



PLANNING FOR COLLEGE:

College Counseling Handbook and Resource Guide

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Table of Contents

• Goals of the College Counseling Office.....	2
• Responsibilities	3
• College Planning Schedule Junior Year	4
• College Planning Schedule Senior Year.....	6
• Factors to Consider When Building Your College List.....	10
• The Selection Process	12
• The Application Process.....	14
• Important Details to Remember.....	14
• Writing Your College Essay.....	15
• Standardized Testing.....	17
• Reasons for Denial.....	19
• International Students – Financial Documentation.....	19
• Disciplinary Action.....	20
• Resources.....	20

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Goals of the College Counseling Office

The College Counseling Office works with both you and your parents to facilitate your transition from high school to college. Our goal is to work collaboratively with you to identify a range of colleges that fit you well and are suited to your needs. We strive to work with you as you locate a group of schools from all ranges of selectivity, allowing you to maximize your options. You should be happy to attend any of the schools to which you apply. Every school should be a “number 1” school for you. **Don’t just make a list without thinking about *why* each school is on that list.**

Most SBS students apply to between six and ten colleges, depending on the circumstances. The average number of applications is usually eight. **It is rare that your college counselor would recommend applying to more than ten schools.** The final list of colleges to which you'll apply will likely include schools from across the continuum and should fall into these categories:

- **REASONABLE/LIKELY** Very strong chance for your admission
- **POSSIBLE/ 50-50** Possible for your admission
- **COMPETITIVE** More difficult for you to obtain admission
- **HIGHLY COMPETITIVE** Intense competition for admission for all applicants
- **REACH** Very slim chance for admission

The majority of schools should come from the “possible” category, but your list should also include schools on either end of the continuum. This balanced, realistic approach to college admission helps to build in the opportunity for choice throughout the process. As larger numbers of students have led to larger applicant pools, the competition for admission has become even more rigorous, but there are still many schools that admit more than 50% of their applicants. Through your self-evaluation and your work with your college counselor, you will come to understand how you might compare with other applicants at your schools of interest so that you can create a balanced and challenging college list. Finally, **believe in yourself!**

Avoid falling into the trap of either believing you will be admitted nowhere or believing that you have the necessary credentials to be admitted everywhere! Neither is likely true! **You are the most important person in this equation,** and it is our hope that you will commit yourself to a thorough investigation of your schools and will devote honest attention to the application process. We are here to support your efforts and to work with you, but we will not make your choices for you or force you to participate in the process. **This is your responsibility!** We are ready and willing to work with you throughout the entire investigation and application process.

Good luck!

Responsibilities

THE COLLEGE COUNSELOR:

- **Will** work honestly and willingly to assist you in the college selection process.
- **Will** be available to meet with you in order to get to know you and advise you about colleges and programs that might be appropriate for you. We will work with you to build your list of possible schools.
- **Will** present your transcript and the official school statement (a recommendation written by the college counselor) to the colleges to which you submit applications.
- **Will** serve as your advocate in the process, in accordance with your credentials and SBS experience.
- **Will** keep you informed about upcoming deadlines, events, college visits, etc.
- **Will** be available for counsel and advice throughout the junior and senior year and throughout the decision-making process, from search and investigation through matriculation.
- **Will** maintain accurate records of all materials sent to your schools.
- **Will** communicate with your parents throughout the process and be available to meet with them.
- **Will** maintain a sense of humor!

YOU, THE STUDENT:

- **Will** engage in honest reflection and analysis of your strengths, weaknesses, ideas, goals and dreams and apply this knowledge thoughtfully in the college search and application process.
- **Will** believe in yourself.
- **Will** attend college representative visits, especially if recommended by your college counselor.
- **Will** become familiar with the **Naviance** program and use the program's features on a regular basis.
- **Will** do the necessary research to identify, investigate and apply to a variety of colleges you would happily attend.
- **Will** read and be responsible for information contained in this College Counseling Resource Guide, weekly Forum sessions and updates from the College Counseling Office.
- **Will** do the best academic work you are capable of through graduation.
- **Will** take control of and responsibility for the process rather than be dragged through it.
- **Will** complete applications and essays with care and attention.
- **Will** be responsible for all **deadlines** and other calendar events.
- **Will** communicate with your college counselor.
- **Will** maintain a sense of humor!

YOUR PARENTS:

- **Will** listen to you, your plans, goals and needs.
- **Will** encourage you to explore a wide range of options such as type, size, location and selectivity.

- **Will** provide assurance for you about your worth, independent of any college's decision.
- **Will** inform us of their views in this process, since they know you better than anyone else.
- **Will** complete a **Parent Information Sheet** online.
- **Will** provide support and transportation for you to visit colleges. Will communicate openly.
- **Will** allow you to – and *expect* you to -- complete your own applications while being available for proofreading and advice.
- **Will** contact the College Counseling Office with any questions or concerns or when in need of information.
- **Will** complete necessary forms required for admission and (if appropriate) financial aid.

College Planning Schedule Junior Year

December - March

COLLEGE COUNSELING

- Complete the SBS College Questionnaire during Forum in December.
- Register with Naviance College Connection.
- Make an appointment with Lauren Cunniffe, Director of College Counseling.
- Start reading guidebooks and looking at resources on-line.
- Consider making arrangements to visit some colleges over March break.
- See your college counselor **early** so you can work up a list of schools to investigate.

ACADEMICS

- **Continue to work hard in your classes.** The challenge of your high school courses and the grades earned are critical elements in the college admission process all the way through senior year.
- Work with your advisor and college counselor to select your courses for grade 12.
- Choose carefully and build a challenging program; allow for BALANCE in your schedule.

TESTING

- You will have taken the PSAT at SBS in the fall of 10th & 11th grades.
- International juniors – talk to your college counselor about scheduling the **TOEFL (Test of English as a Second Language)**.
- Use this time to plan and prepare for the SAT or ACT – try practice tests.
- Transportation will be provided to the SAT at Greenfield High School in May, October, November and December. Please do not sign up to test at other schools

if the test is offered in Greenfield. Transportation will only be provided to NMH for the ACT in April and in the fall. Transportation will be provided to Deerfield Academy only if the SAT is not offered at Greenfield High School and only in the fall. Transportation for all other testing dates should be arranged two weeks in advance through the Dean of Students office.

April

COLLEGE COUNSELING

- Touch base with your college counselor if you visited any colleges over spring break.
- Working with your college counselor, you should have an initial list of colleges for investigation by now. Research your schools and write or call (or plan to visit) for additional information. Check out the range of SAT/ACT scores and grades of an admitted student.
- Think about which teacher(s) you'd like to write your college recommendations. You will need to identify two (academic) teachers to write on your behalf.
- If your parents are on campus for Spring Family Weekend, be sure they attend the college counseling workshop.

TESTING

- Take the ACT test in April.

May

COLLEGE COUNSELING

- Continue to meet with your college counselor and work to refine your college list through solid college investigation. Make use of collegeboard.org and various print guidebooks.
- Make sure you are on the mailing list at any college you are investigating. You can do this on-line, by phone or by mail. Giving your name does not commit you to the school, but it will keep you informed.

TESTING

- Take the SAT test in May.

Summer

COLLEGE COUNSELING

- Make plans to visit some colleges. Determine your itinerary (your college counselor can help you). Use websites or call for times of tours and information sessions at each school and schedule interviews wherever possible. **Always be sure to check in at the Admissions Office, even if you are just doing your own tour.**
 - When you visit, keep a **journal** so you can remember your impressions.

- Get the name/business card of your interviewer and write a THANK YOU note.
- Continue to research schools of interest to you. Write down what you like about the schools that are of greatest interest. Why do you want to apply and why do you want to attend? *Hint: This is often a question on the Common Application Supplement.*
- **Work on essay drafts.** Review the Common Application questions to generate ideas for personal statements/essays. Review your personal essays from your junior English class.
- **Complete your Activity Resume** using the information you gathered during Forum classes. If you used the “My Resume” section in Naviance, it will come in handy.
- **Communicate with your College Counselor.** Update her on your summer visits to colleges and ask any questions that arise.
- Check out the Common Application site (www.commonapp.org) to see if the new Common App is ready. The latest version should be ready by August. Create an online account and save time in the fall by completing as much of the application as you can. Review the essay topics and begin to brainstorm your major essay.
- International students: take the TOEFL in your home country, if possible.

College Planning Schedule Senior Year

September and October

COLLEGE COUNSELING

- **Welcome back!** Be ready to work hard and plan ahead.
- Submit the **Senior Update** form via **Naviance** and schedule a meeting with your college counselor as early as possible.
- Re-read sections of this **College Counseling Handbook and Resource Guide**. Make special note of the **Senior Year** section and watch for important deadlines. Mark these dates in your planner.
- Check the “College Visits” site on **Naviance** to see which colleges will visit Stoneleigh-Burnham School and sign up to meet the representatives for the colleges of interest to you. There are typically 50 college visitors each fall.
- Ask two teachers to write a recommendation for you; turn in the forms to your college counselor.
- Meet with the two teachers who will write your **letters of recommendation**. These two teachers will write for every school to which you apply. They need at least **one month’s** notice to write your recommendation.
- Fine-tune your prospective list of colleges in **Naviance**. If appropriate, make final plans for **Early Decision (ED)** or **Early Action (EA)** applications. Plan your

backup list – it is VERY IMPORTANT to have a “Plan B.” You must let your college counselor know if you are applying early.

- If you decide to apply **Early Decision** or **Early Action**, be sure to work carefully on your application, including the essay(s), activity resume, portfolio, etc. Meet with your college counselor to review your early plan. **ED applications** due on November 1 should be submitted by October 15, two weeks in advance of the deadline. Notify your recommendation writers for ED or EA applications at least one month in advance.
- **For strongest consideration**, you should submit applications to large state (public) universities (with rolling admission plans) no later than Mid-October. (Examples include U-Michigan, U-Wisconsin, U-Pittsburgh, Penn State, Ohio State, Indiana University, etc.)
- Use one of the many web-based programs (for example, www.fastweb.com) to investigate scholarship opportunities. Check your colleges for school-specific scholarships. Some colleges offer merit-based scholarships. Follow the directions and see if there is a separate scholarship application process. See the “online resources” section of SBS’s College Counseling website for more programs.
- Check your final list for **balance**. Your choices should reflect a balanced selection of schools from among the following categories:
 - Reasonable/Likely
 - Possible
 - Competitive/Very Competitive
 - Reach
- Fine-tune your **Activities Resume** to send along with your application – take advantage of the opportunity to explain and describe your activities and commitments. (You must also enter activities information on your applications.)
- Work on your **essays**. PLEASE do not leave your essays until the last minute. Find a friendly reader (one is enough) to read your essay and help you to edit and proof it. What does the reader learn about you from your essay? Have you said what you want to say?
- **Early Decision/Early Action** deadlines are typically November 1 or November 15. Applications should be reviewed by your college counselor **at least 2 weeks before the deadline**. If you are a financial aid applicant, be sure to follow the school’s instructions and deadlines. You must be finished with testing in October.

ACADEMICS

- Continue to work hard in your courses. **Senior grades** are very important. We send fall trimester grades and most colleges request winter trimester grades, too.

TESTING

- All testing must be completed by the end of December.
- Transportation will be provided to the ACT in October. SAT transportation will only be provided to the Greenfield test site and only in the fall. Transportation will be provided to Deerfield Academy only if there is no test in Greenfield. Transportation for all other testing dates should be scheduled at least two weeks in advance through the Dean of Students office.

- Be sure you are registered for the October SAT Reasoning Test or ACT.
- Take the SAT or ACT in October.
- International students: Please communicate with your college counselor about your TOEFL. Submit your score report to college counseling. Let your college counselor know if you need/want to retake the TOEFL this fall.
- Register to take SAT Reasoning Test and/or the Subject Tests in November and/or December. Be sure you have taken two or three Subject Tests (depending on your colleges' requirements) by December.
- **You must send your own SAT or ACT scores and TOEFL (Test of English as a Second Language) scores officially to all of your schools.** Do this in conjunction with your last test date. You must send your scores on-line through www.collegeboard.org, www.actstudent.org or www.ets.org. Do this before January.

November

COLLEGE COUNSELING

- You must schedule time to meet with your college counselor to review the requirements for each college application. You must be familiar with the requirements of each college.
- Applications to any University of California school are due between November 1 and November 30. **These are very firm dates.** Send your application on-line before Thanksgiving.
- Review your final list of colleges with your college counselor. **Changes to your list will not be accepted after December 1st** unless there is a very compelling reason to apply to more schools.
- Use Thanksgiving break wisely. Complete essays and applications and work hard to present yourself well. Early application filers: This is the time to work on your "Plan B" applications.
- Financial Aid applicants: Register with CSS Profile if your school requires it. Create a PIN number (www.pin.ed.gov) in preparation for filing your FAFSA after January 1st.
- International students should make an appointment with the college counselor to go over financial affidavits for each school.

TESTING

- Take the SAT Reasoning Test or SAT II Subject Tests in November at Greenfield High School.
- When registering for your last SAT, be sure to list your schools and have your scores sent officially by the testing company to each school to which you'll apply. **The College Counseling Office does NOT send scores. THIS IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY!**

December

COLLEGE COUNSELING

- Remember to register for your FAFSA PIN number at www.pin.ed.gov. Your parent/guardian must also register for a PIN number.
- **All application materials must be received by the College Counseling Office no later than December 1st or we will not be able to send out your application.**
- **Early Decision/Early Acceptance notifications received.** Congratulations to you if you've been accepted. If not, be ready to submit "Plan B" applications. If you are deferred, you should follow up with a letter to your college. See your college counselor for guidance.
- Continue to work on applications with later deadlines. Do not procrastinate!
- File the FAFSA on line at www.fafsa.ed.gov after January 1.

TESTING

- Take any remaining SAT II Subject Tests in December.
- Officially send all necessary SAT, ACT, and/or TOEFL scores. **This is your responsibility.**

January and February

COLLEGE COUNSELING

- File the **FAFSA (Free Application for Student Aid)** after January 1 and before February 1. If you are applying for Financial Aid, check with your schools for necessary forms and file the FAFSA and CSS Profile (if required).
- Check for any outside scholarships for which you might qualify using Fastweb.com, Naviance, or other websites.
- Pay attention to mailings from your colleges! Watch for **missing credential** letters or e-mails. Call the school or go on their website to check the status of your application. NOTE: Schools often notify you of missing information before they have actually filed all information on hand. It is common for your information to actually have been received, but not yet in your file. **DON'T PANIC.** See the College Counseling Office with any questions – we can verify the date the materials were sent if necessary.

ACADEMICS

- Keep working hard – your second trimester grades go to the colleges.

TESTING

- Have you sent your SAT's? **If not, do it today.**

March and April

COLLEGE COUNSELING

- Many students receive admissions decisions in March; all decisions are in the mail by early April. **Please notify the College Counseling Office of decisions (Admit/Deny/Wait List) from colleges.** We do not know your decisions until you tell us.
- **Congratulations!** You now have the opportunity to choose your school. You must make your final decision on matriculation by **May 1. You may deposit at one school only.**
- Write letters or send return cards to all schools you will not attend letting them know your final decision. This is important, as you may open a spot for someone on a waiting list.
- Make arrangements for visits to colleges during March or April if appropriate. You may use your College Days for these visits! See your college counselor if you have used all **four** days.
- Meet with your college counselor about **Wait List (WL)** decisions. She will work with you. Since you probably will not know your final decision until after May 1st, you must pay a deposit at another school even as you remain on the wait list at your first choice school. If you come off a WL, you can pay a deposit at your new school and notify the school where you originally paid a deposit that you will not be coming. They will NOT refund your deposit.

May

COLLEGE COUNSELING

- **Candidate Reply Date - May 1.** You may pay a deposit to only one school.
- Continue to work with your college counselor if you remain active on a wait list. You should write a letter confirming your strong interest. Wait Lists sometimes remain active until June 30. If you come off a WL, you can pay a deposit at your new school. Notify the school where you originally paid a deposit that you will not be coming. They will NOT refund your deposit.

ACADEMICS

- **AP Exams.** Take AP Exams if appropriate. You may send your scores to the college you plan to attend in order to receive college credit.

Factors to Consider When Building Your College List

- ❖ **Type of Institution:** Are you interested in a university or a college? Coed or single sex? Public or private?
- ❖ **Location:** Urban/suburban/rural? What part of the country? Mountains/ocean? How far from home? How close to an airport?

- ❖ **Size:** What feels right to you? *Small* =1,000–3,000; *Medium* =3,000–8,000; *Large* =8,000–15,000; *Extra Large* = 15,000+
- ❖ **Culture/Environment:** What is the atmosphere of the school? What does it feel like? What do students do on the weekends? What is the sense of community?
- ❖ **Facilities:** The library, the dorms, the classrooms, lecture halls and labs, the computer facilities, the athletic complex, the health center, and the dining facilities - what's important? How well is the campus wired? What are the art, music, dance, and/or theatre facilities like?
- ❖ **Academic Program:** How flexible is the program? Is there a core curriculum? What majors are offered? What are the graduation requirements? Are there preprofessional and study abroad options? Are there internships? What is the academic advising system like? What is the average class size? Are there honor opportunities and support services? Can you pursue independent work? Are there special programs for freshmen?
- ❖ **Competition for Admission:** What are the credentials needed for admission? How competitive is admission? What percentage of applicants is admitted? Is standardized testing optional? *Hint: Review the application history on Naviance.*
- ❖ **Student Body:** How diverse is the student body? What is the level of their seriousness of purpose? Where do students come from? Are there international students? Are they politically-minded?
- ❖ **Faculty:** What is the number of full-time faculty? How diverse is the faculty? Are faculty members accessible to undergraduates? Do all faculty members teach?
- ❖ **Extracurricular Activities:** How wide a variety of offerings are available on- and off-campus? What about community service, Greek life, arts offerings, clubs and sports?
- ❖ **Cost:** What is the full cost for attendance (tuition, room/board, fees, transportation, books and personal expenses)? What is the availability of financial aid, including merit and/or need-based scholarships?

You will find that through your research, you will be able to narrow down your list of schools. After visiting a few places, you will have an even clearer idea of what you like and what you don't like. Carefully compare the features and environment particular to each school and your reaction to these campuses by keeping a journal. Ideally, you should strive for the goal of identifying between six and ten schools that are in keeping with your ideals. This "final list" should reflect all levels of competition, from **Reasonable** to **Possible** to **Most Competitive**. Selecting schools from each category will assure that you have several schools from which to choose when you receive your admission decisions.

Remember, you know yourself better than anyone else. You know which environment best suits your needs. Believe in yourself and your ability to make decisions, but be realistic in your assessment of yourself in the applicant pool. Your college counselor will work with you throughout the process by supporting, encouraging, questioning and challenging you as you investigate all of your options.

The Selection Process

In no other country does such a wide array of choices confuse the issue or encourage as many frivolous decisions. Loren Pope, in his book, *Looking Beyond the Ivy League*, says it best:

“The process of choosing a college is a revealing test of a person, of her values, goals, aspirations, and her character. True, her high school record has already said a lot about her, but whether she has excellent or mediocre credentials, she can still make crucial college decisions. The test is not how selective the college, but how suitable the college.”

Remember, you are seeking colleges that fit you well!

What do competitive colleges and universities seek from their applicants? As you might guess, the answer varies from school to school, depending on the agenda of the school. Because approximately 75% of all applicants to competitive colleges meet the academic standards, these colleges often look beyond the objective information (such as strong grades in challenging courses and competitive test scores) to select students who will contribute in significant ways to the campus community.

One school may place special emphasis on your essay; another may stress your commitments and contributions outside the classroom; still others may value your special talent. Each school’s subjective criteria may change slightly year to year, depending on the needs and priorities of the college. Despite the differences among the colleges, most admission officers agree that the **transcript** is the most important factor. Important factors in the selection process include the following:

The Application

The application affords you the opportunity to distinguish yourself from others in the applicant pool. This is especially relevant if you plan to apply to a highly selective school, since 3/4 of the applicants meet the admission standards. Strive for more unique and personal essay responses with special emphasis on the fit of the college for you.

The Secondary School Record

Your **high school transcript** (your academic history) is the most important document you will submit. Colleges look for the **rigor of program** (level of challenge) and your successful performance in the major academic areas of English, math, foreign language, science and social studies, and a balance of work in the arts and humanities. **Your senior year course selection and performance is very important in this review!**

Grades and Rank in Class

As a school policy, SBS does not calculate a Rank in Class (RIC) or a Grade Point Average (GPA). We present a grade distribution from the junior year for use by the colleges. Here they can see the range of the course offerings and your performance in relation to your peers in a given course.

Standardized Test Scores

Most colleges require the SAT Reasoning Test or ACT, while an increasing number of smaller colleges make it *optional* to submit test scores. Only about 100 schools REQUIRE the College Board Subject Tests. Generally speaking, the more selective the school, the more emphasis will be placed on the SAT and Subject Test scores. In general, these applicant pools draw well-prepared, strong students and the overall test score average (middle 50% of the applicant pool) tends to be quite high. Colleges will take your best scores (best critical reading, best math & best writing) if you test more than once. Nearly all schools accept the ACT in lieu of SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests. Check the testing requirements of your colleges carefully.

The TOEFL

The Test of English as a Foreign Language is required of all non-native English speakers. Your score must be from a test taken within the last two years. There are three versions of the test; paper-based, computer-based and internet-based. All are acceptable.

The Essay

A well-constructed, carefully composed and concise essay indicates your desire to be reviewed as a serious candidate. It is important to read and understand the question and be sure that you **answer the question asked** rather than submit an essay that you have already written in hopes that it will work. If you have additional information you would like to share (about your learning style or special circumstances), you can submit an additional statement for review.

Teacher Recommendations

Each college has its own requirement for teacher recommendations (most require an English teacher). We suggest **two** recommendations from teachers representing different disciplines. Identify at least one of the two teachers at the end of your junior year. Think about the teachers who **really know you** and can speak about you as a student!

School Statement

The school statement is the school's letter of recommendation, written by your college counselor, which speaks about you and your overall high school experience.

Extracurricular Activities and Work Experience

Colleges are quite interested in what you do **outside the classroom**. Admission officers are not looking for a long list of clubs and activities, but rather where and to what you have committed yourself (in and out of school) over the course of your high school years. Your **Activities Resume** can include athletics, the arts, publications, community service, leadership, student government, religious groups or employment.

You are the most important person in this process, so working hard to present yourself in the best light is an important element in the application process. Presenting yourself honestly and thoughtfully with an eye toward what makes you unique is most important.

Most students who apply to highly selective colleges – those that admit fewer than 25% of applicants – can do the work and often meet or exceed the published admission standards. Therefore, factors beyond the grades and test scores (talents, relationship to the school, athletic talent, ethnic background, family background, academic interest and other factors) are often important in the final decision-making process.

The Application Process

The application process can, at times, be a confusing one; each college has unique requirements and deadlines that you must meet. At Stoneleigh-Burnham, **the student** sends all applications (including the essay, portfolio, activities sheet and supplemental information). The **College Counseling Office** sends all supporting documents (school statement, transcripts, teacher recommendations, school profile).

YOU send or submit online:

- Your completed application, supplements and essay(s)
- The application fee (you must attach a check, pay by credit card or present a fee waiver)
- Any additional information you plan to include such as an activity sheet, an art portfolio, a graded writing sample, a portfolio of your writing or additional essays
- Standardized Test Scores (see below)

COLLEGE COUNSELING OFFICE sends:

- Your SBS transcript (and a transcript from your former school, if appropriate)
- SBS College Counselor Recommendation (“School Statement”)
- The SBS School Profile
- Teacher recommendations

The College Counselor is here to assist you in the application process, but it is your responsibility to know your own application deadlines and the specifics of the application plan (Early Action, Early Decision, Regular Decision, etc.) under which you apply. Please check for clarification if you are in doubt. Most colleges frown upon a missed deadline.

Important Details to Remember

Applying to “Rolling Admission” Schools

Most large state (public) universities receive applications on a **rolling** basis, promising to respond within a specified time *once the application is complete*. Sometimes there is a recommended or **priority** date. With increasingly large applicant pools, we highly recommend that rolling applications *be filed by mid-October*. If the school asks to have all materials sent together, let your teacher and college counselor know.

Sending Your Standardized Test (SAT/ACT) Scores

Once you've decided on your list of colleges, go to www.collegeboard.org (for SATs) or www.ACT.org (for the ACT) and identify the schools which should receive your test scores. For the SATs, your test registration fee covers the cost of sending your scores to four schools. **You must have a credit card to send your scores.** ACT also allows you to send scores to the first four schools for "free."

Please see the Standardized Testing section of this handbook for additional information.

Colleges require that you have your scores sent "officially" from the testing agency. *You* are responsible for sending your scores to your schools. We do not include your scores on the transcript, so the only way the schools receive your scores is through your request.

Sending Your TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) Scores

Many colleges will accept a photocopy of your TOEFL score from our office. Please give college counseling a copy of your TOEFL Score Report, as we do not receive one from the testing company. We will include a copy in the application packets we send. Some colleges require that you have your TOEFL Score Report sent directly from the Testing Company (ets.org).

Deadlines matter!

You are responsible for knowing and meeting your deadlines. File your application well in advance of the deadline. We strongly recommend that you submit your applications at least two weeks before your application deadline. Notify your college counselor when you submit your applications.

Reminder: At peak application times, it can take up to 2 weeks for your application to be processed at the college once it arrives. Call after 2-3 weeks to assure that your application is complete. You may receive a **Missing Credential** card or email, indicating portions of your application are missing. **Please do not panic!** Check with the College Counseling Office first, and then call the school to check the status of your application.

Writing Your College Essay

Writing the personal essay can be time-consuming and, when left to the last minute, an overly stressful experience. We believe, in fact, that writing the college essay can be a very satisfying learning experience for each student. You must commit to the exercise - to write honestly about yourself. The questions are formatted in a way that demands perspective. This is difficult for the student who is under time pressure. Talk to your family, your friends, your teachers or your college counselor about possible topics. *Start early so you can have plenty of time to draft and edit!*

General Guidelines:

- Type your essay. You can attach or upload as needed.

- Most schools want essays that are 300-500 words in length (one page, single spaced or two pages, double spaced). Pay attention to these guidelines or to other specific instructions.
- Write in your own voice. Avoid large generalizations by using examples from your own experiences!
- Avoid overly familiar quotations or definitions. No clichés, please.
- Be careful with humor, and use it only if it fits your personality and/or if you are a skilled writer.
- **Use spell check.** Check the grammar. **Proofread.** This is different from spell-checking. HINT: Read your essay out loud.
- Be careful when writing about events or issues that are common experiences ... (winning the big game, for example, is overdone). Try to infuse your essay with a personal, fresh perspective.
- **Think small** – anecdotes and rich detail work well here.
- Avoid the laundry list approach. Details about your activity/positions are listed elsewhere in the application.
- Your first sentence and paragraph must engage the reader.
- Stay away from writing about the SATs or the application process.
- Be free with format. Dialogue can work!
- **Accentuate the positive** – even painful experiences lead to growth and discovery.

Goals of the Essay:

- The essay helps the reader get to know you more intimately – a window to your soul.
- The essay illustrates your uniqueness and clarifies your values and goals.
- The essay allows the reader to evaluate your writing.
- The essay helps the reader create a full and memorable picture of you.

How to Write:

- **Be yourself!**
- Begin with free writing and work to get to your ideas. Brainstorm first, then revise.
- Spend as much time thinking as you do writing.
- If you are stuck, brainstorm with someone who knows you.
- If you write about an activity or an experience, focus on what it means to you rather than the plain facts of your performance or feat.
- Reorganize your thinking with this exercise: Ask, “What should I tell about myself?” and ask someone to read it with the question, “What do you think this essay says about me?”

Some Tips:

- **Be honest! Tell your story in your own voice.**
- Read the topic question(s) carefully and respond to the question(s) asked. (Colleges can often tell if you use an essay written for a different purpose.)
- Write about a familiar subject or idea. **Personalize your essay.** Use anecdotes, if appropriate.

- Be yourself! Do not attempt to use words or ideas that are unfamiliar to you. It usually shows.
- Write about the specific rather than the general, the concrete rather than the abstract.
- Be neat. And, before submitting your final draft, **proofread**, then have a friend, family member, or teacher/counselor **proofread** it. Does it sound like you?
- Remember, your own thoughts are important. This must be your own work.
- Avoid being cute, funny or outrageous.

Standardized Testing

Important Points to Remember

- You are responsible to send your own test scores to every school where you apply. You will receive four free schools for both the SAT and the ACT.
- Only about 100 schools require Subject Tests, but it may be useful to plan to take two or three subject tests. Talk to your college counselor about this.
- Many colleges will accept the ACT in lieu of the SAT + Subject Tests. Check with your colleges.
- Use Subject Test sample tests (available in the College Counseling Office) to review for upcoming tests.
- The Stoneleigh-Burnham School Code is **220925**. Be sure to use this code on all test registrations. If you do not use this code, SBS will not receive score copies; it is useful to have copies in your file if a college requests a faxed copy.
Register for all College Board tests at www.collegeboard.org
Register for all ACT tests at www.actstudent.org
Register for the TOEFL at www.ets.org

Information about the SAT, SAT Subject Tests and the ACT

- **SAT I – Reasoning Test**
A three-hour and 45 minute test measuring critical reading, math and writing skills. Each of the three areas is scored on a scale of 200 to 800, with a total combined score of 2400. The test is given in October, November, December, January, March, April, May and June.
- **SAT II – Subject Tests**
One-hour tests offered in many subject areas and designed to measure specific accomplishments and knowledge in a single field. Most SAT II tests are entirely multiple choice and are scored on a 200 to 800 scale. Students may take one, two or three subject tests at one sitting. The tests are given in October, November, December, January, May and June. The end of the junior year is typically a good time to take subject tests in yearlong courses such as U.S. History, chemistry, physics, biology, languages and math.
- **SAT II subject tests include:**
 - Literature – measures how well a student understands literary concepts.

- Math Level I – students must have a calculator to solve some problems.
- Math Level II – for students enrolled in the fourth year of mathematics. A calculator is required.
- Languages – for students completing at least three years of a language, some tests with listening.
- U.S. History
- World History
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Physics

It is not necessary for all students to take SAT IIs; however, they are often required for admission at the most competitive colleges and universities.

- **ACT – American College Testing**

The ACT can be used in place of the SAT I at many colleges. This test is curriculum-based. The questions on the ACT are directly related to what students have learned in high school courses in English, mathematics and science. It is comprised of four 35 to 50 minute tests in English, mathematics, social science and natural sciences. The test offers four separate scores plus a composite score that averages the tests. Scores range from 1-36, with subscores ranging from 1-18. There is also an optional writing section that should be selected. At some colleges, the ACT may be submitted in place of SAT II subject tests.

Purpose of the Tests

The primary aim of standardized educational tests is to provide colleges with an equitable means of evaluating applicants. The examinations allow the admission office to identify ability regardless of variations in school programs, grading systems, region and other factors. But by no means are tests necessarily the central feature of an application.

Information about the SAT and ACT is available on their websites;. It is a very good idea to familiarize yourself with the test formats.

Colleges indicate that the most important criterion for determining success in college is success in high school. SAT I, SAT II and ACT test results form only a part of a college application.

Test-Optional Admissions Policies

A growing number of colleges now have “test-optional” admissions policies, meaning that some students can choose not to submit SAT or ACT scores. (Some “test-optional” schools do require tests under certain conditions.) The National Center for Fair and Open Testing has a website, www.fairtest.org, which lists the colleges which are test-optional. Each college’s website will have information about their testing policies. Test-optional schools will consider all other elements of an application. Speak with your college counselor about whether “test-optional” is a good option for you.

Reasons for Denial

Reasons for Denial of Admission

- **Inadequate Preparation**
Course work demonstrates insufficient preparation to meet the demands of college-level work. The high school transcript should reflect solid courses. Make certain that upper level math and science courses are not neglected.
- **Not Working to Your Potential**
A student's testing indicates that there is plenty of ability, but the student takes easy courses and gets low grades. This indicates a possible lack of motivation and interest in schoolwork.
- **A Non-Contributor**
It is very important to be involved and self-directed in extracurricular activities or have interests or hobbies outside the classroom. College-bound students are generally asked to demonstrate some area where they have exercised leadership or involvement in music, sports, student government, publications or community service.
- **Missing Deadline Dates**
It is important to know the deadlines that have been established by the admission offices. Deadlines vary by school so it is crucial that the student and counselor communicate often about deadlines and requirements for each school.

International Students Financial Documentation

International students are not eligible to receive federal or state funds and most private colleges and universities typically allocate their financial aid funds to U.S. citizens and permanent residents only. It is necessary for international students to provide **financial documentation** from their sponsor (parents), delineating the amount and source of their financial support annually.

Many schools have their own forms that should be completed by each family. The College Counseling Office will provide the generic financial documentation form as well. All of these forms require the accompanying signature of the bank and the sponsor (parents), guaranteeing that the student will be supported financially for her entire four years. This documentation should be originals only and contain valid signatures.

Forms or requirements may vary by school, but every school will require financial documentation before an I-20 form will be issued.

We recommend that each girl's family secure this information during the fall and send 15 original copies of each document to the College Counseling Office. That way, all

necessary information will be available to be added to each application packet sent from the College Counseling Office in the fall.

Disciplinary Action

Important reading for all students and parents

Many college applications now ask if the applicant has been involved in disciplinary action during high school.

The Common Application specifically asks if a student has been **suspended** or placed on **disciplinary probation** and asks for an explanation if the answer is YES. With the Common Application, the question is asked of both the student and the college counselor. When the question is asked specifically, we must respond. In such a case, it is important for the college counselor and the student to meet to discuss the infraction and how the information will be presented.

College admission officers are generally able to discern those incidents that lead to disciplinary action and suspension at a boarding school, but would likely go unnoticed on a college campus. Schools asking these questions seek to identify those students who might be at risk on a college campus, by virtue of their actions and behaviors during high school.

SBS will not inform colleges about individual disciplinary actions occurring during the freshman through junior years UNLESS ASKED ON THE APPLICATION. Disciplinary action resulting in suspension or expulsion during the senior year will be reported to the colleges. Seniors who have submitted applications are expected to report disciplinary actions that result in suspension or expulsion to the colleges on their own, within two weeks of the occurrence. The college counselor will follow-up with the colleges to confirm the student's communication.

As with any disciplinary situation, it is important to identify what has been learned as a result of the experience. It is expected that the student will be able to speak to this growth in her statement to the colleges. Your college counselor will also write a short response (separate from the School Statement) to the question of involvement in disciplinary action.

Resources

There are a variety of resources and materials designed to assist you and your family in your college investigation, available for use in the College Counseling Office or at home. The **Naviance** program and the college counseling portion of the Stoneleigh-Burnham School website are great places to begin! Go to the SBS Home Page, click on the Academics tab, then College Counseling and click on **Naviance College Connection**.

The college counseling pages of the website are a work in progress, so we urge you to visit the site often.

Print materials such as college guides (objective and narrative) are available in the College Resource and Visit Room for your use and can be checked out for use at home or in the dorm. In addition, college catalogs, view books and other informational pamphlets are available for your review. You are welcome to take any resources from the collection in the College Counseling Office. Please return guidebooks, but feel free to keep brochures.

Here are a few guidebooks the college office recommends to families and students:

Fiske Guide to Colleges

Finding the College That's Right for You!

Looking Beyond the Ivy League

Finally, resources to assist you in selecting colleges, standardized test preparation, completing your application or writing your essay are available. **Please return any materials borrowed to the College Counseling Office.** Visiting the college's own website is an excellent resource.

For test preparation, we have SAT Reasoning Test prep books/materials and ACT test prep materials for use by students. Both www.collegeboard.org and www.actstudent.org are helpful websites for your consideration.

In addition, the Internet houses a wide range of college search programs such as the ones found on the **Naviance** website, at www.collegeboard.org and www.petersons.com. These programs allow you to research schools by your individual priorities. You can select factors in a variety of combinations, then print out and save your searches for future reference. These websites are resources, not definitive ways to identify the schools you will investigate. Generating an initial list of schools through one of these search programs is an excellent way to begin your investigation. You can revisit your search to fine tune it or talk to your college counselor for more information.

NAVIANCE

The Naviance program is a great resource for the College Counseling Office as well as for you and your family. This database houses all of our statistical information, including student profile information (test scores), application data and college decisions. This program offers limited access to each student and family. Each student can view her own password-protected account, and families can access limited information with a password distributed by the College Counseling Office. Some of the features on Naviance include:

- Home page – view profile data on individual student account
- College page – track college application investigation and action
- Score page – view score information here (SAT, ACT, TOEFL)
- Connect to college websites
- College search program for college investigation