
Senior Planning Guide



The Selection and Application Process

The college selection and application process can be a time of fun or a time of challenges. There are many things to consider and deadlines to meet in order to increase your chances of finding the college of your dreams. Below is an outline of the process. This process starts as juniors and ends on your first day of college.

1. Decide on the factors that are important to you

There are many factors that can be considered when choosing the right college option. The following offers some suggestions for items that you may want to take into account when choosing a college. You don't necessarily have to consider each factor. Decide what is important to you as an individual. Some of these factors are:

- **Size of the college and the college classes**

Do you like to know everyone on campus or would you prefer to see new faces. Would you be more comfortable in a small class or a class of 300? How do you learn better, in a lecture-style class or a smaller discussion-style class?

- **Location**

Would you prefer to live in a suburban, urban, or rural setting? In what geographical location do you wish to live? What type of climate do you prefer? How far away from home do you want to be?

- **Type of Institution**

Do you want to go to a two-year, four-year, or community college? Are you interested in a vocational/technical school? What is the college academic calendar? Is it semesters or quarters? Are there block plans or year-round calendars?

- **Academic Programs**

If you have a decided major, does the college offer it? Is the department well respected in the discipline? If you are undecided, are there a variety of majors offered at the college?

- **Campus Life**

What types of social events are popular on campus? Do the students stay on campus on the weekends? Are there fraternities and sororities? Are the athletic events popular? Are there clubs or organizations on campus of interest?

- **Diversity**

Do the students come from your state or other states? Is there a mix of ethnic backgrounds?

- **Cost and financial aid availability**

Is the school affordable to you? What is the financial aid package the school is offering? Do not automatically eliminate a school from your list because of cost. Compare the financial aid packages from the schools you are considering. Sometimes, the more expensive schools are able to offer a financial aid package that may make it as affordable as a less expensive college.

- **Facilities that are available**

Are there adequate computer labs? What are the athletic facilities like? Is the library up to date? Will the health center and other student services meet your needs? Is a wireless campus important? Is it available?

- **Living accommodations**

Do most of the students live on or off campus? Is there adequate housing available? What are the dormitories like?

- **Safety on campus**

Is campus security readily available? What types of security programs, such as safe-ride or emergency phones, are in place? Request a campus security report to see what type or crime occurs on campus.

- **Academic standards**

What are the GPA requirements? What are the average SAT or ACT scores? Do not be discouraged if the average test scores are above your own score.

- **Length of time it will take to earn a degree**

Ask about the average number of years students take to earn their degree at the institution.

- **Placement rate or graduation rate**

What is the retention rate of the college? Do a high percentage of students graduate and find a job in their field? Do they get into graduate school? Is the career placement office helpful?

2. Make a list of potential colleges

Based on the criteria that are important to you, make a list of the colleges that fit your requirements. **It is best to begin making a list by the fall of your junior year.**

- **Do a college search on-line.** By answering a few questions, this tool can select schools that match your criteria. Some sites to visit are: www.collegeview.com, www.collegeboard.com, and www.collegenet.com.
- **Search the Internet and read books, magazines and newspapers** to find out more about colleges. Request catalogs and view books from the colleges that interest you.

- **Attend College Fairs.** Visit a selection of colleges while there, and be prepared with a list of questions to ask the representatives. Speak with college representatives when they visit your school, and schedule on-campus visits with colleges you are interested in. Talk to friends, family and your counselor for information and advice. Speak to alumni from your high school and find out their impressions.

3. Start the Application Process

Application Strategies

Students generally apply to six or eight colleges or universities. This number varies from person to person. What is critical in developing a college list is that the final list includes schools that the student would be happy attending. Students often choose colleges from the following three categories:

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| Reach | A student's top choice college. A reach refers to colleges that generally accept students with GPA's and standardized test scores higher than those of the applicant. Students are encouraged to apply for one or two "long shots". |
| Realistic | This category refers to colleges that generally accept half or more of the students with GPA's and standardized test scores similar to those of the applicant. Realistic colleges are those at which the probability of admission is 50:50 or better. |
| Safe | This category refers to colleges that almost always accept students with GPA's and standardized test scores below those of the candidate. Safe colleges are those in which the student is highly likely to be admitted. |

Most students consider applying to 2 colleges that are a "reach", 2 that are "realistic" and 2 that are "safe". When students are choosing, they should make sure that they would be happy attending those colleges. Students should give the decision process careful consideration before deciding on a college path.

Application Procedures

Once you have selected the schools that you have interest in, the first step is to obtain information about those schools. The Benton Community Counseling Department has information on many of the Iowa Colleges and Universities. For all other schools, students can write to the individual schools, call for their applications or request them via the internet.

It is extremely important that students read and follow the directions contained in the information received from schools. Students will receive instructions on how to complete application forms and will be told exactly what additional materials will be needed to support the application.

Students have the responsibility for knowing specific details applicable to each school to which they are applying. Make sure you check deadlines, admission requirements, tests to be taken, etc.

Fill out applications as legibly as possible. When possible use a computer, or complete the applications on-line (some colleges even offer fee waivers if the application is completed and submitted on-line).

The Application Package: Putting It All Together

There are two parts of an application package: the student portion and the high school portion.

Student Portion: The student should begin by completing his or her portion of the application and then mailing it (or submitting it electronically) to the college.

School Portion: The school portion of the application must be completed by the School Counseling Office. Students who require a copy of their high school transcripts must complete a "Transcript Request" form. Once completed, turn it in to Mrs. Venneman in the Guidance Office and she will mail an official copy of your transcripts (which includes a copy of your test card) to the school (s) of your choice. Please allow two days for your request to be processed.

Additional materials: Students are often required to include letters of recommendation with their college applications. Students can obtain letters of recommendation from their teachers or counselors. It is recommended that requests for letters of recommendation be accompanied by an official "Requesting a Letter of Recommendation" form. This form helps teachers know exactly who they are writing the letter to, what information should be included, and when the letter is due. The "Requesting a Letter of Recommendation" form is also available in the School Counseling Office.

When requesting a letter or recommendation, the student should:

- Provide the teacher with a timely request. Teachers prefer that students allow at least 2 weeks for the completion of a recommendation letter
- Provide the teacher with a copy of the "Requesting a Letter of Recommendation" form and a copy of the students "Senior Synopsis".
- For each college letter, provide the letter writer with an addressed envelope with correct postage.
- Write a thank you note to each teacher for taking the time to write your recommendation.

When Applying for Admission to College.....

1. Assure that your Senior Synopsis form is completed and on file in the School Counseling Office. Teachers and Counselors use this form to complete their letters of recommendation.
2. Send your college admissions test scores (ACT, SAT, etc.) to the colleges that you are applying to (this can be done when registering for the exam).
3. Be sure that you apply to at least one or two colleges that you feel confident in your admission to.

4. Arrange for a tour and interviews of college's of interest. Be sure to dress appropriately and bring an official copy of your transcripts with you.
5. See your School Counselor if you have questions, concerns, and/or need any assistance. Please make an appointment to see your counselor. **We are always here to help!**

4. *Start the Financial Aid Process: Sources and Programs*

Students will want to consider financial aid for to help pay for college tuition, room and board, books, and other related expenses. Financial aid programs are designed to assist all students with the costs associated with post-secondary education. Financial aid comes from different sources: federal and state government, colleges/universities, local private organizations, scholarship programs and banks.

In general, eligibility for financial aid is based on student need. Other forms of financial assistance are available for scholastic excellence, athletics, or other specialized talents. The amount of "need" varies from school to school according to the cost of attending each school and how much the student/family is expected to contribute.

The student/family's expected contribution (EFC) is an amount determined by a formula established by the US Congress that indicates how much of a student's/families resources should be available to pay for school. The student/family financial information is provided by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). All schools use this form to award grants, scholarships, loans, and work-study to students. The FAFSA should be completed as soon as possible after January 1st to assure that the results are obtained prior to the financial aid deadlines provided by the college. The organizations and colleges that are to receive the FAFSA results must be included on the FAFSA forms or through a written request at a later date. Colleges may also require students to fill out financial aid forms specific to their institution.

A student qualifying for aid will likely be offered a financial aid package composed of self aid (student loans and work study programs) and gift aid (grants and scholarships which do not have to be re-paid). Some schools may vary the proportion of each kind of aid based on the student's academic standing and other factors. The amounts awarded in the various programs listed may vary from year to year depending on government funding available.

Common Types of Financial Aid

Subsidized Stafford Loan

A subsidized Stafford loan is a federal loan that is lent to a student attending school at least half-time. The student is responsible for repaying the loan after graduating from college or leaving school. Interest accrued on the loan is paid by the federal government while the student is in school. This loan is often a low-interest loan available to most students.

Unsubsidized Stafford Loan

An unsubsidized Stafford loan is a federal loan that is lent to a student attending school at least half-time. The student is responsible for repaying the loan after graduating from college or leaving school. Interest accrued is also the responsibility of the student while the student is in school. Students do have the option to add this accrued interest to the principle of the loan or to pay the interest quarterly. If a student requires financial aid after receiving all other forms of aid, a student may seek financial help from this low interest, non-need based program.

Perkins Loan

This program provides low interest educational loans for qualified students who are Enrolled at least half time.

Pell Grants

These need based federal grants are awarded to eligible full and part time undergraduate students.

College Work Study Programs

College work study provides federally subsidized jobs on campus and in the community. Students are paid minimum wage and work for about 10-15 hours per week. The money earned is usually directed towards tuition and fees, any money earned above the award is given to the student.

PLUS Loan (Parent Loan for Undergraduate Students)

Through a local bank, parents may borrow up to the full cost of an education minus any financial aid received. Many colleges and universities have their own loan programs and /or tuition plans. For more information, contact their financial aid offices.

Merit Scholarships

Merit Scholarships are typically awarded on the basis of academic, athletic or artistic merit, in addition to special interests. Some merit scholarships also consider financial need, but rewarding talent is the primary objective. In most cases, the scholarship sponsor has a set of criteria they use to select the winners from among the qualified applicants, so a key to winning a scholarship is to identify the sponsor's criteria and tailor your application to those criteria.

The first step is to make sure you qualify for the scholarship. If the application requirements specify that you must have a 3.7 or higher GPA and you have a 3.6 GPA, do not apply. Most scholarship sponsors receive so many qualified applications that they do not have time to consider applications that fail to satisfy the requirements. You may be a wonderful and talented person, but if your application is not qualified, the selection committee is not going to look at it.

Search for private scholarships. Scholarships are available from a variety of local, state and national sources. Students should visit the school counseling office, the school website, or use search engines to find scholarships available to them. Be sure to check frequently as many new scholarships are added daily and all scholarships have deadlines for application.

Some websites to use include.....

www.fastweb.com

www.wiredscholar.com

www.collegeplanning.org

Local Scholarship Information

Benton Community High School is fortunate to have an extensive listing of local Scholarships available to our students. These scholarships include awards based on financial need as well as on merit. A complete listing of the scholarship opportunities are available for students to review on the Guidance Office website and in the Guidance Office. Applications as well as directions for completing the applications are available through the Guidance Office. Students may apply for an unlimited number of scholarships provided they meet the criteria set forth. **A special note: The Benton Scholarship Foundation Application and most local (town and legion) scholarships are not available until after Christmas Break.**

Be sure to carefully follow all directions when applying for scholarships. Many students miss out on award money simply because they fail to apply as directed or miss a deadline. Don't rush the process; you will be rewarded if you put time and energy into earning the awards.

How to Fill Out a Job Application

A prospective employer's opinion of you can be influenced by the way you fill out the job application. If there are cross outs, unanswered questions, incomplete answers, mistakes in following directions, or if it is sloppily filled out, it reflects poorly on your abilities. On the other hand, a neat, clean and complete application shows that you can follow directions, think clearly, express yourself, and that you care about getting the job. Follow these helpful tips on filling out an application.

1. Be sure to use blue or black ink, not pencil, when handwriting information. You may also consider typing the information if the application was sent to you.
2. Read all of the instructions and follow them carefully.
3. Think before you write. Use a separate piece of paper to draft ideas and then complete the question on the application. This way you'll avoid mistakes.
4. Fill out the application neatly.
5. Answer all the questions. If a question does not pertain to you, put a dash or "N/A" (not applicable)
6. Use your complete name. Don't use nicknames.
7. Be prepared to answer questions about your education and work history. Bring along a list of dates, names and addresses so you are able to complete the application. A copy of a resume may also be helpful.
8. Know or have your social security number with you.
9. List your most recent experience 1st.

How to Prepare a Resume

A resume is a summary of your persona, educational, and occupational experiences. It is a form of "marketing" yourself to perspective employers. It should distinguish you from other candidates and point out your most desirable qualities. On the first reading, the personnel manager will spot-read the resume; therefore, it is important to simplify the reading by presenting the information in a clear, concise and distinct manner. The preparation of a good resume requires these steps:

1. Collect and organize personal information required.
 - a. Personal Data (Name, Address, Phone Number, Social Security Number)
 - b. Employment Objective
 - c. Work Experience
 - d. Education
 - e. Relevant volunteer experience
2. Write your resume in a clear concise manner. Review it for clarity, spelling and punctuation. Have another person proof-read it for errors or clarifications.
3. Print resume on good quality paper (resume paper is sold in many discount and office supply stores). Never hand write a resume.
4. Send a resume to potential employers. Also bring along extra copies to any interviews.

Resume Format

There are many formats available for resumes. A great option is the chronological format. This format is a classic format used in many different industries and provides information from most recent to least recent. An example is described below.

Elements of a Chronological Resume

Heading

Include your name, address, e-mail address (if you check your e-mail regularly)* and telephone number**.

* Your e-mail should be something simple and classy. For example,

Tina_a_Smith@hotmail.com is an appropriate address. unisuperfan@yahoo.com is not.

** Consider your voicemail message on your phone. Unusual or silly messages can turn a personnel manager or manager away. When looking for jobs keep the message on your phone simple.

Objective

An objective is a somewhat optional part of the resume. In general, it is helpful to hiring managers to see your goals relating to your career. Your objective should be a simple statement indicating what you are looking for in a position. It should also be customized to the job for which you are applying. The objective section could also be used to highlight some important assets or accomplishments. This is less widely seen, but can be effective.

Example: To obtain an entry-level position as a cashier with hopes of aspiring into sales.

Example: A sales manager with 12 years of experience successfully selling products in the software industry. Appointments to the National Sales Manager Association board of directors.

Education

This is the place to list your education and the dates you attended. Start with your most recent school first. List your high school only if it is a recent graduation or you have no other post-secondary education.

If you are in the process of school, indicate your anticipated graduation date or “in progress” under the date category.

Activities and Awards

Include academic awards or activities that may help the hiring manager connect your experience to their job opening.

Selected Courses

Recent graduates and students still in school often find it helpful to list course work relevant to the job for which they are applying. This shows potential employers your interest in the industry.

Experience

This section is used to describe your experience in real-world situations. You should list jobs (paid and unpaid), volunteer experiences (if they related to the job), internships, summer jobs, etc. A brief description of duties also helps the hiring manager.

Sample Resume

Christine Jones
24 Elk Road
Van Horne, Iowa 52346
cjones@hotmail.com
Tel: 319-228-9999

Objective:

To obtain an entry level position with an accounting firm that will enable me to gain further experience in current business and accounting practices and that utilizes my extensive experience with Peachtree Accounting software.

Education:

- University of Northern Iowa 2006-Present
Majoring in Accounting and Business Management
- Benton Community High School 2002-2006
Graduated 10th of 170 students
GPA: 3.8

Awards

- 3.0 Club for 4 years (maintain a GPA of 3.0 over 4 quarters)
- National Honor Society

Experience

- Johnson & Stevens- Intern 2004
123 1st Street
Anytown, Iowa 55555
 - Assisted the Senior Partner who was conducting audits on major companies in the area
 - Handled incoming telephone calls to the Senior Partner
 - Organized and maintained the Senior Partner's filing system
 - Typed reports on a PC using Microsoft Word
 - Devised a new filing system to maintain the files held by the department
 - Solved user's PC problems including sorting out spreadsheets and explaining how to use the complex features in word-processing packages.

References

- Dr. Andrew Brown Tel: 319-243-9992
- Mr. Jack Davenport Tel: 319-244-9993
- Ms. Judy Adkins Tel: 219-243-5555

How to Make a Good Impression During an Interview

An interview, whether for college or employment, is an opportunity to demonstrate abilities for oral expression. It helps the interviewer make more accurate judgements about attitudes and personality than the written application process provides. Although questions may vary, consider and be able to answer some of the questions below and you may have greater success in the interview.

Why do you want to attend this college? (apply for this job?)

What three words best describe you?

How would others characterize you?

What is your most outstanding characteristic?

What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?

How do you handle job stress?

How hard are you willing to work hard on academics?

What can you contribute to the college you attend or the position for which you are applying?

What experiences in your past have contributed most to your current successes?

How did your high school benefit from you being a student there?

What have you learned or accomplished through activities and special interests?

How does participation in high school activities benefit you?

What are your favorite free-time or school experiences?

What would you do if you received a lower grade than you thought you should have or were unfairly treated on the job?

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION INFORMATION FORM

We recommend you provide this form to anyone from whom you are requesting a letter of recommendation. This form will provide information to this person that will help them to write a letter that best suits your needs and will allow them to express some of your unique qualities and assets. Remember, provide enough time for letter writer to complete this task. It is customary to allow for at least 1-2 weeks. Be sure to factor in time to send the materials in.

Date of Request _____

1. Name _____

2. Recommendation Writer _____

3. Date Recommendation is due _____
 (The due date should be at least 2 days before it must be sent)

4. Action Required
- a. _____ Send letter directly to college or scholarship (include a self-addressed stamped envelope)
 - b. _____ Return letter to me (attach an envelope)
 - c. _____ Return letter to Guidance Office
 - d. _____ Other (Please explain) _____

5. Type of Recommendation Requested

_____ Academic _____ Athletic _____ Music _____ College Entrance

_____ Other _____

6. Information about college/scholarship committee that will receive your letter

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip Code _____

Additional Information about the scholarship committee or college that would be helpful to the letter writer: _____

7. To help your letter writer write a personalized letter, please circle the five adjectives below that best describe you. You may add your own if you wish.

Accurate	Curious	Intelligent	Realistic	Ambitious	Dedicated	Intense
Reasonable	Articulate	Dependable	Leader	Reliable	Assertive	Determined
Lively	Resourceful	Bright	Enthusiastic	Logical	Responsible	Friendly
Mature	Sensible	Caring	Goal-Oriented	Motivated	Sympathetic	Cheerful
Tactful	Clever	Hardworking	Optimistic	Thoughtful	Competent	Honest
Outgoing	Truthful	Concerned	Humorous	Patient	Unassuming	Confident
Idealistic	Perceptive	Unique	Conscientious	Imaginative	Polite	Unselfish
Consistent	Independent	Popular	Versatile	Cooperative	Ingenious	Proud
Well-Adjusted	Couereous	Inquisitive	Quiet	Witty	Multi-Talented	Good Judgment

Optional Information

8. Explain any special circumstances regarding your family, the choice of college or the financing of your education that should be considered.

9. List and explain any anecdote or example relating to you, your traveling, or other unique experience that should be considered in this recommendation.

10. Is your high school record an accurate measure of your ability and potential? Explain

Please list any/all Benton Activities you are involved in (such as sports, NHS, band, vocal, student council, yearbook, newspaper, clubs, etc)

Vocabulary

The college admissions process has its own vocabulary. Understanding this vocabulary can make the process less mysterious and more accessible. Definitions of some key words are listed below.

Advanced Placement Test (AP)- a test given to high school student, usually at the end of their junior or senior year, after they have completed AP or Honors courses. Many colleges give advanced standing and/or credit for these College Entrance Examination Board (CEED) sponsored test if students can earn a score of 3, 4 or 5.

American College Test (ACT)- a test that measures aptitude and skill in English, Math, Reading, and Natural Science. The ACT is more often used in the Midwest, South, and Far West as a college entrance test.

Associate Degree- a degree granted by a college or university program that requires two years of full time study.

Common Application- an application form developed and widely accepted by participating colleges and universities.

Cooperative Education (Co-op) Program- a program integration of classroom study and work experience that offers both school credit and salary

Deferred Admission- an accepted student can delay entrance for a year (or semester)

Early Action- permits you to apply to a college or university of your choice and receive a decision early in the senior year, well in advance of the normal spring response dates. Through you will hear early regarding your admission, you are not committed to attend and you may apply to other colleges. If you are applying for financial aid, you will follow the aid application deadlines set by the institution. You are not required to make a commitment before May 1, but you are encouraged to do so as soon as a final choice is made.

Early Decision- requires you to commit to a college or university at the time of the application, that if admitted you will enroll. You should apply under an Early Decision plan only if you know that you can make a well reasoned, first choice decision. Upon admission, the institution will require a non-refundable deposit well before May 1. You may apply to other colleges but are permitted to have only one request for financial aid at or near the time admissions is offered, If admitted, you must enroll unless the financial aid award is inadequate.

Expected Family Contribution (EFC)- the total amount the federal government expects students and their families to pay toward college costs from their income and assets.

Fee Waiver- permits eligible students to submit college applications or test registration forms without the fee. A limited number are available through school counselors and educational agencies for students who qualify.

Financial Aid Package/Award- a combination of grants, scholarships, loans, and work student that the college is able to offer you to meet your financial need.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)- the primary form used to determine your eligibility for financial aid. This should be filled out in January or February of your senior year.

Federal Work Study Program- an award of on-campus part-time employment for students who demonstrate financial need. The maximum amount a student can earn under this program is determined by financial need.

Grade Point Average (GPA)- a system used to evaluate academic performance. The most frequently used system of numerical values for grades is A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, and F=0. The GPA is reached by multiplying the number of credits given for a course by the grade received in the course. It may be weighted or unweighted.

Interview- an interview with you and a representative from the college. You will be able to demonstrate qualities that don't show up on your application and to find out more about the college.

National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)- an athletic governing body to which approximately 500 small four-year college and universities belong to. The NAIA governs athletic recruitment and scholarship awarding policies.

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)- and athletic governing body to which approximately 800 colleges and universities belong. Each school chooses a general division I, II, or III and is required to follow the policies regarding recruitment and scholarship awards that have been established for that division

National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMQT)- scores from the PSAT given in October are used to determine if a student qualifies for a National Merit Scholarship

Open Admission- the college admits all applicants

Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT)- this test is an abbreviated form of the SAT I and is designed to give juniors and opportunity to practice taking a test which is similar but shorter than the SAT I. It is given in October of the junior year.

Rank in Class- a methodology to compare on student's academic performance to with the performance of all other students at the same grade level

Regular Decision- most colleges of an early winter deadline (Jan 1 or 15 or February 1); they generally notify candidates between March 1 and April 12. Student then have until May (the common reply date) to respond to the colleges

Rolling Admission- a term used to describe the application process in which an institution review applications as they are received and offers decisions to students soon after they are made. If you

are applying for financial aid, you will follow aid application deadlines set by the school. You may apply to colleges and you will not be required to make a decision regarding enrollment before May 1

Scholarship- a form of financial assistance which does not require repayment and usually made to a student who shows potential for distinction, usually in academic performance.

Scholastic Assessment Test I: Reasoning Test (SAT I)- this test, graded on a scale from 200-800 measures students' mathematical and verbal ability and skill.

Scholastic Assessment Test II: Subject Test (SAT II)- one hour tests offered in subjects such as English, Foreign language, Science, History and Math

Student Aid Report (SAR)- reports the information from your FAFSA

Unmet Need- difference between the cost of education, the total financial aware + expected family contribution

Wait List- a term used by institutions to describe a process in which they may initially delay offering or denying admission, but rather extend the possibility of admission in the future. Colleges offer admission to wait list candidates if insufficient numbers of regularly admitted candidates accept their offers of admission

