description from the survey results. Don’t believe every word you read.

Each year, the US News and World Report, along with several other publications, attempts to rate colleges from number 1 to number 1,600 or so. It is impossible to try to
compare a school such as UC-Berkeley (with 29,000 students) to Tufts (with 6,000 students). Yet, that is exactly what these rating guides do. Just because a for-profit publishing company has assigned a rank to a school does not mean it should be believed. It is no more appropriate to rank colleges than it is to rank SAS’s 3900+ students from best to worst. How do you compare a senior to a second grader? Use a ranking guide as a guide, not as a reliable reference.

Admission Office Representatives
Each year SAS hosts over 200 college representatives. Take advantage of these visitors. Even if you’re not particularly interested in a school, the more information gathered about different types of schools, the easier it will be to make a manageable college list.

Even though admission representatives are here to “sell” their schools and recruit good students, talking with them provides the opportunity to learn about a college and to interact with a member of the admission staff. If you decide to apply, the chance to talk one-to-one might make a lasting impression, remembered during the selection process. At least, you have a contact name if you have a question about your application. Some admission officers seem to change jobs every few years. The person representing some unknown college when you were a sophomore might be the admission officer of your first choice school when you’re a senior. In short, always be nice and respectful to all admission officers.

Here are some suggestions:
• As you shake hands, start off with “Hello, how are you?” or “Hi, my name is...” for a relaxed beginning to your conversation.
• Try not to ask a vague question like “Tell me about your college,” since the rep will have no idea where to start. That can be frustrating for the college rep and the student, because the conversation will have no direction.
• Be specific with questions by saying things like “Tell me about class spirit” or “Can you give me examples of some campus traditions.” These types of questions will give you a sense of the atmosphere and give the rep something specific to talk about.
• Ask about scholarships. The conversation doesn’t always get around to this in a rushed environment like a college fair. Be sure to identify if you are a US citizen or not since it can make a difference in their answer.
• You will want to know the admission requirements, of course, but you may also want to ask what factors they consider to be most important in their admission decisions.
• Find out the safety history of the campus and the surrounding town.
• Ask how many of the students drop out or transfer after the first year, compared to how many remain for four years and graduate. College reps may cringe at this one, because student retention is a touchy issue at many colleges. A low retention rate may be a warning sign, though.
• Ask: “What’s the biggest complaint from current students?”
• If class size is important, ask about it in a specific way such as, “In my first semester what will my class sizes likely be?”
• Ask for a direct email address for an admission counselor. Be sure to pick up a business card.
• If you are very conservative or very liberal in your thinking, ask about the political/social climate. This is one of the things that could cause a feeling of discomfort or alienation down the road. It’s not a silly question.

Campus Visits
If at all possible, try to visit college campuses. This is an excellent way to help narrow your college choices. You may find an urban setting more appealing than a rural, college-town campus. Similarly, a visit to a large, public campus such as the University of Washington may help you discover your preference for a small, private college. See the section on interviewing for information about talking with admission officers.
Visits are best made early in college planning — at the end of your sophomore or junior year. Anytime you’re near a college campus during the summer, stop in and take the tour. Maps and other information about a campus visit program can be found on the college’s website. Private organizations also arrange group college visits. Talk to your counselor about picking up an unofficial transcript to take with you on your visit.

**Types of Colleges**

Colleges can broadly be divided into either liberal arts and sciences or comprehensive research universities. A comprehensive university is usually fairly large and consists of different departments called “colleges” of which one may be a “College of Arts and Sciences.” The University of Illinois is an example of a comprehensive institution. It has a College of Law, College of Engineering, College of Business, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and a College of Agriculture. Most comprehensive universities have undergraduate programs, which is where the first degree (called a Bachelors degree) is earned and graduate programs, offering advanced degrees, such as a doctorate in biology, or providing professional training in such areas as law and medicine.

**Liberal Arts and Science Colleges**

The mission of a liberal arts and science college is to impart general knowledge and develop students’ general intellectual capacities, in contrast to a professional, vocational, or technical curriculum. Most majors at liberal arts colleges are general in nature (English, biology, psychology) rather than vocational (accounting, nursing, business, engineering). Liberal arts and sciences colleges help students become better thinkers, writers, and problem solvers. These students find jobs in many different fields. Students do specialize and graduate with a major, but their degree indicates that, in addition to a general core of knowledge, they also have specialized knowledge in a particular field. Students who know they will be going on to graduate programs (law, medicine, business administration), often find liberal arts colleges to be good preparation. The well-rounded background helps them do well on law school, medical school, or other graduate school entrance exams. The smaller class sizes allow more opportunities to get to know professors, which is helpful when they are asked to write recommendations for graduate study.

**Specialized Colleges**

There are a small number of specialized colleges offering majors in only one area. These schools are great if you’re committed to a field of study. Examples include Juilliard and Rhode Island School of Design (the arts); Babson and Bentley (business); and Harvey Mudd (engineering).

**Women’s Colleges**

These institutions are totally committed to the personal, social, and academic development of women. They also provide extensive opportunities for leadership and independence (and almost always have a college with men nearby).

**Location**

One way to narrow down the search is to consider location. Proximity to relatives, for example, may be important. Living away from home can be easier if there are people in the area who can help or provide a place to go for long weekends or holidays. Location has nothing to do with education, but it is not a frivolous issue — especially for overseas-based families. You are selecting a school and a place to live. Be sure you want to live there before you decide to go there. If you easily get bored when not in the hustle and bustle of a major city, would you be happy at a small rural school like Grinnell? On the other hand, would you have difficulty finding time to study at a college like New York University? As you consider different colleges, always ask yourself whether the campus area will distract from or encourage your academic pursuits.

**Urban Campuses**

Urban life in the US is very different from Singapore, and crime can limit your freedom to go out in some areas, especially late at night. Large cities do offer many options and cultural opportunities: art exhibits, drama, dance, concerts, and sporting events. But these activities in urban centers could be a distraction from...
your studies. Urban schools include New York and Boston Universities.

Suburban Campuses
Suburban colleges strike a balance by being near, but not in the heart of a city. They typically have more of a campus atmosphere than do urban colleges. Although the campus is not in the center of the action, you are close enough to get to it when you’d like. Suburban schools include Pomona, Tufts, Northwestern, and Richmond.

Small-town Campuses
Small-town colleges are often the major focus of the community, with almost all social and cultural activities occurring on campus. The college is fairly self-contained and provides a large number of activities to keep students occupied. Typically, the campuses are beautiful and perched in natural settings with close-knit communities. Colgate, Cornell, Oberlin and Grinnell fit into this category.

Size
Some differences between large and small schools are exaggerated. For example, many high school students say they don’t want to go to a small school because they won’t be able to meet enough people. That’s not true. Studies show the number of friends made in college is approximately the same regardless of size. Colleges do provide different experiences depending upon how small or large they are. When you read about the number of students at a particular college, look at the entire student population, which may include graduate students. It could be larger than you expect.

Small Colleges
Small colleges—those with fewer than 3,000 students—are best known for the close contact between students and faculty. Everybody knows everybody. Often class sizes are small and everyone is expected to participate. Many of the best known liberal arts and sciences colleges, such as Williams, Amherst, and Carleton, fall into this category. These schools provide a great education, are nearly as selective as the Ivy League universities, and their graduates have amazing success being admitted to selective graduate schools.

Mid-Size Colleges
Colleges with 3,000 to 10,000 students are considered mid-size. These schools boast close contact with most members of the school community and offer more social and academic options than smaller colleges. Except for some introductory classes, most class sizes are reasonable. Typical mid-size colleges include Notre Dame, Brandeis, and Duke.

Large Colleges
Large schools have more activities, more facilities, more students, more courses, more everything. At a big school, you are expected to show more independence and take a greater responsibility for planning your own education. Because of the sheer number of students, large schools have a larger bureaucracy to navigate. Classes are often in large lecture halls and first-year students are likely taught by graduate student teaching assistants. Changing a course or correcting a billing error can take considerable time and patience. Large schools include UCLA, University of Colorado, and University of Michigan.

Housing
While the type of dormitory arrangement may not be one of the most important factors, it is worth considering. Do you require vegetarian or other special meals? Check that out. During long weekends and breaks, does the dorm remain open or will you be forced to stay at a friend’s house or a hotel? Life in virtually all freshman dormitories is similar in many respects — loud, messy, crowded, uncomfortable, and usually a lot of fun.

Campus “Culture”
Each college has a different “culture” or feel. Are most students interested in intramural sports or are they more interested in where the next party will be? Are students politically conservative or liberal? While this is often difficult to gauge without visiting campus, it is important to find out how accepting the students are towards people who are different—whether they are African-American, Asian, gay, or Muslim. Check the Fiske Guide in the counseling office for insights on the “feel” of a campus.

Many colleges are attempting to increase the number of students who come from diverse
cultural backgrounds. That’s great for you as a student attending an international school. However, if 95% of the students are wealthy white kids from New York state, you should think about whether you would have a hard time finding students who share your international background and interests.

Safety
Safety is an obvious concern for everyone. In the US, colleges are required to have information available about campus crime. This information is published on a Department of Education website at www.securityoncampus.org. In the crime statistics search area, enter the name of the college you want to look up.

Campuses place a high priority on safety. In addition to it being the right thing to do, no college can afford the negative publicity resulting from a high profile crime or high crime rate. Emergency phones and 24-hour security officers are commonplace, and, at most colleges, only those students who live in a particular dormitory can enter that dorm. The most common crimes on college campuses are theft and burglary. Mobile phones, computers, bicycles and other items with a resale value are most likely to be taken, often from unlocked dorm rooms. Date rape also exists on college campuses, especially when students are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Murders, assaults and other major crimes are a rarity. If students encounter a serious problem, it’s usually due to activities occurring off-campus (and often late at night). Be safety conscious and use available on-campus escorts if you are out alone late at night.

Where Friends Go
Going to college with your high school friends can be great or terrible. While it can be nerve-wracking at the beginning, you may be better off not going to the same place with several friends. You’ll make more new friends if you don’t have the old gang to fall back on. Feelings of freshman alienation usually don’t last beyond the first couple of weeks anyway. You may find the kind of SAS people you used to hang out with are not the kind of people you hang out with at college.

If you do end up at the same college with a good friend, it is better to not be roommates. Living separately increases your number of new friends. You’ll still see high school friends, but with a wider network, the college experience will be more enjoyable.

Prestige Factor
Many students (and parents) overemphasize the importance of a university’s prestige when choosing where to get an education. While it’s true in many parts of the world a person is often hired as much for where they graduated as for what they learned, in the US, being hired or admitted to graduate school is more based on what you did, what you learned through course work and internships, and what your professors say about you. The name of the college is less important.

Take a look at where students from the top law or medical schools (or IBM, General Motors, or Exxon) completed their undergraduate education. They come from a number of state universities and small liberal arts schools as well as the Ivies. The most prestigious institutions earned their reputations primarily by the strength of their graduate programs. At this point in your life, you need to be concerned with finding a school that offers a good undergraduate education. The prestigious universities often put more emphasis on research than they do on undergraduate teaching.

Be certain you know why you are choosing a particular school, and be honest about the prestige factor. If attending a high-profile college is important to you, admit it. If you are not honest with yourself, you may end up at a school for all the wrong reasons, such as ego or family/peer pressure. Remember, what looks good may not fit well. Even Gucci shoes can give you blisters!

Class Size and Quality
Many guides list something labeled “average class size” or “student-faculty ratio.” Neither of these statistics means much since most colleges calculate these figures using whichever numbers put them in the best light. A more accurate figure is the percent of classes with fewer than twenty-five students in them.

Course quality is much more important than class size. Huge courses taught by great teachers are more rewarding than tiny courses.
taught by boring lecturers. On the other hand, don’t expect to be able to talk individually with a professor whose course has an enrollment of hundreds. Some schools place a large amount of emphasis on the quality of their teachers, while others are more interested in getting the best researchers. Ask whether you’ll be taught by professors or graduate students.

**Freshman Satisfaction**

One statistic provided in most guidebooks is the percent of freshmen who return as sophomores. A high number indicates most freshmen were satisfied with the school and were successful, or at least didn’t flunk out. If this statistic is low, find out why.

**Career Services**

Graduate school, career opportunities, and networking options can all play a role after graduation. Find out what percent of students actually graduate in how many years. Does it take them four, five or six years to earn a diploma? If you may want to go to law school, medical school, or graduate school, find out the percent of graduating students who were admitted. Check out the job information and career services offered.

**Majors**

Most high school students going to US colleges don’t know what they’ll major in. And a large percentage of students who think they know will change their minds. It is perfectly acceptable to begin a US college “undeclared” about a major. At some schools, more than half the students who begin with a declared major change it before they graduate.

If you’re thinking of a particular area of study, make sure the colleges offer that major and then assess the quality of the program. Find out the number of students majoring in the subject, the size of the faculty, and the special resources available. *Rugg’s Recommendations of the Colleges* and *The College Finder* are two of the better guides for college information. Both are available in the counseling office. Talking to parents, teachers, or people who work in the field will also provide valuable information.

Focus as much attention on the overall quality of a college as on the quality of the particular department you may now be interested in. Consider the possibility of a change in your interests. Be confident the colleges you apply to offer a solid educational foundation. Nearly all do.

**Cost and Quality**

There is little to no relationship between the tuition charged by a particular college and the quality of the education. A college that costs $50,000 per year is not two times better than one that costs $25,000. Some schools have huge endowments used to support their educational programs. Publicly supported schools use tax money to pay a portion of the costs. Although a student may pay $20,000, the school may actually spend $30,000 or $40,000 a year to educate each student. Therefore, don’t just look at the cost of tuition. Find out the amount each college spends to educate each student. Don’t choose a school merely because it costs less—or more.

A few SAS families living out of the US may still remain residents of a state and qualify for in-state tuition. Each of the 50 state legislatures determines what it takes to be a state resident. The counseling website has a list of these requirements. If you live overseas, at a minimum, you must continue to pay state taxes and have a home in that state to be considered as a state resident.

All US universities are now required to have available on their websites an online tool called a Net Cost Calculator. Based on the information entered, the college cost estimator will return an estimate of typical expenses for a student to attend this college or university and an estimate of financial aid that the student may be eligible to receive from this college or university. Some schools do not make the calculator very prominent on their website; use the Google search feature on their site using the words “net cost calculator.”

**Financial Aid and Scholarships**

One concern regarding college education is cost. For US citizens or permanent residents attending college in the US, federal financial aid is available if you demonstrate
“financial need” as determined by a federal formula. Need-based financial aid in the form of grants, low-interest loans, and student work-study programs is available to qualified students on the basis of the information submitted on the “Free Application for Federal Student Aid” or FAFSA. On the FAFSA, your parents list information about assets, income, and other data from their US income tax forms. This information will be subjected to a formula to determine the amount your family can reasonably be expected to contribute toward your education. The difference between your family’s contribution and the total college costs is your financial need. If the results from this form show financial need, the college will probably offer you a loan, grant, work-study program, or a combination of all three.

To apply for need-based financial aid you and your parents must complete the FAFSA after January 1st of your senior year since the data supplied on the form comes from your family’s US income tax return from the previous year. Shortly after January 1, your parents must calculate—but they do not need to send in—their US income taxes, and complete the FAFSA online. A link to FAFSA can be found on the financial aid section of the counseling website.

Very few SAS families qualify for need-based financial aid. If you have an “unusual circumstance” you will need to discuss it directly with the financial aid office of the college. Some colleges also require an additional form such as the “PROFILE.” Details will be provided by the college.

Very selective, well resourced colleges generally only provide need-based financial aid, as opposed to merit-based. Less selective colleges do, however, sometimes provide merit awards. These awards encourage talented students to consider attending their schools. Colleges realize talented students have a number of acceptance offers and use merit awards to attract them. Talent grants are given to students who demonstrate a particular talent in sports, the arts, leadership, social service, or academics. These grants are offered regardless of a student’s financial need and are sometimes open to non-US citizens.

Financial Aid for non-US Citizens
Not all US colleges offer financial aid to students who are not US citizens. In fact, the majority of colleges expect international students to find their own sources of money to pay for a college education. To get a visa you must prove you have sufficient financial resources to pay for college, living expenses, and a return trip to your home country. If a college doesn’t offer aid to international students you must plan to pay all of the expenses yourself. Because of the limited amount of aid available to international students, even those colleges with international student aid only offer it to the strongest applicants. If you are a non-US citizen requiring financial aid, you will need to be among a college’s top applicants in order to receive an offer of aid.

“Need Blind” Admission
While most schools consider US citizens’ admission separately from their need for financial aid (i.e., they are “need-blind”), some are “need-aware.” The school’s need-blind or need-aware status should be clearly stated by each school. For non-US citizens, almost all schools are need-aware. Some directly state that, if the non-US citizen can’t pay their own way, they need not apply.

A school that guarantees to meet students’ “full-need” agrees to provide sufficient financial aid to meet the need as determined by the FAFSA form. Other schools may admit students without regard of ability to pay, but may not provide sufficient financial aid to make it possible for the student to attend.
Finding a Range

While it’s not unusual for students to talk of their “first choice” college, it is rare that there is only one single, best college. Even if, after thorough research, you decide on a first choice, the final list should include a number of colleges, any one you’d be happy to attend if admitted. Just like you won’t find a partner in life without dating a few people, you shouldn’t think you will just stumble onto that one perfect college and instantly fall in love without doing some dating.

Once your senior year begins, you’ll have to narrow your list of potential colleges down to a manageable number of five to seven and no more than ten. With this number, you can do a thorough job on each application, instead of being overextended trying to complete too many. With each application fee of approximately US$50 to $100, plus costs of sending ACT/SAT and TOEFL scores, applying to a larger number of schools will quickly add up and can consume your senior year. To make certain you’re admitted to at least two, you need to make certain you apply to a range of colleges.

Likely, Possible, and Reach

The following is a rough guideline to categorize your college choices: Apply to one to three “reach” schools—colleges that normally accept students with GPAs and test scores higher than yours; three to five “possible” schools—those that generally accept students with profiles similar to yours; and one or two “likely admit”—colleges for which you are an extremely strong candidate. Be certain your likely schools are those you wouldn’t mind attending. Just because you’re likely to be admitted doesn’t mean the college should be thought of as a “lower status” college in your mind. Also, remember what may be a likely school for you might be a reach for one of your friends, because these categories vary for each student.

You must understand only the most exceptional students are accepted at Harvard, Stanford, and the other most selective colleges. Harvard, for example, has approximately 2,100 slots for the more than 35,000 applicants. These kinds of schools can often fill their entire freshman class with students who earn all As and have perfect ACT/SATs. Harvard denies 94% of their applicants. Be realistic about your grades, test scores, and the entire application.

A truly exceptional student with a realistic chance at the highly selective universities can choose to apply to more “reach” schools— as long as there are at least a couple of truly likely schools. Because of the large numbers of outstanding students applying to the most selective schools, many acceptance decisions will be made based on extremely subjective distinctions. If you are an A student with top scores applying to Ivy League-type schools, you may want to complete up to the maximum of ten colleges.

There are few guarantees in the admission game. Each year a few students are admitted to places where the odds seemed impossible. The opposite occasionally occurs as well. A college looked like a safe bet, but a letter of rejection arrived anyway. Using the method of applying to some likely, some possible, and some reach schools is the best way to keep from being shut out in April. So how do you decide which school is at which level?

Look at “Family Connection”

You have access to data on the acceptances and rejections of SAS students who applied to colleges all over the world. This data is in Family Connection and generates scattergrams, which list acceptance and denial information by college. The chart plots the SAS seventh semester cumulative GPA, best SAT score, and (most importantly) whether the applicant was admitted or denied. The name of the student is not provided.

If previous SAS students have applied to a school you are interested in, by using the scattergrams, you can see how a student with similar grades and scores fared with his or her application. Although the data is sometimes contradictory (i.e., students with lower grades or scores were sometimes admitted while students with higher numbers were denied), it can approximate your chances of admission. Contradictions occur mainly because applications are more than just grades and test scores. One student may have taken harder courses, been a student leader, or
had outstanding recommendations, while another student did nothing except come to school each day and make good grades. The scattergrams help to identify which schools are reach, possible, and likely based on your numbers. Once you find a college that seems to be a good match, click the “Add to List” button. That college will appear on your “colleges I’m thinking about” list.

**Check the Percent Accepted**

If there is no information in Family Connection (FC), you can make a guess on your chances of admission by finding out how many students are usually admitted in a given year. The most selective schools only admit 5 to 15 percent of the applicants. Certainly your chances of getting into that kind of school are less than one that admits 60 to 70 percent of the students. The percent of accepted students is found on college’s websites.

Each year there are a few “hot” schools to which everyone seems to apply. As a result, they attract a huge number of applications and become much more selective than they used to be. Northeastern, Duke and NYU, for example, are schools that have recently become very hot. This situation creates a vicious circle. When a student hears about a hot school, the reaction is often, “Hey, I’d better apply too!” But the more people apply, the more people are rejected. That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t apply to a hot school. It just means that even if your grades and test scores appear to make you a strong contender, you might not be admitted. Scattergrams list a four year summary of admission so if things have recently changed, they can be misleading.

If you decide to apply to a certain college because you read an interesting article about it in Time, remember several million other people will have read about it too. Some colleges accept students for mid-year (January) admission who might ordinarily be denied. If you are sold on a “reach” college, check on alternate admission seasons. Also, check if there is a greater possibility of acceptance in a second choice major. For example, computer engineering might be extremely selective, while other engineering majors could be somewhat more accessible. However, if you truly want to study science, don’t apply for a major in classics just to gain admission to a college – it’s not always possible to switch majors.

**Compare SAT Scores**

Most colleges now provide SAT scores in middle fifty percentile bands. If a school reports their freshman class had Critical Reading SAT scores from 550-640, it means half of the admitted students had scores within that range. Twenty-five percent of the students had scores below 550 and twenty-five percent of the students had scores over 640. You may be tempted to automatically eliminate schools if you do not have scores in that middle fifty percent band. That is a mistake. Don’t do it. If you are not far off the bottom of the range and have grades that are ok, go for it.

A problem with SAT averages is colleges use their own techniques for determining average scores. They may manipulate the numbers to make them look better than they perhaps are, because most colleges want to look selective and improve their US News rating. Sometimes this is done by eliminating the scores of minorities or athletes, who, as a group, do worse on admissions tests than others. It may be easier to get into a school than the scores suggest, depending upon whether and how the school has manipulated the scores. They don’t lie, but they stretch things sometimes.

If you’ve only taken the PSAT so far, comparing your scores with SAT averages can be misleading—and disappointing—since most students’ SAT scores are higher than their PSAT scores. Non-native English speakers are also not expected to have the same level of verbal SAT scores. Look broadly at the SAT averages. Certainly you should never discount a college based on scores alone. *Your grades are still the most important factor.*

**Make the TOEFL or IELTS Minimum**

If you are a non-native English speaker or a citizen of a country where the official language is not English, you may be asked to submit Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores. You counselor can help you decide if you might need to one of those tests.
Maximum Number of Applications
SAS limits applications to a maximum of ten. If you present your counselor with more than ten, you will be asked to reduce it. This policy, which is common among college preparatory schools in the US and overseas, is designed to maximize the admission chances for all of our students.

Applying to more than ten colleges suggests you haven’t done your research well. Using the scattergrams in FC and discussing options with your counselor should help you choose a reasonable number. Secondly, it is difficult and very time-consuming to complete too many applications. Students can rarely do a good job both filling out college applications and keeping up with school work/extracurricular activities. It’s much better to do an excellent job on a reasonable number of applications than to do a slapdash job on more. Third, it’s expensive applying to colleges. Fourth, when it comes near to decision-making time, universities sometimes ask the counselor how many applications the student has completed, or how likely the student is to attend their school. If you’ve applied to more than ten colleges, your counselor will not be able to give the inquiring college the answer they want. Finally, colleges monitor their “yield” from each high school. Since you can attend only one college, students who apply to large numbers cause the “yield” from SAS to go down. Colleges notice this and may be less likely to accept future SAS applicants.

In the end, it is in the best interest of both you and future SAS students that we limit the number of applications to ten. You have benefited from past students who abided by this limit and your reasonable number of applications will benefit future SAS seniors.

“Clusters”
Sometimes, particular schools have many SAS students (clusters) applying or interested in applying. When those schools have a history of accepting many of our students in any one year, “cluster” applications do not present a problem. If, however, especially selective schools have clusters of SAS applicants, then quite a few students can expect to be denied admission. We only mention this phenomenon as a way to urge students to look widely and deeply at excellent schools (e.g. top liberal arts & sciences colleges) that may provide outstanding educations and experiences, but are off the beaten SAS track.
ADMISSION TESTS

When applying to college, test scores may be the first thing to come to mind (even though they are rarely the first thing that an admission officer will look at). As explained earlier, test scores are the primary acceptance factor for European universities. For applicants to Singapore universities, exam results either get them in or keep them out. For students applying to the US, however, the answer to “How important are the SATs or ACTs?” is a complex one. If you ask an admissions officer from a selective university if scores are the most important part of an application, the answer will be “no.” Instead, you hear, “Test scores are one factor, but grades and the strength of course work are more important.” “Spend more time making good grades and being involved in extracurricular and community activities than worrying about your ACT or SAT scores.” “Scores are overemphasized.”

However, when that same admissions officer begins wading through stacks of applications to decide which fifty percent to admit or reject, test scores do become important. Many applicants will have roughly the same grades, the same positive recommendations, and the same well-written essays. In these cases, a high ACT or SAT can break the ties.

Regardless of what an admission officer may say, most still put considerable weight on scores. While many believe there are better ways to measure college preparation (which there are), they still see the ACT or SAT as a measure of predicted ability. The more selective the university, the more important the scores seem to become. Scores are probably more important than admission officers say, but less important than you think. The following is an explanation of the major entrance exams.

PSAT/NMSQT
The Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test is given to all SAS freshmen, sophomores and juniors each October. The test follows the SAT format and can give an early indication of likely SAT scores. Test scores range from 320 to 1520 on the PSAT slightly different than the 400 to 1600 new SAT scale.

Do not get upset about low PSAT scores. SAS purposely requires all students to take the PSAT as practice for taking a college entrance exam. Most students earn lower PSAT scores than SAT scores. Colleges will never receive your PSAT scores; only you, your parents and the SAS counseling office will be able to view them.

PSAT/NMSQT scores are used by the US-based National Merit Scholarship Corporation to determine who is eligible to enter the National Merit Scholar Competition. US citizens who perform exceptionally well on the PSAT/NMSQT are identified as “Commended” or National Merit “Semi-Finalists.” Semi-Finalists with extremely high SAT scores, good grades, and positive recommendations may be named as “National Merit Scholars” and could win scholarships.

The SAT
Most colleges require SAT scores because the results are the only common comparison they have between students coming from a variety of schools and backgrounds. For students going to the US or Canada, SATs (or the similar ACT test) are required by almost all universities. Non-US students applying from schools such as SAS may be required to submit SAT scores if applying to universities in their home countries.

Prior to May 2009, students who took the SAT more than once had to send all scores to colleges. “Score Choice” was announced by the College Board in 2008 with the goal of “reducing student stress.” Score Choice permits students to send only their best overall score from a given test date. So students can take tests repeatedly with no apparent penalty. There’s one catch. Colleges can opt out of Score Choice and require applicants to report every SAT score. Currently Stanford, Yale, Columbia, Cornell, Pomona, and the University of Pennsylvania are just a few of the colleges requiring students to report all scores. Other selective schools, including Harvard, Princeton and the University of Chicago, honor Score Choice. Several colleges say Score Choice is irrelevant because they already cherry-pick the highest individual math, verbal and reading scores from among multiple tests (often called “super scoring”).
In the past we have found that sometimes students (often encouraged by their parents) take the SAT as early as freshman or sophomore year. This is a bad idea. The more high school math, science, social studies, and English courses completed, the better the score will be. Scores earned early in high school will be lower than those earned in junior or early senior year. Since all SAT scores taken since ninth grade may be required by some colleges and low scores earned early don’t help, students are advised to continue to put off the SAT until later the second semester of the junior year. Use the PSAT as it was intended - as a practice SAT.

**New SAT Beginning in March 2016**

The College Board is overhauling the SAT effective with the Class of 2017. Recent research shows that success in college today depends in part on strong critical thinking and analysis skills; the redesigned test will seek to better gauge student preparedness for the rigors of college coursework. The revised SAT will launch in March of 2016 in the US and overseas in May.

The changes, which include going back to the 1600-point composite score based on 800-point math and “evidence-based reading and writing” sections, and making the essay optional, are intended to better reflect the material students should be learning in high school and improve the SAT’s reliability as an indicator of how prepared applicants are to tackle college work.

One big innovation is the way vocabulary will be handled. Rather than test students’ knowledge of obscure words out of context – like “cruciverbalist,” “mellifluous,” or “prestidigitation” – the focus will be on so-called high-utility words that appear in many disciplines, and they’ll be used in a passage. For example, after reading a selection about population density that uses the word “intense,” test-takers might be asked which word has the closest meaning: “emotional,” “concentrated,” “brilliant” or “determined.”

The new SAT will also require students to draw conclusions by taking account of evidence, to revise and edit text, to analyze data and interpret graphs, and to solve the types of math problems most commonly seen in college courses and the workplace.

The new SAT will more closely resemble the ACT, which has been growing more popular. The redesigned SAT will last three hours, with an extra 50 minutes allotted for an optional essay in which students will analyze a passage and how the author builds an argument. Check the College Board website for more information about this new test.

**SAT Subject Tests**

SAT Subject Tests used to be called the SAT-II’s, and your parents may have known them as the Achievement Tests. They are one-hour tests on subjects studied in high school and are only required by fewer than 50 US colleges (the more selective ones). The majority of colleges do not require students to take any SAT subject tests nor do they use them. For those schools that do require them, generally math and a second exam of your choice are required. Only a very small number of colleges (less than 5) recommend a third exam so taking more exams isn’t particularly helpful. On any SAT test date, you can choose to take exams in one, two, or three subjects. You cannot, however, take both the SAT Reasoning Test and the SAT Subject Tests on the same day.

Most subjects are offered on each SAT test date. The notable exceptions are the Foreign Language with Listening tests. These tests are offered only in November. If Japanese, Korean or Chinese is your native language, you generally cannot substitute this exam for a required SAT Subject Test, since the test is designed for students who have completed three or four years of high school language study. Colleges do not find the scores earned by native speakers (which are invariably around 800) to be very helpful.

Take your SAT Subject Tests in May or June of the year you complete the highest level course in that subject area, or at least no later than fall of senior year. If you will be applying to colleges requiring the SAT Subject Tests, you should probably take Math (level 1 if you are in Algebra II or level 2 if you are completing Pre Calculus or a higher math) and one or two other tests of your choice. If you’re taking one or more AP courses, your exam...
choices would ordinarily be in those subjects. Since SAT Subject Tests are written at an AP level, your score may not be very good after just one year of a subject. If needed, you can retake any subject tests or select new subjects during the October or November test dates of your senior year.

Your counselor or the college website can tell whether schools you are considering require SAT Subject Tests. If you’re not sure where you’re applying, but are strong in an academic area, consider taking a test in that subject at the end of your junior year.

SAT Scores
SAT scores are on a scale from 200 to 800. Approximately half of US college-bound juniors earn about 500 on each section. The other half earn scores less than 1500. At SAS, our students typically earn higher SAT scores.

The easiest way to determine how you did on the SAT Reasoning Test is to check your percentile score. A percentile score judges your performance relative to other students who took the test. If you earn an SAT score at the 50th percentile, it means you scored better than 50 out of 100 typical college-bound students who took the test. In other words, if you lined up 99 students from the lowest (1) to the highest (99) scores, you would be number 50 if your score was at the 50th percentile. Don’t confuse percents with percentiles. Percentiles compare you to other test takers.

Percentiles on Chinese, Japanese, and Korean SAT Subject Tests are highly misleading, because they are so often taken by native speakers. As a non-native speaker, do not use the percentiles to judge your performance instead, look at the scores and judge them as you would any other SAT subject.

Almost all colleges require an official copy of your SAT scores. When registering for an SAT, you can send your official scores automatically to four colleges at no additional charge. Once the test is scored, they will send the new results, plus all previous SAT scores, to the listed colleges. You can opt to send official scores later—and you must at some point have your official scores sent—but it costs US$11.25 for each report sent.

Retaking the SAT
Students often ask how many times to take the SAT. Generally, the answer is two. Most students show score improvement the second time, averaging 15-20 points on each section. Taking the SAT more than twice will rarely increase scores further. Since SAS students take the PSAT twice, by the second SAT, it’s really the fourth time an SAT-type of test has been taken.

SAT Prep Programs
There are an array of books and computer programs available to help prepare for the SAT Reasoning Test. As long as they don’t take away from homework or other activities, using one makes sense. Unless you already are making straight As, don’t spend a large amount of time taking a prep course, especially during the school year. Remember, admission officers say courses and grades are the most important factor considered when making an admission decision. Therefore, SAS counselors can not recommend lengthy coaching courses, especially if they require a lot of time and effort better spent on schoolwork or other worthwhile activities.

There are, of course, valuable test-taking tips and strategies. For example, if an answer to a question near the beginning of a test section seems obviously right, it probably is; later in the section, as the questions get more complex, beware. But, don’t spend lots of money on a test prep course to learn the tricks.

If you are willing to spend some time preparing for the SAT, there are some free web-based SAT (and ACT) prep programs. Login to Family Connection for a link.

If you do wish to take a course, research on the SAT shows 20 hours of quality prep time will result in about the same improvement as considerably longer programs. Putting more time into a prep course will detract from important activities such as homework and extracurricular activities. While a test prep company will never tell you this, research has shown that you will get just as much improvement by buying (and using) and SAT prep book than you will by going to a course.

Remember, a change in your SAT Reasoning Test scores may help distinguish you from
other applicants; but so will success in an especially rigorous course load, involvement in school or community activities, or demonstrating an outstanding talent. If you attend summer school and want to also take an SAT preparation course, go ahead. But don’t go to summer school simply to take an SAT course. It is not worth the expense, and will not impress colleges.

**The ACT**

The ACT is a three-hour test similar to the SAT. While it used to be that colleges preferred one or the other, all colleges now accept either test.

The ACT test consists of four sections: English, Mathematics, Reading Comprehension, and Science Reasoning. Subject test scores range from 1 to 36, with the English, math, and reading tests also providing subscores ranging from 1 to 18. The ACT composite score is the average of all four tests. The optional writing test provides a writing score ranging from 1 to 36. A conversion chart on the SAS Counseling Website allows a comparison of ACT to SAT scores.

All US colleges accept ACT scores. A few colleges require SAT Subject Test scores in addition to ACT scores. While most students earn equivalent scores on the ACT and the SAT, some students do better on the ACT than the SAT or vice versa. Since the tests are designed to be equivalent don’t expect that your scores will be wildly different between the two tests. Even though the writing test is optional on the ACT, it is still advisable to take it since many colleges require it.

While ACT preparation is not offered by many of the local test prep companies, a free online ACT prep is available. Login to Family Connection and check the menu for one program.

Like the SAT, we advise students to take the ACT alongside the SAT in the spring of the junior year as there are variances between the two tests. You can then determine which is the better test to study for and retake in your senior year.

**Test of English as a Foreign Language**

If English is not your native language, or you are from a country where English is not your official language, you may need to take the TOEFL. (or IELTS, see below). The TOEFL is designed to test language spoken in the classroom for academic purposes. Since SAS students listen, read, write and speak in academic language every day at school, they usually do well.

SAS students often wonder if they should take the TOEFL, since many learned to speak both English and another language simultaneously. Although expensive, it is advantageous to take it, because when an admissions officer reviews your application file, the TOEFL score will immediately remind him or her that you were raised speaking another language. That reminder can be an especially helpful “excuse” if your SAT critical reading and writing scores were low. Talk to your counselor to see if taking the TOEFL makes sense for you.

The internet-based TOEFL test, known as the iBT, is designed to focus on integrating language skills. It emphasizes overall ability to communicate in English and includes four sections: reading, listening, speaking and writing. Take a free, short practice test online at the TOEFL website after registering to use the site, or pay to take more sophisticated tests.

Scores on the TOEFL are from 0 to 30 on each of the four sections, with a total score ranging from 0 to 120. The TOEFL has changed three times in the past 15 years.

If you need to take this test, take it during the spring of junior year, or early summer before senior year, in order to have time to retake it in the fall of senior year if necessary. Your TOEFL score is valid for only two years, so don’t take it too early. Be aware that if you plan to apply to the UK, you must take the IELTS instead of the TOEFL.

**International English Language Testing System (IELTS)**

The IELTS from the UK has gained currency with North American admissions offices. As such, students are at liberty to take the IELTS instead of the TOEFL if they wish, especially if scheduling the TOEFL proves difficult. In Singapore the IELTS is offered more often. Test sites include the British Council and IDP.
Registering for Admission Tests
Registration information for the SAT, ACT, TOEFL, and IELTS can be found on the counseling website. Each test requires a different procedure. One thing the tests have in common is the high school “College Entrance Examination Board” (or CEEB) code. The SAS CEEB code is 687225.

Registration for the SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests is done online and links are on the counseling website. You will be asked to register with a user name and password and you will use this same login each time you want to register for a test. You will also log on to the site to get your scores so don’t lose your login or password!

Singapore American School has worked with College Board to make SAS a private test center only open to SAS students. SAS students wanting to take the SAT here must use a special set of instructions to register. Login to Family Connection for detailed instructions on how to register for the SAT.

You will also register online to take the TOEFL. Space in Singapore can be limited, so register well in advance of a test date. You are allowed four free score reports if ordered prior to the test. After receiving your scores you can also order additional reports for a fee online.

Registration for the ACT is also done online. Similar to the SAT, SAS has worked with ACT to reserve about half of the seats at the SAS test center for SAS students. Login to Family Connection for more details on registering. On the test date bring a picture ID, calculator, and sharpened pencils. Like with the SAT and TOEFL, everything is now done online.

AP Examinations
US universities take Advanced Placement (AP) exam results into consideration. You may list your junior year AP scores on your application, but don’t spend money asking AP to send an official score, since these reports are automatically sent to the registrar’s office instead of the admissions office. AP exams completed in the senior year are not available until July, long after admission decisions are made. If you are recognized as an AP Scholar, make sure you add this honor to your application.

Sending your Official Scores
When you take an SAT, ACT, TOEFL, or AP exam, you are the person who receives and “owns” the scores. Although your counselor receives a copy of your results and adds them to Family Connection, most universities do not consider these reports to be “official.” Colleges require you to ask the testing agency to send your scores to them. You can do this at the time you register for the test by logging on to the testing website and paying to have your scores sent. Only you can send your official scores - your counselor can’t.
How They Decide

How does a college or university decide who gets admitted? For UK universities, the decision is based primarily on exam scores related to what you want to study. For US colleges, however, it’s much more complicated. Each college asks for a different set of information and each one weighs application components differently. Below is a list of most schools’ decision-making criteria. No single factor is considered in isolation. All documents and forms are reviewed together.

Your Grades and Transcript

Admission officers are interested in many things, but they’re most interested making sure the freshmen they admit won’t flunk out. All colleges want to fill their classes with students capable of doing the work. No college wants to traumatize its freshmen by having them in a situation they aren’t equipped to handle.

The best indication colleges have of how well you’ll do in college is how well you’ve done in high school. High school grades are the best predictors of college success, much better than SAT scores. As a result, US colleges pay attention to grades earned since ninth grade. The more academically successful you’ve been in high school, the better your chances of admission will be.

As your transcript is examined, each year will be seen as more important than the previous one. Colleges look for steadily improving grades—unless of course you’ve earned straight As each year. Grades from the junior and the first half of the senior year are most important. If you really messed up your freshman year, don’t despair. Admission officers are pretty good about discounting isolated problems, as long as they happened early in high school. If you blew off your entire ninth grade year but then pulled yourself together for the rest of high school, most admission officers won’t be overly concerned. Some schools - especially those in California - don’t consider your freshman year grades when making an admission decision.

The GPA calculated by SAS might not be the GPA used by a college reviewing your application. Since each high school uses a different set of grade weightings, most colleges recalculate each student’s GPA. They may drop the weightings, eliminate PE and art classes, or discount freshman grades completely. Rather than focusing on GPA, most admission officers review an entire transcript to see the overall number of As, Bs and Cs, while carefully considering the course load.

Courses You’ve Taken

“Is there anything wrong with the courses I’ve been taking?” you ask. Probably not, but the A earned in Ceramics is not as impressive as the A earned in AP Chemistry. All As are not created equal. Anybody can inflate a GPA by taking easy electives that don’t require much academic work. You (and your parents) may enjoy seeing As on your report card, but don’t expect college admission officers to be as impressed with an easy course load. The names of the courses are printed next to the grades earned.

College admission officers and high school counselors are always asked, “Is a B in a hard course better than an A in an easy course?” Here’s what Stanford once said: “Be careful not to assume that the world is divided between students who take difficult courses and get Bs and the students who take easy courses and get As. Most of our applicants are able to take difficult courses and receive As.”

Of course, most students can’t make all As. But the general principle still applies. If you can handle the work in advanced courses, take them. If your transcript reveals you are taking a lighter load than you can handle, admission officers will wonder about your motivation. They will be especially concerned if the difficulty of your course load drops off noticeably senior year. On the other hand, continuing to make good grades in five or six solid academic courses is more impressive than a mediocre performance in seven. Don’t get in over your head, because earning a D in an AP Biology course is never impressive.

Don’t fill your schedule with easier courses as soon as you’ve fulfilled the minimum graduation requirements. Continue taking as many advanced courses as you can while still doing well.
Likewise, taking only six courses in junior and senior year won’t impress admissions officers of selective colleges. Unless you are heavily committed to extracurricular activities, enroll in seven courses. More important than increasing your attractiveness to admission officers, you’ll be getting a better education.

Senior Grades Count
Although you apply to college in the fall of senior year (before your first semester grades are available), almost all colleges require an updated seventh semester transcript be sent in the middle of senior year. If you slack off during the first semester senior year or drop hard courses midyear, you can ruin the chances of being admitted to a selective college. Colleges really do care about senior grades, and require a final year-end transcript for all students planning to attend. There have been cases of students having acceptances withdrawn due to poor senior grades. It has happened - even to SAS students.

How Good is the High School?
You are undoubtedly aware that teachers grade differently. Much the same is true of different high schools. An A from SAS is well respected by admission officers. Your counselors know college admission officers and familiarize them with SAS. Most are impressed with the quality of our school, which helps your chances as they take a look at your transcript.

When admission officers review the stacks of applications received, they have to decide how impressed to be with each high school. SAS, like most college preparatory schools, sends our “profile” with each transcript, which helps the admission officer understand our school, our grading system, and the quality of our student body. A copy of our school profile can be downloaded from the counseling website.

Were Previous Graduates Successful?
Many colleges track how students from a particular high school have fared at their institution. Some even predict the student’s freshman GPA and compare it to the student’s earned GPA. If you’re applying to a college where previous SAS graduates have enrolled, hopefully they did well. It’s a good sign if a previous student was just barely admitted, but went on to be very successful. Data we get from our graduates and colleges indicate that SAS graduates are well prepared for the rigors of college and are quite successful.

Your Test Scores
Most universities are interested in standardized test scores. At the most selective schools, almost all applicants have top grades and top test scores. They expect everyone to have high grades and scores, but only have space to admit those students they find to be compelling beyond the grades and test scores.

An admissions officer does not look at SAT scores in isolation nor do they simply look at the composite score. They make up just one part of your entire application packet. If your ACT or SAT scores are weak, the question the admission officer will ask is, “Why?” Perhaps you didn’t begin learning English until late in your school career. That could help explain why your grades are high, but your critical reading or writing score is low. The admission officer will take your lower scores into consideration and probably give you the benefit of the doubt. A good TOEFL score will help, but it will not completely counterbalance low critical reading and writing scores. There is no getting around the fact that you need a certain level of verbal ability to sit in a college lecture hall and understand what is going on. College admissions officers don’t want to admit someone who can’t academically keep up.

Relationship between Tests and Grades
Because grading systems in different schools and countries vary, colleges use test scores to provide a standardized measure of comparison. If something seems out of line, the question becomes, “What’s going on?” For example, if a young man has 1200+ SATs or 32 ACT, but B and C grades, a flag is raised. Comments regarding motivation are looked for in the recommendation letters. The word “lazy” will probably come to mind, and evidence to support or discount this “laziness theory” will be reviewed.

Test Optional Schools
There are more than 800 four year colleges (Mount Holyoke, New York University, Bates, and Bowdoin to name a few) who no longer require the SAT or ACT. These schools have
conducted studies on what best predicts success at their institutions. Since high school grades are often the best predictor, some have stopped requiring admission tests and instead base their decision on grades and the other application information.

Those students who earn high scores usually submit them anyway (wouldn’t you?), so admissions officers know if you don’t send yours, you may not have done well. However, with good grades and low scores, for “test-optional” colleges, it is to your advantage to not send them. Some of these schools instead ask for a graded paper as part of the application packet, which provides them with a good perspective on the quality of your work and the grading standard of your high school.

In What Ways are You Interesting?
Admission officers look for more than just students capable of earning good grades. They want engaging students who bring a spark to a class discussion, take initiative on campus, to sing in an A Capella group, or to make the residence hall a better place to live.

An admission officer once said, “When I’m considering an applicant, I try to decide whether this is the kind of student I would want as my son or daughter’s roommate.” Obviously being a good roommate is not something that can be determined by looking only at a transcript. Most schools realize GPA does not make up the total student.

Essay
Colleges use the essay to determine who you are, how you write, and what distinguishes you. What kind of person are you? What is something significant about your experience? What is important to you? Colleges want to know what makes you unique and interesting.

Do not write what you think the college wants to hear or what they already know about their institution. There is no perfect or correct essay. Essay topics are purposely chosen to result in many different responses, so the admissions staff won’t have to read the same thing over and over. Your essay should be one that only you could write. The most effective essays seize a topic with confidence and imagination. Relax and try not to guess what the admissions committee wants to read. An honest, personal essay built around an illustrative story is much more effective than an essay that recites a list of high school achievements (which are already listed elsewhere on the application anyway). A good topic is one you want to write about, that comes from your heart, not one you think you ought to write about.

Please note, when an essay topic asks to describe an experience, person, or book that has influenced you, the admission reader is interested in what the influence has been. Most of the essay should discuss this impact, not just the last sentence. More information about writing an effective essay will be provided in later sections of this guide, on the counseling website, and in sessions offered by the counselors.

Extracurricular Involvement
A college’s interest is not only confined to what you do in class. They are also looking for students who are members of a learning community and who contribute outside the classroom. Extracurricular activities play a big part in distinguishing you. Quality and commitment are much more important than quantity. Colleges are pleased to see you’re committed to a few activities for which you have an aptitude/passion and in which you plan to remain involved. Leadership positions demonstrate commitment, so, just as upward grade trends are important, so are increasing levels of responsibility in your chosen activities. It is better to take three years of French than to take one year each of French, Chinese, and Japanese; it is better to spend three years rising to a position of importance in the SAVE club than it is to join a dozen organizations the school has to offer.

Johns Hopkins University says: “A common misconception is that university admissions officers are looking for each student to be ‘well-rounded,’ whereas we are looking for a well-rounded freshman class, depth being valued over breadth. A combination of both is ideal.” Involvement in high school activities tells the admission officer how much you’ll contribute to their school.

Extracurricular activities can only do so much to make up for less than stellar grades. Students highly involved with extracurricular ac-
Activities may find their grades suffer as a result. No list of activities will make up for mediocre grades. If you want to attend a top school, understand many high school students demonstrate leadership and also make As. Don’t overextend yourself to the point your grades suffer.

Awards and Honors
If you have been an impressive student, you may have won an award or two. Almost all applications contain a section to list academic awards and honors. Most students don’t have too much to add here. Induction into an honor society, an academic achievement award, and an art or writing award is usually all a student can list. Don’t worry about not being able to completely fill in this section. The majority of students have only a few things to add here.

Summer School
Going to Harvard during the summer of junior year does not equal admission later. Since summer college sessions are not as rigorous as regular sessions, surviving Harvard summer school will not convince an admissions officer you’re capable of doing Harvard work. Therefore, don’t sign up for summer school because you think it will impress an admission officer - it won’t. However, being on a college campus for the summer can be a great experience, giving you the chance to see what college life is like and helping you decide if it’s the kind of school you’d like to attend.

Other valuable summer activities include internships or jobs, volunteer work, or vigorously pursuing a hobby that has always fascinated you. Reading all summer while traveling to see relatives or remaining in Singapore is also great. The idea is that you need to do something rather than sit on the couch playing computer games or watching TV.

Are you Recommended?
Teacher and counselor recommendations have an impact on your chance of admission. To increase the chances of a roundly positive, helpful recommendation, be responsible and take your job of “student” seriously. Teachers find it easier to write about a student who is polite, involved, and motivated to learn.

What the College Needs

Diversity
Many colleges look for students whose characteristics or accomplishments match their “institutional priorities.” For example, being an unusually talented athlete won’t guarantee admission, but can be the “hook” to help admissions officers distinguish among a number of equally qualified applicants. The accomplished oboist or trumpet player could also be an example of a performing arts “hook.”

Other students, not Olympic swimmers or oboe players, also match a college’s admissions priorities. Almost every college is interested in its cultural and ethnic diversity. If you have a passport from a country not already represented in a student body, your chances of admission may be increased. If you have a common passport (American, Chinese, Indian, Korean), colleges are still interested because they’re trying to increase their overall percentage of international students. American students who have experienced life in another country are also thought to bring a helpful perspective to the life of the college.

Undersubscribed Majors
It sometimes seems most seniors plan to major in business, engineering, or pre-med. These hot majors mean colleges may have difficulty keeping their humanities programs viable. Since they need students in these areas as well, at some colleges, applicants, who list humanities as an intended major, may be more appealing. Before playing this “game,” find out what a humanities major is. Also, understand some universities make it difficult to transfer between a major in one college (College of Liberal Arts) and another (College of Engineering). Entering as “undecided” is perfectly acceptable if the college doesn’t require you to declare a specific major upon application. It’s especially good if you think you may declare a pre-med or pre-law major. You won’t be lying. Instead, you’ll decide later based upon your college GPA. Some colleges actually prefer applicants who haven’t made up their minds on their majors or careers.

Keeping Alumni Happy
When it’s time to build a new building, alums are the ones to receive letters asking for do-
nations. Most schools ask if you have relatives who attended the same school. Children of alumni and other “legacies” usually have an admission advantage. Parents and siblings are the important ones to mention, but when completing the application, don’t leave anybody out. At schools such as the University of Pennsylvania, legacies are given an advantage only as early decision applicants. Ask your counselor or the admission officer if a particular college gives an advantage to legacies.

Full Paying Students
As college expenses go up each year, many institutions are having difficulty staying within their budgets. Most US colleges and universities have a high percentage of students who require some amount of financial aid. More US colleges are becoming “need aware,” which means that financial need is a factor in whether or not you will be admitted. Need aware schools should openly state their policy. Financial need awareness plays an admissions-decision role for those students just barely admissible. In the case of a tie, the admit decision will often go to the student who can pay.

For non-US citizens, many colleges clearly state, if the applicant can’t fund college expenses, don’t apply. Colleges are not trying to discriminate, but, because the majority of financial aid funds come from the US government, US taxpayers would not be happy spending tax dollars on international students when many US students do not get their needed financial aid. International SAS students, do not request financial aid until you discuss it with your counselor first.

Show Interest
Because colleges want to admit students who are likely to enroll, many admissions offices take into account how well-informed and serious a candidate is. When a choice has to be made between two equally-qualified applicants, demonstrated interest can provide the necessary edge.

How can you show your interest? Admissions officers won’t welcome a flood of pointless emails, but they might keep track of thoughtful questions about academics, housing options, extra-curricular activities, and campus life which aren’t easily found on the college’s website. Be sure you make an effort to talk with an admission officer who visits SAS – it’s easier for the admissions officer to send a rejection letter to someone they haven’t met than to someone they have.

Demographics
There are several things the applicant has no control over during the application process. Basic demographics can play a role. Admissions officers may be under pressure to round out the freshman class with particular applicants, such as student publications editors or women mathematicians. Colleges do look for well-rounded people. But more importantly, they admit a well-rounded freshman class to have a well-rounded student body.

Decision Making Process
Different colleges have different systems for deciding who gets admitted and who gets rejected. At some colleges admission decision may be made on the basis of a GPA and test score. At most US schools, decisions are made either individually by a small group of professional admission officers or democratically by an admission committee.

At most liberal arts colleges and universities, an application folder is read by one or two admission officers who give each applicant a personal and academic rating. The academic rating is based on grades, course work, and test scores. The personal rating is based on extracurricular activities, recommendations, and essays. If a combined rating is high, the student is assigned a “likely admit;” a low score is an “unlikely admit;” and a mid-range score is a “possible admit.” A second reader may review the file, too, and add his or her ratings. If the ratings are similar, the score may determine the admission decision. At other schools, the first reader may present “your case” to a committee where the majority rules.

Once you’ve sent the application, it is out of your hands. So, now sit back, relax, do your homework and keep your grades up. If you carefully selected your schools, did the best job possible on your applications, and met all of the deadlines, you successfully maximized your chances of admission.
APPLICATION OPTIONS

Once your list is made of where to apply, visit each website to get on the school’s mailing list. Feel free to contact more schools than you will apply to. Receiving materials or an application doesn’t mean you have to actually apply. While you will probably not apply to more than six schools, it is perfectly acceptable to contact ten or more schools.

There are several different versions of US application plans, each with own set of deadlines, procedures and obligations.

Regular Decision
A “Regular Decision” application has a set deadline for application submission and a standard date of acceptance/rejection notification, usually April 1.

Some schools, primarily large state universities, have rolling admissions, which means they tell you the admissions decision a few weeks after the application is sent. Admission officers keep accepting and rejecting students until the freshman class is filled. It is beneficial to get your application in early, because the longer you wait, the harder it is to get admitted. Applications for large state universities are brief, since they process thousands of applications. They may also emphasize numbers (GPA and test scores) in their decision process.

Priority or Early Response Deadline
Some colleges, such as the University of Illinois and University of Michigan, offer an early or priority deadline. For students whose completed applications submitted by their deadline (usually November 1), these colleges guarantee that a decision will be released in December. Students whose applications are complete after the Early Response deadline receive decisions on a rolling basis. If a college offers a way to find out decisions early, students should certainly use that option.

Early Decision
Early Decision (ED), an option offered by less than twenty percent of colleges, is an application program in which you specify that a college is your absolute first choice. The deadline for ED is usually November 1. Students who choose ED are usually notified about their acceptance around December 15.

If you are accepted, you must withdraw all other applications and agree to attend the Early Decision college. SAS counselors are ethically required to hold you to your early decision and will not submit transcripts or applications to other schools if you are admitted ED. Only apply ED if you have an absolute first choice school.

If you choose to apply to a binding ED college or university, you are indicating that this institution is your first choice for further study for all universities worldwide. No matter where else you may have applied, whether in the US or other countries, if you are admitted ED you must withdraw all other applications and enroll. SAS will not process additional requests for transcripts.

One ED advantage is that admission committees feel positive about a student who has clearly designated their college as the first choice. Students who apply ED usually have a better chance of admission than those who apply regular decision. If you are not accepted, you will either be rejected or deferred. Some schools (e.g., Stanford and Northwestern) admit or deny the majority of ED applicants, deferring very few. Those students who still have a chance of being admitted—or who didn’t get SAT scores sent in time but appear to be admissible—are usually deferred. Deferred students are reconsidered in the spring with the regular decision applicants.

A disadvantage to ED is the limited time to review all options, since you are committing to a school early in senior year. Also, if you have strong first semester grades, ED schools will not see them.

Some colleges now offer two rounds of Early Decision, with the first round due date in November and the second round due date in early to mid-January. It is recommended for students who feel their first semester senior year grades should be included in their applications. If you are rejected as an ED candidate, your application will not be reconsidered in the second-round or regular decision pools.
Early Action
Early Action (EA) schools allow you to apply early and receive early notification, but do not require you to withdraw other applications. Applications are usually due on November 1 and notification is made in mid-December. Accepted students don’t have to decide to accept until the regular May 1 reply date.

Restrictive Early Action
Some colleges (Harvard, Princeton, Yale and Stanford, for example) are restrictive and do not allow their applicants to apply to any other early action or decision programs. Students are only allowed to apply to other colleges with a rolling, priority, or regular decision option. Restrictive Early Action is called “Early Action Single Choice” by some colleges. If you are applying early to any school, read the rules carefully and see your counselor for clarification.

Methods of Applying
On-Line Applications
Nearly all college and university applications are now submitted online. This has been a major improvement for students living overseas. When you apply online, the information is imported directly into the college’s computer system, speeds up everything, and reduces the chances of error. Online applications can be tracked by both the student and the school, and checked for missing items through your account on the college’s website.

The Common Application
The Common Application allows students to fill out one application and use it to apply to several colleges at the same time. Over 500 colleges and universities now use the Common Application. Many colleges will require a supplement that includes questions specific to their school and may ask for additional essays. To use the Common Application a student must create an account via the www.commonapp.org website. SAS has developed a document with information about all of the questions on this application and hints about how you should answer each one. Ask your counselor for the link to this Google document.

Electronic Submission of Transcripts
Singapore American School was one of the first international schools in the world to send transcripts and recommendations online to the Common Application. This process requires students to login to Family Connection and enter their Common Application user name and password so that documents can be matched up correctly, but it has been a major improvement at getting materials to a college in a timely fashion.

Students and parents can monitor the submission of documents by logging into Family Connection or by checking the application status on the Common Application.
Improving the Odds

Your completed application is the way an admissions officer knows you. Remember, filling out a college application is not the same as sending a friend an SMS message. Always use proper punctuation, grammar and capitalization rules. Answer all of the application questions, and when you have finished, go back to double check you’ve answered the questions properly. Misspellings make you look really lazy—especially if you misspell the college’s name!

Inappropriate e-mail addresses must also be changed. Addresses such as SEXYGURL@hotmail.com or PARTYMAN@yahoo.com do not impress anyone. If you’re using an immature e-mail address, including any with angel, devil, luv, nerd, chick, or baby, get a new one. An address with your name or initials is definitely more appropriate.

Some students establish a new email account just for college-related matters. If you do this, make certain you change your data in Family Connection. Most importantly, make sure you check it regularly!

Application Form

Since not all colleges are using the Common Application, you may have to complete an application specific to a particular college. Before beginning an online application, you will create an account with a user name and password. Different colleges require different numbers of characters and letter-number combinations, so you probably won’t be able use the same user name and password for all your applications. Keep a list with the user name and password for each college, your College Board account information, your social security number, and the SAS CEEB code (687225). All of this information is needed repeatedly to complete applications.

Complete your online applications in advance of the due date. In the week prior to application due dates, so many students are using the website that the system sometimes becomes overloaded which causes slowdowns and other technical problems. The University of California system applications must be completed in November. As you work on your

online applications, save from time to time. Most applications require you to save at the end of each section, but for those that don’t, save often so you don’t lose your work.

Essay questions should be completed offline as Word documents. When you are fully satisfied with what you have written, you will usually cut and paste the essay into your application. Before clicking the “Submit” button, have someone whose eye for detail you trust to review what you have entered. Once the application has been submitted, there’s no way to electronically recall it, so be sure everything is spelled correctly and the short answers as well as the essay are all intelligently written BEFORE you send the application.

Speaking of clicking the “Submit” button, make sure you do so! For the Common Application, you must submit both the application and any required supplements. Every year, someone forgets that important step. In April, when we try to find out why a decision hasn’t arrived, the most common reply is that the application was never submitted. However, NEVER submit an online application and also send a paper copy as a “backup.” This will cause two files to be set up under your name, and most likely, both will be incomplete. You’ll then receive two denials. The best “backup” is to save a paper copy of your application at home or on your hard drive.

Essay

The college essay can be a procrastinator’s nightmare. Don’t put it off waiting for lightning to strike you with brilliance. Regrettably, the lightning never strikes and, with the deadline looming, you dash off a less than stellar essay. Don’t do this; write the essay early.

While specific directions vary from college to college, all will ask you to “tell us about yourself” in a well-written essay. You may have the choice of a variety of questions. Trust your instincts and choose one that feels right. With the essay, you want to show you are a decent writer and an interesting, mature person. A well-written essay can help to tip an “admit” decision in your favor. A dull, poorly written “this is what I think they want to hear” essay can keep out an otherwise admissible student.
The same essay can be used for different applications if it fits the question. Make absolutely certain, if you mention a particular college's name, you don’t send the wrong essay. It’s not impressive to tell Pitzer College you’d be a great addition to Pepperdine University. And, this really happens each year.

Topics to Avoid
Some topics should definitely be avoided. Some are inappropriate topics for college applications, while others are too popular, have been written and read a thousand times before.

Generally, these topics should be avoided:

- Your relationship with your girlfriend or boyfriend.
- Your religious beliefs—unless you’re applying to a college with a strong religious orientation.
- Your political views.
- The evils of drugs. They are evil, but essays tend to sound contrived.
- Your SAT scores. Never ever mention your scores no matter how good or bad they are.
- Any topic that doesn’t appeal to you, but you think will appeal to an admission officer. They have built in phoniness alarms.
- Anything to make the reader, who might be a grandmotherly type, blush or be embarrassed.
- Anything to reveal you are a poor college prospect, such as how you hate to study.
- Generalities about how you will help/save the world. Stick with details.
- Any topic drawing attention to your academic weaknesses.
- How you saw very poor but very happy people on an Interim trip and realized how “lucky” they (or you) are.
- How you helped win the big game.
- How you caused the big game to be lost.
- Anything that makes it sound like you’re going to college for the sole purpose of learning how to make a lot of money.
- Any topic specifically mentioned as a great essay topic in a how-to-get-into college book. Several thousand other students read the same book and will write on the same topic.

Personal Narrative
Your essay should be a window into your psyche; through your written response, the person reading your essay should be able to draw some conclusions about how you think and process information, your ethics and/or value system, your sense of humor, and your intellectual curiosity. No one else should be able to write your essay – in some ways you are revealing your inner monologue – that conversation you have with yourself. This is very different writing than the five paragraph expository essay that you were taught in middle school. You should write in the first person; you should bring the reader into the action of your story immediately. Think about the best stories you have read. Do they take an interminable amount of time setting the scene or are you caught up in the narrative from the first sentence?

Avoid Generalities
Since admissions officers read an unbelievable number of similarly-written, not-memorable essays, write about something specific rather than general. Narrow your focus; write about a specific incident during a particular activity. Details stick in a reader's mind.

Don’t try to pack everything you’ve ever done into the essay. Do not write, “I’m a leader at my school. I’m in the band, student council, and make good grades. I also play sports. During the summer I travel. I am considered to be very responsible.” This is BORING.

Remember, most students applying could say the same thing. Besides, this information is included in other sections of the application.

Writing Style
Teachers have been telling you how to write for years. Now’s your chance to use those skills. Your prose should be clear and direct. Don’t use a thesaurus to plug in big, impressive SAT-type words. Doing this is always obvious and never impressive. Reread your essay;
stop at every adjective or adverb and ask if it is necessary. Too many adjectives and adverbs make writing seem contrived. Concentrate on nouns and verbs. Don’t use exclamation points (ever!) and never write in the second person using the word “you” unless you are quoting dialogue.

One of the worst things a student essay can contain is a lot of sentences that begin, “as Shakespeare said…” Admission officers will know you found these lines in a book of quotations - not your memory. Also don’t begin your essay with a little quotation. And don’t ever quote the lyrics of a rock song.

Admission officers understand you’ll have asked others to review your essay. Ask trusted friends and family to read your essay and comment on it. Asking for feedback isn’t cheating; getting someone else to write it is. Like with your application, get a detail oriented person to proof it before submitting.

School Specific Supplements
Universities using the Common Application may have a supplemental essay. Generally this essay will ask why you want to attend that university. This is the time to “show the love” and demonstrate your interest. If you can’t answer this question with conviction, why are you applying to this particular university? If you know what you want to study, write about specific departments and professors whose work you admire. Write about how the university will prepare you to reach your goals. Write about what you can contribute to the social and intellectual community of the university. Be specific; you’ve done the research and know why this university will be a good match for you. It’s generally best to avoid mentioning that you really want to be in New York City and any university located there will be “just fine” for you. Remember you are applying to a university or college that has spent significant energy and resources developing its own culture or “brand.” Know the brand and write a convincing case for why you are a great match. They want to know that there is a reasonable likelihood that you will accept their offer of admission and the more you know about the school and why you are applying, the better able you will be to assure them of this.

Questions
In addition to an essay, most applications have one or more short answer questions. Whatever the questions, be specific and interesting with your answers. Broad, vague answers are dull and have been read by the admissions officers time and time again. Make certain your answers are well written. If you have written an outstanding essay, but your short answer questions are poorly written, the admissions officer may rightly wonder whether the essay was actually your own work.

The “Anything Else” Question
On the Common Application and often on other applications as well, there is an optional section asking if there is any additional information you wish to add. Use this if, after looking at the entire application, there is something absent which should be added. Does your completed application accurately and positively reflect who you are? If you find something has not been included somewhere else, put it here. Examples include explaining how an illness kept you out of school for a significant length of time, or other unusual situation in your life. Speak to your counselor for details if you’re unsure what might be appropriate for this section.

Extracurricular Activities
It is not necessary to mention each out-of-school activity on your application. Nor is it important to fill up every space. Concentrate on your important activities and list them in order of most to least involvement. Leave out extraneous or trivial activities. Also, add up the total hours spent to see if it seems logical. Sixty hours per week on three different activities is not logical.

Under the “About Me” tab in Family Connection is a great feature called “Resume” that allows you to track your extracurricular, work and out of school activities throughout high school. Keeping this document up to date can really assist you with completing this section of your applications.

Impressive Activities and Awards
Some extracurricular activities are seen as more important than others. Here are some of the more impressive ones:
• Student government, especially Executive Council or class president.
• Yearbook editor.
• Choir, band, or drama; especially soloist or leading role.
• Varsity sports, particularly captain or all-star.
• Leadership positions with substantial time commitment (Scouts or church), or community service activities.
• Anything unusual taking time and effort.
• Math and science awards.

Remember to Include
Some things SAS students seem to overlook in their applications include:

• Band and choir—they may be courses, but also activities.
• Officiating athletic contests or coaching.
• Private music lessons.
• Hobbies such as karate, taekwondo.
• Specific service activities.
• Don’t use acronyms (NHS, MUN, IASAS or SAVE) unfamiliar to people outside SAS. Instead, describe what these activities are and how they are unique to you.

Things to Avoid Mentioning
• The words “World of Warcraft,” “Dungeons and Dragons,” or other computer game clubs, especially role-playing clubs.
• Any fundamentalist religious group (due to the strong emphasis on the separation of church and state) unless you are applying to a religiously affiliated school.

Summer Activities and Employment
Remember, most students applying to a US college grew up in the States and may not have traveled extensively. Admission officers enjoy students who have seen a bit of the world, but don’t gush over every single trip.

Make a list of jobs you’ve held. Some non-traditional jobs may need an explanation if they aren’t jobs also done in the US. Be specific when describing what you’ve done. Don’t forget to include jobs such as tutoring, babysitting, modeling, etc.

Summer school is often put in this section. If you attended a college summer program, you may be asked to submit your transcript. If you have a copy, bring it to your counselor so it can be sent with your application. If you earned poor grades, however, you may not want to list this.

Your Recommendations
Choosing whom to ask to write recommendations is important and is one of the things you will discuss with your counselor. At SAS, teachers will only agree to write a recommendation if they can truthfully say something positive. These are academic recommendations in which teachers address what they have seen in class and how that predicts future college success.

Some colleges give you specific instructors to ask. The form may ask for a recommendation from an English, math or science teacher, or someone who has taught you in the last year. If there are no specific instructions, consult with your counselor. If you know you will be majoring in a particular area, ask a teacher in that subject area to write for you. It is best to ask teachers you have had in your junior year, but it’s not necessary to choose teachers in courses where you earned As. In fact, it’s often those courses in which you earned Bs and Cs that admission officers wonder about and can be explained by the recommendation writer.

Ask teachers who know you, respect you, and will write positive things. If you feel a teacher has little to say other than the grades you earned (or something negative), pick someone else. Also, ask the teacher in a way that he or she can politely decline. You might add, “I don’t want to put you on the spot, if you’d prefer not to.” If your teacher replies, “I’d like to help you, but maybe someone else knows you better,” take the hint and ask someone else.

Do not ask several teachers to write recommendations and expect your counselor to “choose the best one.” Teachers are too busy to spend time writing recommendations that will never be used. Most students need one,
and some students need two teacher recommendations in addition to the counselor recommendation.

Waive Your Rights
In the US, you have the legal right to read what colleges have in their files about you. Virtually all recommendation forms request you waive this right by signing your name. SAS requires that you waive your right to read a letter of recommendation. If you don’t, an SAS teacher or counselor won’t write a letter. Colleges only value confidential letters. Remember, we are your advocates. Both counselors and teachers seek to paint an accurate picture of you that puts you in the best light possible.

Teacher Recommendation
Teachers have a lot to do without also writing recommendations. Some teachers who teach only juniors and seniors may be asked to write recommendations for twenty or more students. Because writing these letters takes a lot of time, give teachers plenty of advance notice and be sure to request one recommendation in the final quarter of your junior year.

If you ask a teacher to write a recommendation one day before the deadline (this really does happen), don’t expect the teacher to write positively about organizational skills—if he or she is willing to write it all.

SAS has a system to help teachers write recommendations. After asking the teacher for a recommendation, a student must answer the questions found under the “About Me” tab in Family Connection. Choose the appropriate subject area questionnaire and fill it out completely. While not everything you write will be used in a recommendation, the information helps a teacher to recall specifics about you. If you put little thought or effort into the questionnaire, you are not helping your recommender to write the best letter possible.

Once you have finished the form, contact your counselor. Your counselor must review and approve it before the teachers name will be added as your reference in Family Connection.

If your college has provided a specific recommendation form you do not need to complete it. Really! Like most college prep schools, SAS has its own form we use for teacher recommendations. In most cases, the form will be uploaded and sent online along with your official transcript and other application documents.

Letters of recommendation are kept on file in the counseling office for five years. If you decide to transfer to another college, your recommendation letter can be easily sent. Although a copy will be in the counseling office, you will not be allowed to read any recommendations.

Counselor Recommendation
Over the years, SAS counselors have met many admission officers. The admission officers take into account what counselors say since they know we can lose credibility by writing an inaccurate recommendation. If a counselor says “this student is brilliant and will do great,” but flunks out after one semester, all future recommendations will be suspect. Therefore, expect your recommendation to be positive, yet honest.

Most applications have something called a “Secondary School Report” or “Counselor’s Report.” Your counselor is usually asked for an assessment of your motivation, academic promise, and integrity. An official copy of your transcript, along with a profile describing SAS, will also be sent to the college.

In Family Connection you must complete the “Counselor Rec” form. This document includes a set of questions you must answer to help your counselor write your recommendation and insures that nothing important is left out. It also makes the recommendation accurate and easier to write. For example, many recommendations ask the counselor to write the first three words that come to mind when thinking about you. Having you list three words to describe yourself can be very helpful when your counselor has writer’s block.

A counselor recommendation is included with each application that requires one. The counselor’s recommendation can be used to explain weaknesses in your application, to highlight your strengths, and to explain any situations that negatively affected your grades.
If a college does not ask about suspensions or disciplinary issues, we assume they don’t want to know and so, we do not volunteer the information. If you have had an out of school suspension, we must confirm (if asked) that you have been subject to disciplinary action. You and your counselor will discuss the manner in which you should explain the suspension in your application. This will entail describing what you learned from the experience and how you’ve changed as a result. Understand that a mistake, even a fairly serious one, can be seen as a learning experience and might not impact your admission decision. If you are concerned, discuss any past disciplinary issues with your counselor.

Extra Recommendations
Some students and parents incorrectly think they can influence the admission process by sending additional recommendations. Somehow they believe a letter from someone famous or otherwise known to the school is the ticket to an acceptance. There is an old saying among admission officers: “The thicker the application file, the thicker the student.” The more stuff added to an application to impress the admissions officer, the more likely they are to think the student is unimpressive. Asking someone famous, wealthy, or connected to write a letter of recommendation rarely pays off, because they’re typically shallow, causing the admissions officer to wonder why the student doesn’t think he or she is good enough to get in on his or her merits alone.

Only submit extra recommendations from people who know you well and are in a position to add information not already told. This does not include your girlfriend or boyfriend, but rather a letter from the supervisor where you were a camp counselor or your boss at your internship/summer job. A good recommendation has examples and anecdotes instead of empty adjectives.

A few colleges (e.g., Dartmouth) ask for a “peer” recommendation. The most important thing about this recommendation is to make sure the person writing it writes well. With peer recommendations, there is no rule saying you can’t see it or help the person decide what to write. But, writing the letter for your friend is against the rules and crosses an ethical line.

Some colleges, such as Brigham Young University, ask for a recommendation from a “non-school” person such as a church leader. This person should not be a relative, but someone who knows you well and can contribute something not yet included in other parts of your application. If you can’t think of a person to ask, see your counselor for suggestions.

It is important to follow the instructions provided by a college and not take it upon yourself to send extra documents. Admission officers expect you to follow instructions. When Stanford says, “We will accept a maximum of two teacher evaluations” or Illinois says, “Recommendations are not considered so please don’t send them” believe them.

UK Reference
The above information primarily applies to US institutions. Since you apply for a particular course of study when applying to UK universities, the academic reference is written differently for UCAS. The reference page will be written by your counselor and should specifically concentrate on whether you would be successful in the proposed course of study. Predicted exam results are also critical. SAS will be asked to predict what scores you will likely earn on your senior AP exams. The UCAS instructions also specifically ask whether or not the candidate would be successful if admitted to the particular course of study. Talk to your counselor for individual advice if you are completing the UCAS form. Full details about UK applications and references are found later in this guide.

Thanking your Teachers
A week or two before you send the application, check with the teacher about your recommendation. This is especially important as application deadlines approach.

Remember, teachers who write recommendations get no extra compensation for their work. They’re nice people doing this personal favor to help you. Send each teacher a thank-you note or do something to show them your appreciation.
Names and Numbers
If you are a US citizen, many US colleges still ask for your social security number. If you do plan to use it, be sure to use the correct one. Ask your parents what yours is and copy it correctly onto your application. Students who do not have or do not use a social security number will be assigned an ID number by each college.

Applications also ask for SAS’s College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) code. Singapore American School’s CEEB code number is 687225. This is the same number you are asked to put on your SAT and ACT registration forms.

Some SAS students use two different names. Make certain you always use the same name on all of your applications, SAT and other test scores. If you are not a US citizen, use your passport name on college applications, since the college will need to match the name on your transcript and if admitted, will issue your visa in that name. If you use one name to register for the SAT and another name on college applications, your SAT scores can’t be matched with your application, and your SAT scores will be listed as missing.

International or US Applicant?
Seniors wonder if they should apply as an international or US student. Usually, there is no choice. A US passport means you are a US citizen. At some colleges, such as the University of Pennsylvania, all students educated outside the US are considered “international” regardless of what their passport says. If you have a US and a second passport, list both countries when asked about citizenship. If you need a visa to enter the US, a certificate of finances must be submitted showing sufficient financial resources to support your studies in the States (see section below). If you are not a US citizen, fill out the international application form.

Major
Most colleges ask you to state a probable major. Think about what this answer says about you. Be certain your intended major is offered by the college.

If you are considering a career in law or medicine, you do not need to select pre-law or pre-med as a major. “Pre-med” is actually a group of courses required for admission to medical school, and in many colleges, it is not listed as a major. If you are a foreign student, it may be a disadvantage to list pre-med as a major, since it is exceedingly difficult for international students to be admitted to US medical schools.

Don’t declare a physics or math major if your SAT math scores are mediocre. If your science grades are low, don’t declare a biology major. Stick with “undecided.”

Should I Lie?
Lying is a bad idea (even if you do it without getting caught), because, well, because it’s just a bad thing to do and eventually it backfires. If the application asks if you were ever suspended and you were, answer honestly, because the same question may be asked of your teachers and counselor, who won’t lie.

Keep a Copy
Always keep a copy of each online application and the confirmation message you receive when submitting an application. While technology is very good, it pays to be safe. You also need to write down your login and password information for each application.

Fees and Finances
Most US colleges require an application fee (ranging between US $50 to $100) before considering your application. Application fees are almost always paid by credit card, and you need to enter payment information before your application is fully submitted.

Financial Certification: U.S. Visa
US passport holders applying to a US college do not need to submit a financial statement (even if you mistakenly see a form asking you to). Non-US students are required to obtain a visa from the US Department of Immigration before travelling to the US to attend college. To be eligible for a visa, you must have sufficient funds to pay for your expenses while in the US. Submit a financial statement or letter from your bank listing the people (probably your parents) paying for your education. You also have to provide a recent bank statement certifying available funds. Most colleges
require this information as part of the application, but a few ask for it at a later date.

Since many bank officials are naturally leery of signing forms, they may not want to certify the form provided by the college. Instead, ask for several official copies of the financial account statement or letter (written in English) indicating sufficient funds are available to support your college expenses, and attach it to the form provided by the college. This approach is acceptable to almost all colleges and banks are familiar with this kind of arrangement.

**Sending it Off**
The SAS counseling office has developed efficient procedures to send all the finished applications. Since more than 1,500 applications are sent each year, these procedures make sure everything gets out in an accurate and timely fashion. The Document Request Form (DRF), which can be downloaded from the Counseling website or picked up in the office, keeps track of what forms and documents need to be sent with each application.

Most US colleges accept online documents from SAS. If you are required to submit a paper application (typically to non-US universities) bring all paper documents to the Counseling office and we will send them along with your transcript. Make a copy of everything for your records. SAS pays the regular airmail postage. If you prefer to send materials by courier service, you are responsible for that cost.

We keep the DRF in the counseling office and refer to it, checking that your documents were sent with your application. The counseling office secretary also completes a final check to make certain all of the items you’ve indicated to be sent were uploaded and submitted online or were mailed. This information is also listed on Family Connection.

You must turn in any paper forms and your document request form to the Counseling Office at least two weeks before the college’s deadline. This allows the counseling office time to prod a teacher to finish a recommendation, if necessary, and still have the application arrive before the deadline. It is always better to get your application completed earlier rather than later. Early in the application process, admission officers tend to be more forgiving of borderline applications than they are later in the process. Toward the end of the admissions cycle, the people reading files tend to get ruthless.

DRFs for all applications due on or before February 1 must be turned in no later than December 1. This allows time to get everything mailed before the school shuts down for the holiday.

**Private Counselors**
SAS students are fortunate to have a team of high school counselors with deep knowledge, expertise and experience in college admission. Their collaboration and synergy mean you get great counseling.

Some students/parents perceive a need to engage private college counselors for added help with the admissions process. Some independent counselors can be helpful, but others are far less so.

SAS does not encourage the use of independent counselors. Our experience with local independent counselors has not been overly positive. If you decide to seek private assistance, be certain you are working with someone who is credentialed. The highest level of credential is Certified Educational Planner (CEP). The person should also be a current member of the Overseas Association for College Admission Counseling and National Association for College Admission Counseling. An independent college counselor should have recent experience as a college counselor at a high school where many students apply to selective colleges, or recently have been employed as an admission officer at a US college or university.

Sadly, nearly anyone can print business cards or announce that (for a fee) they can help you with college applications. Some of the worst college essays the SAS counselors have read have been a result of inappropriate advice received from private college counselors. Just because a person graduated from an Ivy League college or other highly selective institution doesn’t mean that she or he has an understanding of the current state of college admission. Buyer beware.
Interviews

Few schools in the US require interviews for admittance. Many no longer offer them at all. Others have elaborate networks of alumni (graduates of the college) who interview applicants. There are a number of alumni interviewers in Singapore. You may be contacted by a local alumni interviewer once your application has been received.

Some UK universities - notably Oxford and Cambridge, all medical programs, and some art programs - require you to have an interview. A few UK universities send representatives to Singapore to interview you here. In some cases it may be to your advantage to fly to the UK for your interview.

If you are on a college campus during the summer and an interview is offered, take advantage of it. Also, if someone calls you representing a college you applied to, if possible, try to meet with them. Most interviews are not as important as students generally assume. If you have an interview, you should realize that the impression you make on the interviewer will make it into your application folder. Rarely have students been admitted simply because they had great interviews or rejected because they had a bad one.

Leave Your Parents Somewhere

Your parents should not accompany you into an on-campus interview room. Admission officers don’t like having your mom or dad in the room any more than you do. Most will tell parents to wait in the waiting room (if there is one). If possible, leave your parents outside the admissions office entrance.

Not having your parents with you only applies to the interview. It is perfectly acceptable for your parents to accompany you on the campus tour or to any group presentation.

For local interviews, it is best to meet the interviewer at a coffee shop, work place, or at SAS. Although no SAS student has ever reported a safety problem during an interview, it pays to be cautious. It is not appropriate to meet someone at their home.

Interview DO’s

- Be prepared to offer a few different dates and times when you schedule your interview.
- Learn about the college or university before you appear on campus. Using the school’s website or a college guide, familiarize yourself with testing requirements, general curriculum, majors, or concentrations, current admissions statistics, financial aid availability and procedures.
- Dress appropriately. There’s no need to dazzle but you should not wear jeans, flip-flops, tee shirts or ball caps. Shorts? Sure, as long as you wear a nice shirt.
- Be on time -- or, better yet, five minutes early. Call if you will be late.
- Be respectful of everyone you come across on campus: the admissions receptionist, student panelists, your tour guide, the guy in the Student Center...
- Turn off your cell phone. OFF, not vibrate.
- Extend your hand to the admissions counselor; introduce him or her to your parents and siblings.
- Arrive prepared for a conversation.
- Practice answering questions like:
  - Can you tell me about yourself?
  - Why do you want to attend this college?
  - What is your intended major, and why?
  - What are your long-term dreams?
  - What do you like to read, and why?
  - Whom do you admire?
  - How would your friends, family or teachers describe you?
  - What’s your favorite subject?
  - What’s your favorite extracurricular?
  - What do you do for fun?
  - What are you most proud of?
- Think about asking thoughtful, qualitative questions such as:
• What do students consider to be the biggest pros and cons of your college?
• What do students like most and least about the surrounding town?
• What draws students to your college?
• If you had to generalize, how would you describe your student body?
• What’s the social scene? What do students do on weekends?
• Can you tell me more about X, a major/extracurricular that I’m interested in?

• Make eye contact and listen attentively.
• Thank your interviewer, shake his or her hand and request a business card; mail or email a formal thank you within 48 hours.
• Relax and have fun. You are the only real expert on you so show it.

Note: Everything you present to the admissions office – emails, questionnaires, notes – should be composed with care. Use proper grammar, spelling, capitalization and punctuation.

Interview DON’Ts
• Ask your parents to schedule your interview for you.
• Roll in late; if it’s unavoidable, call.
• Slouch, chew gum, yawn or litter your speech with umm’s or like, you know’s; avoid slang and off-color language.
• Answer your phone or text during your interview. Your parents shouldn’t either.
• Expect (or permit) your parents to answer questions asked of you. The admissions counselor wants to hear from you, not your parents.
• Be negative about everything in your life; conversely, don’t overwhelm your interviewer with insincere enthusiasm about everything.

• Recite your resume and think you’ve helped your interviewer know you better.
• Give answers you think the admissions counselor wants to hear. Give your own, honest answers.
• Show up without thoughtful questions about the college or university (see DO’s).
• Ask questions you could easily answer on your own if you checked the school’s website or a college guide (see DO’s).
• Comment about College A when you’re interviewing at College B.
• Let a question like, “What doesn’t the school know about you after reading your application?” slip by without a good answer. Answer with “I covered everything” and you miss an opportunity to share something new memorable about yourself.
• Let more than 48 hours pass before you send a formal thank you to the person who interviewed you. It is courteous and helps the admissions counselor remember you. You may not receive a response to your note but you must send one anyway.
• Forget that the interview is just one part of a collection of materials that will help the admissions staff evaluate you. Your future does not hinge on the stellar or pedestrian quality of your interview.

Save the Best for Last
If you have more than one interview, try to schedule your first interviews at schools you care about least, because you get better at interviewing with practice.

Send a Thank-You Note
Sending a thank-you note is always a good idea - which is why you keep reading to do it. Your note can be quite short, but it should sound personal. As with any good thank-you note, mention a specific.
ADMISSION DECISIONS

Once the college has reviewed your application, they will notify you about your acceptance. Colleges using “rolling admissions” usually notify applicants six to eight weeks from the time they have a completed application folder (with your test scores). Students applying in September sometimes hear in October. Colleges using a notification date (approximately April 1st) send out decision letters on or about the same date.

Accept
It used to be that thick envelopes were a sure sign of an acceptance. These days you are much more likely to receive your decision online, either through an email or through your account on the college’s website. Since email decisions are sent in batches, it’s entirely possible that a decision email ends up in your spam folder. Around decision time, get into the habit of looking in your spam folder before you automatically delete all of the messages.

Defer
Students who apply Early Decision or Early Action sometimes get a letter of deferral, which means the college will wait until the regular decision cycle to decide whether or not to accept you. Deferrals can be due to the need to see your first semester senior grades, or because the admissions office is unsure of the strength of the rest of the applicants. A deferral is not necessarily a terrible thing. Some students who are deferred are admitted later. If you are deferred, you are released from any binding commitment. You can apply, be admitted, and choose to go to any college that accepts you.

Deny
Unfortunately, not everyone can be admitted everywhere. Admissions decisions have little to do with you personally and more to do with the other students who applied that year. You can do everything right, and still not get in. If you happen to be denied admission to a college you especially wanted to attend, never call the admission office to vent your anger. If you are contemplating transferring a year later, you don’t want to have had a bitter encounter with the admissions office.

Only in extraordinary circumstances is an “appeal” possible. Appeals are rarely successful unless the college has made an honest mistake—perhaps they were unable to locate a part of your application and denied you for that reason. If you think something like that has occurred, your counselor is the one who should intervene.

Wait List
All colleges admit more students than they have room for in a freshman class, because they realize not all students they admit will choose to enroll. Hard to believe, perhaps, but even Harvard only gets approximately 80% of their accepted students to enroll. Guessing the “yield” is a difficult task—especially as more students apply to more schools each year.

If a school underestimates the number of accepted candidates who enroll, there will be holes in the incoming freshman class, which are filled from the wait list. Even so, the wait list is usually a long shot. Final notification may not come until well into the summer so, for safety’s sake, accept an offer of admission from another school, even if it means sending in a nonrefundable deposit. Only choose to remain on a waitlist if you really plan to attend should you be admitted later. Some colleges waitlist almost as many students as they admit, so the chances of being admitted off the waitlist at these institutions is minimal.

May 1st Reply Date
Once you have your acceptance letters, you must decide where to go. The US candidate reply date is May 1st. If you don’t tell a school by then that you’re coming in the fall, they can, and often do, withdraw your acceptance. Notify all other schools that accepted you of your decision not to attend. An email is a great way to do this. If you’re sure you won’t be attending, notify the college promptly so they might be able to open up other slots for other (possibly SAS) students.

Once you’ve made your choice, pay the nonrefundable enrollment deposit, which tells the school you are showing up in the fall. Also, check on housing arrangements. Read the
materials you received with the acceptance letter to see how you should take care of these matters.

Thank all those who proofread your essays and wrote letters of recommendation. Teachers asked to write recommendations feel hurt when seniors forget to say thank you or fail to tell them the outcome of the colleges’ decisions.

UCAS Offers
Each time a UK university makes a decision on one of your applications, UCAS will notify you of the offer details. You will be asked to code all of your offers (you could have as many as five) as “Firm,” “Insurance” or “Decline.” Choose one firm and one insurance offer; all others must be declined. Since most offers are conditional upon examination scores and you won’t have received the exam results, this can be a difficult decision. If you are confused about any offers, check with your counselor before submitting your offer. Once you have made a commitment to particular course you cannot change your mind.

Ask your counselor for advice regarding which offer to accept as your firm. UCAS asks for prompt replies and will provide a deadline in which you must make your decision.

If you don’t get a place on your chosen university course, you can apply for other courses through “Clearing.” If you did not receive any offers, you can participate in a process called “Extra” in which you can apply one at a time to additional courses until you receive an offer. See your counselor for help with either of these processes.

Canadian University Decisions
Most universities in Canada have coordinated their decision period to coincide with the US. However, some still do to not make decisions until after receiving final senior year grades, especially if a candidate is on the borderline between admit and deny. Final quarter of senior year is no time for “senioritis” if you are waiting to hear from Canadian universities. If you don’t get a reply by late April, email or phone the admissions offices to check if all required documents were received.

Senior Slump
After the college decisions have been announced, seniors often go through a “senior slump.” You have been accepted and you feel high school performance is no longer important. Beware! The fine print on the acceptance letter will probably say that your acceptance is contingent upon continued progress during your senior year. Each year, some students have acceptances revoked or are put on probation in college due to final semester grades. Don’t let this happen to you. Do you want to go through all of this work again next year?

Beyond Graduation
Once you’ve made your college decision and graduated from high school it seems like you should finally be able to take it easy. Not so fast.

Housing Contract
Housing information is usually included in the acceptance packet. Send this form in early to better your chance of getting good housing. In the housing contract, there may be a form asking about your likes and dislikes. This information is used to match you up with a compatible roommate. You may be asked to comment (honestly) on areas such as neatness, study habits, smoking habits, and taste in music. A college won’t guarantee to match you up with a perfect roommate, but they’ll try. Once you find out who your roommate will be (usually in July), contact him or her. Several colleges now have online roommate selection. You are able to post information about yourself and see information about others. Roommates are then able to mutually choose each other.

Address Changes
If you leave Singapore right after graduation and return to your home country for the summer, file an address change with your college in late May. Otherwise, you might miss some important mailings, such as information about orientation programs, course registration, roommate assignment, and housing.

Getting a Visa
If you are an international student going to college in the US, you will need a visa. You
should receive a “Form I-20” from the college’s international student office with your acceptance letter. The US Embassy requires this form when you apply for your visa. You can’t enter a foreign country for university study unless you are a citizen, a permanent resident, or have an appropriate student visa stamped in your passport. Do not enter the US on a tourist visa!

SAS hosts an informational meeting with representatives from the US embassy each April or May to help international students understand the steps necessary to secure a US visa.

If you are attending SAS under a guardianship arrangement and your parents don’t live in Singapore, you may have to return to your home country to request your visa.

Health Documents
You will receive health forms, which need to be completed by a physician. You will also be asked to include an official copy of your immunization history. You will not be able to begin classes unless this form is completed. If your family does not have a record of your immunizations, you should contact the SAS nurse before the end of the school year.

Travel Plans and Orientation
Most US colleges begin in August, and many expect new students to arrive on campus a week or two before classes actually begin to go through an orientation program. Colleges often have a separate orientation for students coming from overseas. Generally, all SAS students are able to attend the international orientation, but occasionally US passport holders need to ask about it. Do not skip orientation. It’s a great way to meet new people and to get over freshman jitters before classes begin. SAS graduates always report that attending orientation was a big help in their adjustment to college.

Transferring
It is possible to transfer from one school to another in the US. Generally speaking, the more prestigious a school is, the harder it is to transfer into later, because there aren’t a lot of students who leave these schools, and, if they don’t leave, there isn’t room for you to enter. The easiest schools to transfer into are the ones with the highest attrition rates. You need to ask yourself why you would want to transfer into a school where a large number of students keep transferring out. If you do think you might want to transfer to a “better” school, it is sometimes possible. Transfers most often occur after the second year. By that time, you will have demonstrated you can do college work. Usually decisions are made in late spring.

Colleges often expect transfer applicants to have a good reason for wanting to switch schools. Simply being unhappy at your present school isn’t enough. The best reason is you’ve decided on a major that your old school doesn’t have. Your case has to be convincing. If you come across as the type of student who would be unhappy anywhere, you’re not the type of student most colleges would want.
**Applying to the UK**

The country known as the United Kingdom (UK) is comprised of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Universities in all four of these lands are subject to the same government regulations and processes, but the system of education in Scotland is different from that in the other parts of the UK. Thus the application process is consistent throughout Great Britain, but what you experience as a student would be different, depending on whether you enroll in Scotland or elsewhere in the UK. Most degrees in the UK can be completed in three years, whereas in Scotland, the usual length is four years.

**What to Study?**

If you are applying in the UK, you are required to indicate your course of study at the time you apply. Unlike the US, where students can apply without having decided about their major, there is no such thing as “undecided” at UK universities. If you like the idea of studying in the UK, you must be prepared to launch into a quite specific course of study, and to stay with it for three years until you complete your degree. The word “course” is used to describe the subject of study, including all the specific classes that a student will take over the three or four years of enrollment. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the course of study is usually quite specific - for example, “Psychology” at the University of Durham, or a joint course such as “Business Management with French” at Queen Mary University. Once your studies begin, all courses relate to that subject area, or two subject areas in a joint degree. If you change your mind about your course, you have to reapply to a different course, and unless it’s a closely related field, you would have to begin your degree over from the beginning. For this reason, students who are not certain of their interests are not a good match for studying in the UK.

**Researching Courses and Universities**

The UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) website is the best place to begin the research process. Go to the UCAS website at [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) and click on “Course Search.” You can then search by course or by university. Once you’ve decided on a course, you should consult “Unistats,” a website that allows you to compare a particular course – for example, advertising, at all universities in the UK that offer it. You will find data there about the range of tariff points achieved by the admitted students, which is a rough way of determining selectivity – see your counselor for assistance with interpreting this relative to the AP. You also have access to student satisfaction data, based on a survey of students in their final year of the course. Finally, Unistats also reports the percentage of graduates who are employed or enrolled in post-graduate degree courses within six months of graduation. There is a link to this and other UK related sites on the Counseling website.

There are numerous other resources available for investigating courses. Many students have found the Higher Education League Tables, published by the major British newspapers such as *The Times* and *The Guardian* to be very helpful. Counselors will provide lists of further resources at the College Admission Seminar in May. Links to the sites listed above can also be found on the Counseling website.

**Application Process**

UCAS serves as the central clearinghouse for university applications in the UK. Applicants fill out a single online form, a reference is added, and once the form is submitted, UCAS forwards the application to the universities that the student has indicated. Each university then makes a decision about the application, forwards that information to UCAS, and it is then posted in the student’s UCAS account.

The UCAS application limits you to a maximum of five courses, or four choices in clinical areas such as medicine or dentistry. These course choices could be at five different universities, or two courses could be chosen at the same university (e.g., one course called Psychology and another called Social Psychology at University of Kent would make up two course choices). Each university is counted as one application toward the maximum of 10 allowed by an SAS senior.

**Starting the Application**

All SAS students, including current seniors and graduates considering a transfer, apply...
through our school’s section of the UCAS website at www.ucas.com. Each year, the SAS counseling office provides information about how to complete the UCAS application correctly. To make the process go as smoothly as possible, it is important that you register and apply as an SAS student.

Once you have set up an account, you can begin completing the UCAS form. It requests demographic information, a list of courses to which you are applying, a report of completed and anticipated examinations (including SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests, and AP exams), and a one page personal statement which is described below. You pay the application fee online when you submit your form. After submission, your counselor checks and approves the data you entered and adds the reference letter, which will be written by your counselor with input from teachers you have had in subjects related to your intended field of study. Your counselor then submits the form to UCAS, which forwards it to your chosen universities. An admissions tutor determines whether your background, ability, and examination scores suggest success in your intended course of study.

Since the UCAS application deadline is January 15th, your completed application must be submitted online no later than December 1st, so the reference can be added and the form submitted before school closes for the winter holiday. You may read in some places that the deadline for international student applications is June 30th. In fact, any application received after January 15th is considered a late application and is processed only after all other applications have been considered. SAS counselors enforce a December 1st deadline to ensure that you have your best chance of admission.

There are earlier deadlines for specific universities and courses. Students applying to Cambridge must submit the UCAS form plus a supplemental paper application by mid-September in order to be eligible for the required interviews and exams held in Singapore in late October. If you think you might apply to Oxford or Cambridge, you must discuss this with your counselor in the spring of grade 11 in order to begin planning for submission of the work samples that are often required by those two institutions. Students applying for medical, dental, or veterinary courses, or those applying to Oxford or Cambridge must submit applications to their counselor by October 1st in order for the form to reach UCAS by the October 15th deadline. Interviews are almost always required for clinical courses.

**Personal Statement**

A UCAS personal statement is very different than what is expected by US colleges. A UCAS statement allows you to make a convincing case for admission to the course of study you have selected. The personal statement can be no longer than 47 lines or 4000 characters, including spaces, and should focus on why you have chosen to study the courses you have listed, and what interests you about your subject. Details about what you have studied, read, or experienced in relation to your course will help the admissions tutors assess your suitability for admission. This is not a place to show off every last extracurricular activity that you have joined, but rather to discuss how any particular activity might have helped to prepare you to study your subject.

UCAS is very serious about detecting plagiarized personal statements. Each incoming personal statement is checked against a library of personal statements from previously submitted applications and sample statements on websites and in paper publications. After your application is processed, your personal statement will also become part of the library of statements. Any statements showing a potential level of similarity of 10% or greater will be reviewed closely. Readers will be carefully considering your level of motivation to study your chosen course.

**Reference**

Since you apply for a particular course of study at UK universities, the UCAS reference is very different from a recommendation letter to a US university. The reference should specifically concentrate on your suitability for the proposed course of study, and will include predicted AP exam results as reported by your teachers. Don’t even think of suggesting to your teacher that your prediction be increased a bit – because your offer will reflect that higher prediction and you will then have to achieve that score – or lose your chance to
attend that university. Your counselor will write your UCAS reference, and will include content or quotations from one or more relevant teachers. The document will discuss how you are suited to study the course to which you are applying.

After Applying
After your application has been reviewed, you will be informed of your admission decisions through a section of the UCAS website called “Track” at www.ucas.com/students/track/.

Instead of an outright acceptance, UK universities give “offers” of admission which are usually contingent upon meeting specific conditions. A typical offer requires certain AP or SAT Reasoning and Subject Test scores. The more popular the course of study, the higher examination scores needed. Outright denial occurs if you do not complete the specifically required exams or if your exam scores to date are weak. On the other hand, a particularly well-qualified student may receive an unconditional offer, which is an outright offer of admission. Some universities will make an offer contingent upon exam scores in particular subjects. For example, if you apply for a chemistry course, you would need to be taking AP Chemistry and AP Calculus and earn particular scores on both exams.

Each time a UK university makes a decision on one of your applications, UCAS will post the offer in your Track account, including all the details. You will also eventually receive a formal offer in the mail.

Because of the way UK admissions decisions are made, the SAS transcript is of less importance than exam scores. Once you’ve been assigned a UCAS number, if you wish, you can have your transcripts sent directly to the university admission tutor, especially if you’ve done well. The transcript may not carry a lot of weight, but a record showing you did well in high school will never hurt.

Don’t respond to any offers until you get the last one. When the last decision is posted, speak with your counselor and then use your Track account to reply to your offers. You will be asked to code all of your offers (you could have as many as five) as “Firm,” “Insurance” or “Decline.” Choose one firm and one insurance offer; all others must be declined. Since most offers are conditional upon examination scores and you won’t have received the exam results, this can be a difficult decision, so speak with your counselor. Once you have made a commitment to particular courses, you cannot change your mind.

If you did not receive any offers, you can participate in a process called “Extra” in which you can apply one at a time to additional courses until you receive an offer. See your counselor for help with this process. Students who receive offers, but do not make the scores required by their firm or insurance offer can enter a process called “Clearing” in which they can compete for available places based on their actual AP scores.

For further information about UK universities, take a look at materials in SAS’s Counseling Office, see your counselor, and check the links on the Counseling website.

UK Timeline

- **August 1**: Online application form available. Request “buzzword” from your counselor to start your application.
- **Sept. 15**: UCAS application opens.
- **Sept. 20**: Applications must be received by Oxford or Cambridge University for all students who wish to interview in Singapore.
- **October 15**: Closing date for all medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine courses. Final deadline for Oxford and Cambridge.
- **December 1**: SAS deadline for submitting all UCAS applications. This allows counselor submission before the holiday and UCAS cutoff of January 15.
- **March 31**: Universities expected to have sent all decisions by this date.
- **May**: Indicate your firm, insurance, and declined choices on the Track website by this date.
**Appendix A: Calendar**

**Second Semester Junior Year**
- Update your Family Connection resume
- Register and take the SAT’s, ACT, or TOEFL as necessary.
- Politely ask one junior year teacher to write you a letter of recommendation, complete a teacher recommendation questionnaire in Family Connection, and have it approved by your counselor.
- Discuss with your counselor whether a second recommendation will be needed.
- Attend the SAS College Admission Seminar in May.
- Update list of prospective colleges.

**Summer**
- Visit campuses, research schools of interest, write drafts of required essays, scour the SAS Counseling website.
- Complete the counselor rec questionnaire in Family Connection.

**August of Senior Year**
- Attend the scheduled college presentation during your free period.
- Update your list of colleges, including level of interest, email, home address, and resume in Family Connection.
- Register for the SAT’s you would like to take in October, November, or December, along with the ACT or TOEFL or IELTS if needed.
- Explore admissions websites for the schools you are considering. Check requirements.

**September**
- Check Family Connection or the counseling website to see if schools that interest you will be on campus. Attend these sessions and college fairs.
- Keep your counselor up-to-date on your college plans.
- If a second teacher recommendation is required (in addition to the one you requested at the end of your junior year) politely ask another teacher to write for you. Complete a second teacher recommendation questionnaire, and have it approved by your counselor.
- Create a Common Application account if one or more of your colleges uses it and link the account to Family Connection.
- Begin completing the applications, especially if an application is for Early Decision, Early Action, or if a college has a priority deadline or sends out decisions on a “rolling” basis.
- If you will be applying to Oxford, Cambridge, or medical/dental/vet programs in the UK, submit your UCAS application and supplements this month.
- By mid-September you must notify your counselor if you will be applying to an ED, EA or other college with a November 1 deadline.
October
- Take the October SAT, ACT or Subject Tests as needed
- All rolling and priority applications should be completed this month.
- Early Action/Early Decision applications must be finished this month and Document Request Forms must be turned in at least two weeks before their deadlines.
- Continue to meet college representatives and your counselor.

November and December
- Take the November SAT if necessary. This is the only month that the SAT Language with Listening tests are offered.
- Submit Document Request Form for all applications with deadlines in December and January to the counseling office December 1. If you will be waiting to hear the results of an Early Decision application, see your counselor.
- If you have not already done so, make certain you have the testing agency send your official SAT, ACT and/or TOEFL scores directly to the colleges.
- Go to the college’s web page to check the status of your early applications. Check that all supporting documents have been received.
- Login to Family Connection and make certain the colleges you’ve applied to are all listed.
- Midyear transcripts will automatically be sent to all US and Canadian colleges in late December.

January and February
- Complete the FAFSA financial aid form if you are a US citizen and will be requesting financial aid. Your parents must figure their US taxes (but they do not need to file their taxes) to complete this form.
- Continue to check the status of all your applications. Check that all supporting documents have been received.

February, March, and April
- Acceptances begin to arrive depending on the schedule used by each college. As you receive each decision, please notify your counselor so that Family Connection can be updated.
- You have until May 1 to make your final decision (except in the case of Early Decision applications). You must pay the enrollment deposit by May 1 to hold your acceptance. Otherwise your acceptance can be withdrawn.
- If you are placed on a “waitlist,” see your counselor to review your options.
- Once you’ve made your decision, notify other schools you will not be enrolling.
- Keep your grades up. Your acceptance is contingent upon you completing your senior year satisfactorily. If your grades drop, your acceptance can and will be withdrawn.
Students: Please fill out this form completely each time you are requesting materials be sent to a college in support of an application. The Counseling Office uses this form to track which documents should be submitted with each application. You can download and print this form from the “supporting documents” section of the Counseling Website.

Student: __________________________ Date Submitted to Counseling Office: __________

College or university name and address:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

SAS Counselor Name: __________________________

Application Deadline: ____________ ☐ Regular ☐ Priority/Rolling ☐ Early Decision ☐ Early Action ☐ Regular or ☐ Undecided

Major or Division: __________________________ or ☐ Undecided

☐ Common App: Transcript, Profile, School Report/Counselor Rec, AND
☐ Teacher rec (name)
☐ Second teacher rec (if required) __________________________

Note: All Common App items are sent electronically

☐ Non-Common App Package: Transcript, School Profile, AND
☐ Secondary school report
☐ Counselor recommendation
☐ Teacher rec (name) __________________________
☐ Second teacher rec (if required) __________________________
☐ Other (describe) __________________________
☐ Other (describe) __________________________
☐ Other (describe) __________________________

Sending Information:
SAS sends transcripts and recommendations to over 1,000 colleges electronically. If a college does not accept electronic documents, SAS pays airmail postage. If hard copy materials must be sent, FedEx is available at your expense.

Please indicate the items the Counseling Office should send:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

☐ Please hold until I inform the counseling office of my Early Decision results from a different college.

Counseling Office Use: ☐ Materials Sent ☐ Office/Student Status Updated By: ____________
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