

College Advice for the Next Year's Seniors



Graduation has come and gone, and the Class of 2020 is now prepared to rule the school. Since life as a senior means thinking about what comes next, what can this year's college admission trends tell us about next year's application season? More than the headlines reveal:

Double check your “sure bet” colleges It's not unusual for juniors to spend part of this summer building a list of 4-6 colleges they'd like to attend. In most cases, this list will include at least a couple of schools where the student's GPA and test scores are above the average GPA and test numbers for the college.

Students who built their list as juniors are going to want to check that list closely come August. A number of schools that typically admitted a good number of students with B+ GPAs became incredibly popular this year, and that means many of them could expect a little more from the students they admitted. Double-check to make sure those schools are still in range to be sure bets—and if they aren't, check in with your counselor on how to add to your list.

Apply to rolling schools early This advice has been around for a long time, and it's more valuable now than ever. While many colleges—especially public universities—have application deadlines of February 1 or February 15, many of these colleges will run out of room well before that date. Other colleges with these dates are often willing to take students with slightly lower GPAs in the fall—but once the class begins to fill up, their criterion for admission start to rise.

Keeping your options open usually means starting early, and that's the case with college admission. Even if your dream school is on a rolling admission plan, think about applying by October 1. That can do wonders for your chances for admission.

Complete your FAFSA early as well This is also true for filing your financial aid forms, starting with the FAFSA. This will be the third year students can file the FAFSA as early as October 1, and while some colleges are still waiting until February to put together financial aid packages, others aren't. You really don't want to be left behind when the cash train leaves the station. Once your admission application is done, jump on the financial aid forms.

Send your test scores soon—if you need to A number of colleges have made a major change in their admission policy, where they are allowing students to self-report grades and/or test scores. That can be a huge plus, saving students time and money, and more colleges are joining this movement every day. Check the application requirements of your colleges August 1 to see if they've made the switch.

If your college still requires you to send official test scores, get that done by Labor Day. Colleges needing official scores won't act on your application without them, and scores ordered after Labor Day have been known to take weeks, if not months, to get there. Don't be left behind—jump on the Website where you signed up for the test, and follow the directions to order your scores.

Keep Aunt Becky in mind I probably don't need to remind anyone that you shouldn't do anything illegal when you apply to college, but the real lesson of what went on this spring is bigger than that. Freaking out about applying to college makes no sense at all. You've devoted time and thought to where you want to go, you've made good choices, and your list provides a range of options you'd be happy with. Apply, keep doing great work in high school, and watch what happens.

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