



WESTWOOD HIGH SCHOOL
Honoring Tradition, Inspiring Excellence, Shaping the Future

August, 2015

Dear Parents:

I am sure this has been a summer filled with lots of anticipation as you and your child approach the final phases of the college search process. To help you finalize your plans, the Guidance Department has compiled the enclosed newsletter. In it you will find an excerpt from our annual college decision summary report, an article on what to expect during the senior year, a calendar of events, and other relevant information.

If you have not done so already, we encourage you to view [Naviance](#) for college planning; your child has a Naviance username and password. In addition to academic records and college search results, Naviance provides comprehensive data on all colleges, including admission decisions for Westwood High School students over the past three years. Counselors, students, and parents have found this information to be very helpful in conducting a successful college search.

In the fall the Guidance Department will send all transcripts to colleges through Naviance. In order for us to do this, all students must have a Common Application account for the 2015-2016 school year. Students should go to the [Common Application Website](#) before the start of school and set up an account. The 2015-2016 Common Application goes live on August 1st.

The next several months will be a busy and exciting time for you and your child. We look forward to working with you in this important process.

Sincerely,

Lynne A. Medsker
Director of Guidance

WESTWOOD HIGH SCHOOL GUIDANCE DEPARTMENT

WHS CLASS OF 2016 PARENT NEWSLETTER

Resources used:

COLLEGE BOUND NEWSLETTER

COLLEGE TIMES

FUTURES

THE COLLEGE BOARD REVIEW

COLLEGE DECISION PROFILE SUMMARY EXCERPT

Below is an excerpt from the Class of 2015 College Decision Summary.

The information reported here is derived from student requests for transcripts, letters we receive from college admission offices, and data reported on senior exit surveys. The data provided in the Profile is readily available online, via Naviance, which students can access through their individual accounts.

There were 251 graduates in the Class of 2015 and 96% will be continuing their education;
95% Four-year college/university
2% Two-year College
1% Employment
1% Gap Year
1% Military

During the 2014-2015 school year, 2146 transcripts were sent out to schools around the country. This year 181 members of the class (72%) sent out 786 Early Decision/Early Action applications. Of the 50 Early Decision applications, 30 were accepts (60%). Of the 736 Early Action applications, 560 were accepts (76%). While it is important to recognize the advantages to Early Decision/Early Action, the Guidance Department wants to stress that students do their research well before committing to the binding Early Decision process, as this decision ends all other options early in the year.

When reviewing the results of the Class of 2015, it is apparent that the admissions process continues to be competitive, which makes it more difficult to predict what is in store each year for admission decisions. From the level of competition to the push for early applications, students realize the impact as they attempt to create a realistic list of schools. Guidance Counselors work with students and their parents to help students develop a well-balanced list of colleges. This requires early and consistent counselor/student/parent involvement; this is something we strive for beginning with counselor-led ninth grade seminars, to tenth grade career workshops and junior year college admission workshops, as well as individual meetings we offer throughout the student's time at Westwood High School.

It is important to keep in mind that the college admissions process is not an exact science. Although some of the variables in the admissions process, such as the student's transcript and GPA, are primary factors, there are many other variables, which play a role in the final decisions of the admission committees. For example, participation in extracurricular activities, employment, leadership qualities, unusual experiences or personal circumstances, and family and/or alumni influences may be considerable factors. If a student in this year's class was admitted to a certain school, there is no guarantee that a student with a comparable GPA and SAT/ACT scores will be admitted to the same school the following year.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE SENIOR YEAR

(The following excerpt is from The College Board Review. Although it was written over ten years ago, I review it every year and find it is still relevant and accurate – L.M.)

The first weeks of senior year are devoted to simply becoming a senior. Seniors learn the right walk and talk, and assume a senior attitude toward underclassmen, teachers, staff, siblings, and parents. During this time, seniors push the limits of old restrictions such as curfews and responsibilities at home and test the limits of their new mantle of senior authority.

Early in the senior year students begin to realize the magnitude of their academic workload and extracurricular leadership positions and to see the gathering clouds of the college admissions process. During this time seniors may begin to exhibit symptoms of stress such as disturbed sleep patterns, gain or loss of weight, difficulty meeting school and/or extracurricular obligations, and, in some cases, use of substances such as alcohol or drugs. They are both surprised and anxious at how busy they are, and often express concern that something would have to be sacrificed in their schedules if they were to keep their sanity. One of the most valuable skills for a high school senior is time management.

Two peak times of stress for seniors are related to the conjunction of the college admission process and the demands of senior-year activities. The first period of significant stress is between October and February, when seniors are applying to college. This is also a time when coursework and extracurricular and social activities reach a crescendo. The combination of school related demands on time plus the press of admission, standardized tests, financial aid, and scholarship application deadlines may overpower an already exhausted senior. Increased pressure on seniors to decide on early-admission options offered by competitive colleges has introduced yet another stress-producing element into the equation. Parents and teachers should be aware of emotional symptoms such as depression, panic attacks, and insomnia, and physical illness such as chronic colds, flu, or stomach, headache, or back complaints, which are often stress related.

Seniors may engage in seemingly inexplicable self-defeating behavior during this period, such as refusing to complete academic requirements or failing to meet college admission related deadlines. These coping schemes relieve anxiety by reducing the possibility of success in the competitive admission process that created much of the stress in the first place. Some students and parents may think that there is a “late fee” they can pay for tardy admission applications such as that for registering for the SAT or ACT. Most selective institutions do not allow any “grace period” for the receipt of applications.

Parents should stay mindful of the tendency to become “nags” during this crucial time. They may find it difficult to understand why their child is unable or unwilling to complete these important applications by the deadlines. Students appreciate offers of help and reminders of approaching deadlines (a large calendar in the family room or kitchen might help), but are less likely to respond favorably to sharp-toned deprecations about their delinquency in meeting deadlines. Parents also need to help their son or daughter meet all the financial aid filing deadlines. Parents’ federal tax forms are an important part of the financial aid forms.

The second stress peak occurs from March to May. During this time, seniors are waiting for admission decisions. The stress does not abate once the decisions are in because now students must decide which of their options to select. This, of course, is the time when students are waiting for those equally important decisions about financial aid and scholarships.

Parental stress is also at a very high level during this period because it is when the magnitude of college costs becomes starkly real. "Sticker shock" rattles many families and may result in the selection of a college that is not the student's top choice because of lower cost or a better financial aid or scholarship package. Families may express dismay at assuming the large loan burden required to meet the costs of an expensive institution.

Some parents tend to think of their son or daughter as a commodity and of colleges as operating a scholarship "exchange". While the cost of education is daunting and the colleges are vying for the best students, it is important to remember that parents are expected to provide the primary financial support for their children to the extent they are able. Federal, state, and institutional aid are there to assist the family, not to substitute for its assistance.

Parents are also strongly encouraged to discuss any questions they have about financial aid with the financial aid officers at the colleges their child is considering, because these administrators control about 90 percent of all the financial aid awarded. They also may exercise professional judgment in the interpretation of financial aid regulations, and may be able to provide greater assistance if the family circumstances are unusual. In the financial aid/scholarship area, families should become well-informed consumers by asking questions and learning all they can about financial aid available.

Nothing can prepare students or parents for rejection by the college of their first choice. Even those fortunate students who are admitted to their first choice may not win the top scholarship or the high school valedictory honor. When this happens there will probably be some sense of rejection and disappointment. Students invest a great deal in researching colleges, applying, writing essays, and seeking recommendations. They put themselves into these evaluation processes and, for many excellent high school students; rejection by a much-sought-after college is their first taste of failure. No matter how it is rationalized, the letter of rejection still hurts. Unfortunately, many students and parents are predisposed to severe disappointment because so much value is placed on admission to a particular institution. Some families tend to find someone to blame if the student is not admitted to the first-choice college. These families often do not understand the nature of selective college admission. At most selective institutions there is no guarantee of admission even for students whose records are essentially without blemish. An institution that admits fewer than 30 percent of its applicants must deny admission to a large number of students it would be delighted to have in the freshman class if only it had space. No one is at fault. The simple answer is that there is not enough room and the admission committee must make difficult choices.

The best way to approach rejection is to ensure that students have excellent alternatives. This is done by making certain that the list of colleges applied to covers the three levels of competitiveness (safe, realistic, and reach) that virtually assure applicants of good choices after all the decisions are received. They may also be reassured by emphasizing that the institution they choose is the lucky one and the ones that did not admit them are the losers. Resolution should occur when students decide where they will actually enroll. Once the decision has been made, all the other options should be forgotten.

Students who are placed on waiting lists do have to sweat out those decisions, but should not count on a waiting-list institution “coming through” at the end. It may not happen and then they are left with no choices.

Seniors often think of the final two months of the senior year as anticlimactic. For the majority the college admissions process has been resolved one way or another, and the remainder of high school may seem irrelevant to students who are now truly college-bound. Students should be reminded that the offer of admission they have accepted is contingent on successful completion of the senior year. Dramatic reductions in the number of courses or a sharp drop in grades will draw the attention of the college admission officers. This may result in a tersely worded letter to the student asking for an explanation of this sudden change in academic fortune, and could result in rescission of the admission if the explanation is not convincing.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND SCHOLARSHIP SCAMS

Every year we have parents who become involved with agencies that promise (for a fee) to help with the scholarship/financial aid search. These agencies lure parents with the guarantee of a list of scholarships that only they are privy to, suggesting that each year a large number of scholarships go unclaimed. This is a myth. If you ask any financial aid officer he will tell you that just about every cent of available money is spent each year. (Futures)

If a scholarship agency contacts you with an offer that seems too good to be true, you should just trust those basic “I doubt it” instincts. We have found that the lists that students pay an agency to generate can be obtained free from several resources that are readily available to students and parents online.

<p>The Guidance Department will host a Financial Aid Night for parents on November 12, 2015 to help clarify the financial aid application process.</p>

COMMON APPLICATION (www.commonapp.org)

The Common Application is accepted at over 500 colleges and universities. Many of these institutions use the form exclusively and give equal consideration to the Common Application and their own form. Over the years, the Common Application has demonstrated its advantages to students, counselors, and teachers. The concept is simple: students complete one Common Application and send it to any of the participating colleges. The procedure simplifies the college application process and eliminates duplication of effort. To further simplify the process, you can use [Common App Online](#) to complete your forms and submit them electronically. The 2015-2016 Common Application is now available.

CALENDAR

Attached to this newsletter you will find a calendar of important dates. Also note the registration deadlines and test dates for the SAT’s and ACT’s. You may want to highlight these dates and post them on your calendar to avoid the late fees. See the guidance website links for both the SAT and ACT websites.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Following is a bit of advice from several “how to” books:

Researching the colleges:

“So, how can you learn about the college? To win the heart of a particular college admissions dean, you will have to know that school well enough to express why you are the best match for that campus culture. You are going to learn to research colleges from a great variety of sources. Most of you will have the opportunity to learn about colleges at college fairs, as well as through college guides, college representatives at your high school, catalogues, college home pages on the Internet, view books, alumni, and college visits. Learn how to trust your research.”

WINNING THE HEART OF THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS DEAN, by Joyce Slayton Mitchell

The College Visit:

“Most decisions about a college will be heavily influenced by the campus visit. More often than not, the “feeling” derived when visiting makes or breaks the college’s success in selling the prospective student. Knowing this most colleges work hard to assure the campus looks its best, especially on “Open House” days. Thus campuses you visit that look unkempt---littered, shabby, uncut lawns, etc. --- probably deserve your criticism.”

SELECTING THE RIGHT COLLEGE; A COLLEGE PRESIDENT’S ADVICE ON MAKING ONE OF LIFE’S MOST IMPORTANT DECISIONS , by Norman R. Smith, President of Wagner College.

The Magazine Ratings:

“Magazine ratings of colleges are so flawed it would be foolish to risk one’s future on their criteria. Their databases and hearsay opinions miss the whole point, besides being wildly inaccurate.”

LOOKING BEYOND THE IVY LEAGUE, by Loren Pope

A Note to Parents:

“Relax. This is the single most important piece of advice I can give to parents. I’ve seen too many families implode while going through the admissions process. I know you want to be encouraging and organized and many other things, but nothing is worth ruining your relationship with your son or daughter. Chances are that your child is already under incredible stress from many different sides.”

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS TRADE SECRETS, by Andrew Allen

An Open Mind:

“The biggest mistake of beginning applicants is hyper-choosiness. At the extreme is the perfect-school syndrome, which comes in two forms. In one category are the applicants who refuse to consider any

school that doesn't have every little thing they want in a college....In the other strain of perfect school syndrome is the applicant who gets stuck on a "dream" school at the beginning and then won't look anywhere else."

THE FISKE GUIDE TO GETTING INTO THE RIGHT COLLEGE, by Edward Fiske and Bruce Hammond

A Family Goal:

"As much as possible, disentrall yourselves from the simplistic thinking that so often surrounds the subject of college admissions. Everyone's ultimate mission is to connect a young person to an institution that provides both a scholarly environment and contact with authentic and accessible adults. If this is accomplished, how can a young person fail?"

THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS MYSTIQUE, by Bill Mayher.

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WHS GUIDANCE CALENDAR 2015-2016

		WHS GUIDANCE CALENDAR 2015-2016			
SEPTEMBER		TIME	JANUARY		TIME
2	Students' First Day of School		7	Guidance Parent Talk in Faculty Club (All Grades)	8:00 - 9:00 AM
3	Registration Deadline for October 3 SAT		8	Registration Deadline for February 6 ACT	
11	Senior Seminar		15	Last Day of Term 2	
11	Add/Drop Period Ends		19	Midyear Exams - January 19, 20, 21, 22	
12	ACT testing (not at WHS)		20	Eighth Grade Parent Night	7:00 - 8:30 PM
17	Guidance Parent Talk in Faculty Club (12th Grade)	8:00 - 9:00 AM	23	SAT & SAT Subject Tests (not at WHS)	
18	Registration Deadline for October 24 ACT		27	College Planning Night	7:00 - 8:00 PM
22	Registration Starts for PSAT		29	Report Cards Issued	
			FEBRUARY		
OCTOBER			5	Registration Deadline for March 5 SAT	
1	Curriculum Night	6:30 - 9:00 PM	5	Eighth Grade Presentation @ Thurston Middle School	
1	Registration Deadline for November 7 SAT		6	ACT Testing (not @ WHS)	
3	SAT & SAT Subject Test (not at WHS)		29	Progress Reports Issued	
6	Progress Reports Issued		MARCH		
6	TEC College Fair@ Waltham High School	6:30 - 8:30 PM	1	Guidance Parent Talks in Faculty Club (All Grades)	8:00 - 9:00 AM
14	PSAT Testing for Juniors @ WHS	7:30 AM	4	Registration Deadline for April 9 ACT	
22	Guidance Parent Talk in Faculty Club (9th Grade)	8:00 - 9:00 AM	5	SAT & SAT Subject Test (not @ WHS)	
24	ACT Testing (not @ WHS)		23	College Fair@ Westwood High School	6:30 - 8:30 PM
			APRIL		
			1	Last Day of Term 3	
NOVEMBER			8	Registration Deadline for May 7 SAT	
5	Registration Deadline for Dec 5 SAT		8	Report Cards Issued	
5	Guidance Parent Talk in Faculty Club (10th & 11th Grade)	8:00 - 9:00 AM	9	ACT Testing (@ WHS)	8:00 AM
6	Last Day of Term 1		29	Practice ACT for Sophomores	8:00 AM
6	Registration Deadline for December 12 ACT		MAY		
7	SAT & SAT Subject Test (not at WHS)		5	Registration Deadline for June 4 SAT	
12	Financial Aid Night Auditorium	6:30 - 8:30 PM	6	Registration Deadline for June 11 ACT	
13	Report Cards Issued		7	SAT & SAT Subject Test @ WHS	8:00 AM
30	No School- All Day In Service		16	Progress Reports Issued	
			JUNE		
DECEMBER			4	SAT & SAT Subject Tests (not @ WHS)	8:00 AM
3	Parent Conferences	6:30PM	5	Graduation	2:00 PM
5	SAT & SAT Subject Test (not @ WHS)	8:00AM	7	Eighth Grade TMS Visit to WHS	
12	ACT Testing (not @ WHS)	8:00AM	11	ACT Testing (not at WHS)	
14	Progress Reports Issued		13	Last Day of Term 4	
28	Registration Deadline for January 23 SAT		14	Final Exams - June 14, 15, 16, 17	
			21	Report Cards Issued	