

# APPLYING TO COLLEGE STRESS-FREE

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LEARN HOW TO DO IT

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# WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

The germ of this book came from my talks with my friend Roberta, years before I became an independent educational consultant. Week after week, she listened to me talk



about my college journeys with my two children, and then she embarked on her own journey with her son. Of course, I was the sounding board for that journey. By the time

her daughter was thinking about life after high school, I had become an educational consultant, and it was my pleasure – and privilege – to escort her daughter through the college process.

One of my happiest stories about the right college fit came from another conversation with Roberta during her daughter’s freshman year at a university I had recommended. Her daughter, she said, had called her one day and told her that for the first time, she felt smart.

I want your teen to feel that way about his or her college experience, too. Given how busy our lives are and how anxious the college search and admission process has become, my goal is to make the experience stress-free.

To do that, I have written a brief manual to introduce you and your teen to the process, which comes down to one word: ***FIT***.



In about 30 minutes or so, you will learn:

- How to determine the right academic *FIT*
- How to determine the right location *FIT*
- How to determine the right social *FIT*
- How to determine the right financial *FIT*
- How standardized tests *FIT* into the process
- How colleges gauge *FIT* in an applicant
- \* How to apply to schools that are the right *FIT*



WHAT SHOULD  
YOU CONSIDER  
WHEN CONSIDERING  
COLLEGES?

# ALL ABOUT ***FIT***

**Y**ou're the expert when it comes to knowing your teen, so realistically assess him or her based on your years of experience. The goal is for your teen to enjoy a rewarding and successful college experience, so finding the right fit is key. Ask yourself the following questions before you start the college search and then discuss the questions with your teen. The answers will guide the way.



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questions before you start the college search and then discuss the questions with your teen. The answers will guide the way.

## THE ACADEMIC ***FIT***

*This is the most important fit, and it first requires an honest assessment of your teen's high school academics.*

What classes has he or she taken – regular, honors, advanced?

What are his or her grades?

Is he or she stronger in certain subjects than in others?

Have his or her grades remained steady over the high school years or have they improved or declined?

Where does your teen fit academically within his or her high school class?

# THE ACADEMIC ***FIT*** (CONT.)

*Once you've made that assessment, you can move onto the following questions:*

Will my teen be more successful at a school where he or she will work hard but not struggle to be at the top of his or her class - or will he or she thrive at a school where the students are predominately at his or her academic level?

Will my teen thrive when there is academic competition or does he or she do better when students are not competitive?

Will my teen be more comfortable in lecture classes, small group discussions or science labs?

Will my teen prefer an academic atmosphere where there is an emphasis on experiential or hands-on education?

Will my teen require a structured program or will he or she be able to manage if the curriculum allows for a significant amount of freedom in selecting classes?

Is my teen the type of student who can work independently or will he need more individual attention from his or her professors? How good will he or she be at navigating a large bureaucracy?

Is my teen someone who will ask for academic assistance if needed?

# THE ACADEMIC ***FIT*** (CONT.)

Does my teen prefer solving problems or expressing himself or herself artistically?

Will my teen be more successful at college if he or she is challenged by tough classes and bright classmates or would he or she prefer to be near the top of a less competitive group?

Does my teen know his or her planned area of study at college or is he or she undecided about what to study?

Does my teen want to concentrate in the fine arts or any other area that may require an audition or portfolio as part of the admission process?



# THE LOCATION ***FIT***

*Colleges come in all shapes and sizes and in a wide range of locales. These questions will help you focus your thinking on the environment that best suits your teen.*



Will my teen prefer a college where most students live on campus or where many students commute from home or from nearby areas?

Does my teen want to live at home or on campus?

Will my teen prefer a college in a rural, suburban or urban area - or does he or she not care about the location?

Will my teen be more comfortable in a residential environment or along city streets?

Will my teen care about weather?

Will my teen care about the aesthetics of the campus or its size?

Will my teen want to go to college within driving distance of home, or will he or she be happy to travel a longer distance, either by train or plane? If so, how far away?

Will my teen want to attend a college that is near something in particular, like extended family or grandparents, or near the beach or in ski country?

# THE SOCIAL ***FIT***

*The friendships your teen establishes in college will be pivotal in making his or her college experience satisfying, happy and successful. These questions will help you think about the kind of community that will best fit your teen.*

Will my teen prefer to stand out in the crowd and be the “big man - or woman” on campus, or would he or she prefer to get lost in the crowd?

Will my teen be comfortable in a college where most of the students are similar to him or to her, or would he or she be happier in a more diverse environment?

Is my teen liberal, conservative or somewhere in between, and will he or she be most comfortable in a college where the atmosphere and philosophy are close to his or her views?

Will my teen be comfortable in a college run by a religious denomination?

Will my teen want to attend a college where there is Greek life (fraternities and sororities) or will he or she prefer a college where there is no Greek life or where Greek life does not dominate the social life?

## THE SOCIAL ***FIT*** (CONT.)

Is it important to my teen to attend a college where there is a big sports scene and where he or she can be a spectator at major college sports like baseball, basketball, football and hockey?

Does my teen want to play varsity sports at college?  
If so, at what level - NCAA Division I, II or III?



# THE FINANCIAL ***FIT***

*Affordability is a big factor as tuition and fees, room and board, and other expenses for college students continue to rise. Colleges post their costs of attendance on their websites, so it's best to check out pricing at the outset. These questions will help you determine whether and how to consider colleges based on your individual financial needs.*

Will my teen need financial assistance in the form of merit money, grants and scholarships and/or financial aid in order to attend college in general or to attend a particular college?

How much will it cost my teen to attend a particular college? Have we used a particular college's net price calculator to obtain an estimate of the full cost of attendance at that college, minus any grants or scholarships?

How much will the cost of attendance at a college increase over four years?

If my teen will need financial aid, do we have the necessary documents to fill out the applications for aid - the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE used by some colleges, and/or other college-specific financial aid applications?

# THE FINANCIAL ***FIT*** (CONT.)

Does a particular college meet all or only part of a student's need for financial aid?

If my teen receives aid, is it a guaranteed sum for four years or is it contingent on his or her academic performance and/or taking a particular number of classes (or credits) each year?

*If you and your teen can answer the questions on the prior pages and/or discover their answers as you both embark on the college search, you are a long way down the path of narrowing down your teen's college options and therefore the number of colleges you'll need to consider.*



STANDARDIZED  
TESTS:  
THE INSIDE  
SCOOP

*Policies regarding standardized tests vary from college to college, but you can find the policy for a particular school in the admissions section of a school's website.*

## WHAT TEST RESULTS TO SUBMIT

Most colleges require students to submit the results of either the SAT or the ACT when applying to college. Some



schools require or recommend that students also submit SAT Subject Tests, usually two, in a variety of subjects that can include English, foreign languages, the sciences, and history and the like. Often, the student may choose which tests to

submit, but sometimes a college will invite students to submit a particular test, such as Math Level II for a student applying to study engineering.

Most colleges that request the submission of Subject Tests ask for them only if a student is submitting the results of the SAT, although a few invite subject tests for students who are submitting the ACT.

# GETTING IN WITHOUT SUBMITTING TEST SCORES

More and more schools are becoming “Test Optional,” meaning that a student does not have to submit standardized test results. Applying this way is best for students whose test scores do not approximate their performances in the classroom. Some schools are “Test Flexible,” welcoming a student to submit tests of the student’s choice, such as the results of AP exams, the subscores on any SATs or ACTs, or even a mixture of tests. You can find a list of these colleges at [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org).

# HOW COLLEGES VIEW STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES

Just as schools differ in what standardized tests they accept, so do they differ in terms of how they look at the scores when submitted. Some will “superscore” individual subscores. What that means is that colleges will look at the highest subscores, regardless of when the tests were taken, and will develop a new composite score. So, for example, a student scores a 1200 on the SATs in May, broken down into a 500 in evidence-based reading and writing (EBRW) and 700 in math.

Then in June, he scores a 600 in EBRW and a 600 in math. Some colleges will create a new composite score of 1300 combining June's 600 in EBRW and May's 700 in math. Others may simply consider the subscores but will not compute a new composite score, and still others will simply consider the highest composite score submitted without considering or combining subscores. While the practice of superscoring has long been more common in regard to SATs, more and more colleges are using this practice for the ACTs.

## WHEN TO TAKE STANDARDIZED TESTS

Traditionally, students have taken standardized tests during spring of junior year of high school, but that seems



to be changing with more and more students taking the tests earlier in their junior years.

The goal is to hopefully finish testing before senior year so that students can concentrate on their school work and college

applications. However, there still is ample time to take the tests during senior year.

WHAT YOU NEED  
TO KNOW  
ABOUT APPLYING

*There is more to applying to college than filling out applications and pushing a button on the computer. Not only must a student submit the application on or before a college's posted deadline, but the entire file must be complete with standardized test scores, if they are being submitted, and the high school transcript and profile, recommendations from teachers and the guidance counselor. (Some colleges allow students to simply self report high school grades and/or do not require recommendations.)*

## WHEN TO APPLY

Generally, students can start to apply over the summer prior to senior year of college. Many colleges have application cut off dates, and those, too, can vary. Many schools use January 1 or 2 as a cut off; others can be as late as March or even continue into the summer of senior year. Some require students to apply within a particular time frame, like the University of California system, which only accepts applications submitted during the month of November. It's a good idea to give your teen plenty of time to write his or her applications, as applications ask for a lot of information and the essay questions are often challenging and thought-provoking.

*The easiest way to explain the application plans is through the following brief dictionary:*

**Early Decision** - The student applies to college early in the application season and sometime after receives an early decision from the college (although that decision may take several weeks). The student, the parent and the high school guidance counselor sign a contract in which the student agrees that he or she will attend x college if accepted. A student may only apply to one college via Early Decision (ED). Applying ED does not prohibit a student from applying to a college via any other application plan provided the student does not have to commit to attending that college or university if accepted. There are a few exceptions to this rule as will be indicated below.

**Early Decision I, II** - Same as above, except a college offers two deadlines for early decision. The earlier deadline is EDI, and the later is EDII. A student can only apply to the same college either in EDI or EDII, but not both. If he or she has been denied or deferred admission to a college to which he or she has applied via ED or EDI, he or she may apply to a different college EDII.

**Early Action** - Applying ED does not prohibit a student from applying to another college or university provided he or she does not have to commit to attending that other school if accepted. The student may apply to any number of schools via Early Action.

**Early Action I, II** - Same as above, except a college has two deadlines for applying via early action.

**Restrictive or Single Choice Early Action** - The student applies early in the application season and receives an early decision but does not have to commit to attending the college. There are, however, restrictions on applying to other schools at the same time. Typically, the student cannot apply to another college via Early Decision.

Some colleges also allow the student to also apply to a public college or university and/or through any other school's Early Action plan, as long as that school does not have Restrictive or Single Choice Early Action.

For example, if a student applies to Georgetown University under its Early Action program, he or she may not apply to Johns Hopkins University's Early Decision program, since he or she would not be free to choose Georgetown if admitted. He or she can, however, apply to Johns Hopkins University via Regular Decision (see below) or to the Early Action program at M.I.T. because its Early Action program is neither restrictive nor single choice.

**Rolling Decision** - Once the student's file is complete - the application, test scores, the high school transcript and high school profile have been received by the college - his or her file is reviewed and a decision is made by the college. The review can take several weeks.

**Regular Decision** - The student applies by a certain deadline and receives a decision, usually by April 1, which is known as the universal candidate's decision deadline. The universal candidate's reply deadline is May 1, by which time a student must accept one college's offer of admission – and only one.

## HOW TO APPLY

Until recently, students generally applied to college in one or two ways - through the individual college's own application or through an application known as the Common Application, which more than 700 colleges now offer. A third application the Universal College Application has also been available for a number of years. A new application called the Coalition Application (from a group of colleges that have come together to form the Coalition for Access Affordability and Success) is now also available to students.



THE OTHER STUFF  
THAT'S  
ON YOUR MIND

# VISITING COLLEGES

**T**here was a time when students rarely visited colleges before applying, but that has changed. Visiting helps students understand what they are looking for in a college and to narrow down the list of colleges under consideration.

Not everyone has time to do colleges visits, and it's difficult to visit every college on a student's list. The first thing I recommend is to do a little "visiting" on the colleges' websites, starting by getting a feel for the college by reading its mission statement or President's letter and looking at the section that is often identified as *About*. You can learn about a college by reading guide books and websites that give overviews of many colleges. Other resources are college Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages, and college online chats and blogs, and on my College Blog <http://woolfcollegeconsulting.com/blog/> and Guides to Getting In [www.woolfcollegeconsulting.com/guides-to-getting-in/](http://www.woolfcollegeconsulting.com/guides-to-getting-in/).

Although it is preferable to visit colleges when classes are in session, many families aren't able to do that. It's okay to visit over holidays and weekends, although colleges are often closed to organized visits on Sundays. Families can even visit campuses virtually, as there are websites that feature virtual tours.

# VISITING COLLEGES *(CONT.)*

If you do not have time to visit, the way to get a more direct idea of the variety among colleges is to take a look at colleges near your home.

## WHAT TO DO ON YOUR VISIT

Register for an information session and a tour and don't be afraid to ask questions about the academic and social atmosphere of the college. Try to get answers that relate to the academic and social fit issues that I raise early in this e-book. While it's great to hear about how the meal plan works and why the campus has lamp posts with blue bulbs, you want to make sure that you ask specific questions about academics and the college experience.



# HOW TO DEMONSTRATE YOUR INTEREST IN A COLLEGE

Some colleges are tracking what is referred to as “demonstrated interest.” The philosophy is that a student who visits may be more likely to attend. But there are other ways to demonstrate interest, especially if a family doesn’t have time to visit. The social media resources that I mentioned earlier, such as Facebook, Twitter and others, as well as participating in college chats, all demonstrate interest. Even registering on a college’s web site and requesting more information about the college are indications of interest. When visiting, it’s important to stop in at admissions and make sure that the college registers your visit.



THE BEST THING  
A TEEN CAN DO  
TO GET  
INTO COLLEGE

I am often asked, “What’s the best thing a teen can do in preparation for applying to college?” That’s an easy answer - study and get good grades. Colleges look at the high school the student attends, the courses he or she takes, whether the student has challenged him or herself, and his or her grades before anything else.

It doesn’t matter what the high school in the next town offers in its curriculum; colleges only consider a student based on the availability of classes at his or her high school. So if a high school doesn’t offer APs or offers only a limited number, for example, there’s no need to worry. Students are not penalized for not taking nonexistent classes.

Colleges also look at trends, happy to see that a student’s grades have improved from year to year. Junior year classes and grades are the most important to colleges because they are the last time that colleges can view a student’s record over the course of an entire school year. Then they look at everything else - extracurricular activities, essays, interviews (if a college offers interviews), and students’ passions.

There are no set numbers of activities that a student must show on an application or any particular set of activities. Everyone is different, and that’s what colleges are looking for.

Ultimately, each college wants to fashion a class of students with a variety of personalities and interests who are engaged in their communities

I'll bet there is a teenager like that in your home right now.

I know this all sounds like there is a lot involved in the college search and application process – and there is. As



As a college consultant and certified educational planner, I have the background and expertise that you need to ease the process for you and your teen, eliminate the anxiety that often comes with the undertaking, and ensure

a peaceful household. Your calls and emails to talk about how I can escort your teen through the college application and search process are always welcome. You can reach me through [info@woolfcollegeconsulting.com](mailto:info@woolfcollegeconsulting.com) or calling 914.381.6338. You can also learn more about me and read my College Blog at [www.woolfcollegeconsulting.com](http://www.woolfcollegeconsulting.com).

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Betsy F. Woolf is a certified educational planner (CEP – American Institute of Certified Educational Planners) who holds a Certificate in College Counseling from UCLA and is certified by New York State as a secondary school teacher. She graduated magna cum laude from New York University, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and received a J.D. from the Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University, where she graduated at the top of her class.

Betsy is an award-winning editor who has been featured in the *New York Times Special Supplement*, *Education Life*, and who writes extensively about the college process. She has moderated programs and workshops with college deans from across the United States and has organized and moderated workshops for her colleagues at IECA (Independent Educational Consultants Association) and at the annual conference of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), an organization of more than 11,000 professionals who assist students as they make choices about pursuing post-secondary education.

Find out more about Betsy and Woolf College Consulting at [www.woolfcollegeconsulting.com](http://www.woolfcollegeconsulting.com).

IMAGINE A STRESS-FREE  
COLLEGE SEARCH  
AND APPLICATION PROCESS...

THAT COMPLIMENTS YOUR  
BUSY SCHEDULE  
AND GETS THE BEST COLLEGE FIT  
FOR YOUR TEEN

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WOOLF COLLEGE CONSULTING  
CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN



◀ GET STARTED TODAY ▶