



College Handbook

German International School New York

50 Partridge Road

White Plains, NY 10605

(914) 948-6513 x209

www.gisny.org

College Advisors

Erica Schmalhofer

eschmalhofer@gisny.org

Kimberly Ge

kge@gisny.org

College Board CEEB Code: 335-941

Dear Students and Parents,

Welcome to the college application process! Inside this handbook, you will find various resources as well as helpful tips to guide you through the often daunting world of college admissions.

An important fact to note: the U.S. college application process is unique. It varies **greatly** from the university application process in Germany. The **main differences** are listed below:

1. **All high school grades count!** This means that colleges look at grades “Noten” beginning in grade 9 through grade 12. Therefore, it is important to stay focused and always do your best.
2. **Good grades are not enough!** Colleges want to see well-rounded individuals who can contribute something valuable to their school. It is very important to start “building your resume” freshman year (9th grade). Colleges like to see how you give back to the community (volunteerism), participation in a multitude of school/sport/arts related activities (AGs), and experiences that demonstrate leadership qualities. (i.e.: School President, Captain of the soccer team, Class Representative, etc.)
3. **ACT/SAT scores matter!** Most schools require results from either the ACT or SAT. Do not underestimate the difficulty of these tests. Substantial time and effort must be devoted to practicing for these tests to yield competitive results.
4. **Letters of Recommendation (usually two) and a personal essay required!** These two tools will offer colleges/universities insight about you beyond test scores and grades.

As always, we are available to assist you in any way possible. We are only a phone call, email, or touch on the shoulder away. Let’s work together to ensure you are submitting the strongest application possible!

Best,

Erica Schmalhofer & Kimberly Ge
College Advisors

The Role of the College Advisor at GISNY

- Informs and advises parents and students about the U.S. college system and entrance requirements
- Discusses the importance of extra curricula activities and monitors involvement
- Assists with the college application process
- Prepares official student transcripts and updates the accompanying school profile
- Maintains and creates new relationships with colleges and universities
- Organizes the ACT Prep Course
- Writes letters of recommendation
- Helps write teachers' recommendations (particular to our school)
- Assists students with college essays (per request)

Where Do You Begin?

The initial search for colleges can be quite overwhelming. When you begin your search, think about the following:

- **Location:** Do you want to stay close to home, or do you want to experience a new part of the country?
- **Setting:** Do you want urban, suburban, or a rural setting?
- **Size:** Where do you feel most comfortable? A small college can have a couple of thousands students, whereas large state schools have tens of thousands.
- **Academic Programs:** Does the school offer a major in the subject you are interested in? Are classes taught in large lecture halls or are class sizes small? Who teaches the introductory courses, faculty or graduate students?
- **Cost:** College is quite expensive in the U.S. The total cost of college per year is the tuition plus room and board. The cost of attending a school out-of-state is significantly higher than in-state.
- **Ethnicity and Race:** Are you looking for a school with a large international population? Do you like a school with a diverse student population?
- **Extracurricular Activities:** Do you want the school be a part of NCAA Division 1 athletics? Are you interested in music, art, or theater? What kind of volunteer or public service opportunities are there? Do you want to write for a student publication?

First Steps

1. Now it is time to make a preliminary list of colleges. At this point no number is too great; however, your list should be **realistic**.
2. Sort your colleges into three categories: “Reach”, “Fit,” and “Safety.” However, there are **no guarantees** in college admissions. These days, college admissions representatives will tell you there are no “safety schools.”
3. Look at their individual graduation requirements, rules for declaring a major, and requirements for the department you are interested in.

Types of Colleges

Public Colleges: funded by local and state governments and usually offer lower tuition than private colleges

Private Colleges: rely mainly on tuition, fees, and private sources of funding

Four Year Colleges: offer four-year programs which lead to a Bachelor’s Degree. These include universities and liberal arts colleges.

Two Year Colleges: offer programs that last up to two years and lead to a certificate or Associate’s Degree. These include community colleges, vocational-technical colleges, and career colleges.

Universities

Universities are often larger and offer more majors and degree programs than colleges. Most universities contain many smaller colleges, such as the college of education, the college of engineering, etc. These colleges can prepare you for a variety of careers or for graduate study.

Sources to Help You Create Your List

- College Websites
- Networking with current students, alumni of GISNY, administrators, counselors, and teachers
- College Visits
- Informational material given out by colleges
- *College Handbook*, published by the College Board
- *Book of Majors*, published by the College Board
- *Fiske Guide to Colleges*, by Edward B. Fiske
- *The Best 377 Colleges*, published by Princeton Review
- www.unigo.com for college reviews and videos/photos
- www.fastweb.com for scholarship searches
- www.collegeboard.org testing information, college searches, general information
- www.ucas.com guide to getting into university and college in the UK
- <http://.collegeconfidential.com/alphabetic-list-colleges>
- <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges>

Remember: It is never too early to start researching!

The Application Package

The Three Most Important Factors Colleges Use When Making Decisions

- 1. Strength of Program**
- 2. Grades**
- 3. Standardized Test Results (if required)**

However, final admissions decisions are based on both academic and non-academic factors.

Important Elements of the Application Package

Transcript

- the most important component
- displays courses and final grades in each subject from grades 9-12
- includes the GISNY School Profile

Test Scores (See “Standardized Testing” for more detail)

- typically considered in relation to your overall performance
- it may validate your transcript or demonstrate greater potential for achievement

Personal Essay

- the essay is your chance to show who you are beyond just score results and grades

Advisor Recommendation

- provides context to your transcript, explains any particular academic situations, describes your overall school experience
- provides insight into your attributes as a person and a student

Teacher Recommendations

- include observations on your personal and academic qualities
- focus on your potential for academic success and/or development
- describe your strengths as a student often with specific anecdotes

Activities

- evidence of your participation and achievement outside of the classroom

The Application Should:

- **present a complete picture of who you are**
- **include details and honest information**
- **reflect a document that has been reviewed and edited**

1. If the college is a Common Application school, log on to the Common Application website and complete the application.
2. If the college is not on the Common Application website, then log on to the school's admission website.
3. Notify me in writing (email) of which colleges and universities you will be applying to as well as the addresses/email/contact information of each individual school, so I know where to send the required documents. This step is **very important** because if the school is **not** on the Common Application, they will have their own requirements and guidelines. This is your job to provide the necessary information.
4. Make sure you log on to the College Board website and/or ACT and send your standardized test scores to the colleges that require them. (We are not allowed to do this for you!!!)

Any student needing assistance with the Common Application should make an appointment to see me. We can set up your account together.

The Personal Essay

A very important component of the application package is the personal (college) essay. This is your chance to “show” who you are beyond the numbers and grades. Sometimes, this is a “make or break” component. The trick is to grab your reader’s attention and leave a memorable impression. According to a former Dean of Admissions, Gary Ripple, “We would like each essay to offer us a picture of the candidate that just isn’t visible in a list of courses and grades or the numbers resulting from a three-hour multiple choice examination.” According to Sarah McGinty, author of *Writing Your College Essay*, “The essay can show priorities, values, the ability to synthesize and connect, the ability to get something out of an experience...It can breathe life into your activities, interests, experiences, or family situation.”

Tips for Writing Your College Essay

1. **Write it yourself!** Your writing should have a “voice,” and it should be yours.
2. Keep your focus narrow and personal
3. Prove it: Develop your main idea with vivid, specific facts, events, quotations, and examples.
4. Be specific!
5. Be mindful of the “word count.” On the Common Application, your document will cut off when it reaches the total permissible word count.

Do Not

1. Use standard topics...Bring something new to the table!
2. Write your resume...this has already been done in the application.
3. Use 50 words when 5 will do
4. Brag
5. Forget to proofread! This is when a second set of eyes comes in handy.

Writing is a process. You should have several drafts before a final copy. Give your essay to someone who does not know you so well. Do they get a picture of who you are? Did it keep their attention? Are they confused by anything you have written? Remember: You want to leave a vivid impression in the mind of the lucky college admissions officer selected to read your essay.

How Many Applications Should I Send?

Generally, you should send five to seven:

- One to two “Reach” schools
- Two or three “Target” schools
- One or two “Safety” schools

When Do I Apply?

There are several types of applications. The following will outline the various deadlines:

Early Decision (ED): Due typically November 1, you make a commitment to a first-choice school where, if admitted, you will definitely enroll. Only choose this option if you are 100% confident you will be attending if admitted. You will learn of their decision mid-December, and you will be expected to submit a deposit. If you are convinced this is where you would like to study, it is advantageous to apply under Early Decision. Chances of acceptance are usually higher applying early.

Early Action (EA): Due typically around November 1, however, unlike ED, you are not bound to enrolling if admitted. You will receive a decision by mid-December. You are free to apply to other EA colleges as well as Regular Decision and Rolling Admission colleges. You have until May 1 to respond to an offer of admission. Once again, the earlier you apply the greater chance you have of being accepted.

Regular Decision (RD): You submit an application by a specified date, anywhere from December 15-January 15 to receive a decision usually on or before April 1. You have until May 1 to reply to an offer of admission.

Rolling Admission: Colleges review applications as they are submitted and make a decision throughout the admission cycle. Applications close when the class is full.

National Candidate's Reply Day: May 1. You are required to respond by May 1 and submit a deposit. If you do not submit a deposit, you may lose your spot. You may remain on another college's waiting list as well.

Standardized Testing

Standardized tests are a major component of the application package. Colleges use them when evaluating applicants, along with the student's transcript, essay, and letters of recommendation. However, not all colleges require them. There are over 800 colleges and universities that are "score optional." However, to be on the safe side (because you may change your mind about which colleges to apply to) you should register for these tests. Just because you take the test, does not mean that you have to report the scores.

Here are some common questions and answers concerning standardized testing:

1. Which test should I take?

Answer: I recommend you take both an SAT and an ACT prior to the end of your junior year. (grade 11) See which one you do better on. Focus your attention on that test. Plan to take it again in the late spring of junior year or early in the fall of your senior year.

2. Are both tests equally acceptable?

Answer: Yes. There are no schools that will accept only the SAT or only ACT. You should focus on the one that is likely to result in a higher score for you.

3. When should I take these tests?

Answer: Take the ACT and SAT in the spring of your junior year and then focus on one or the other for the next administration. If you wish to take the test twice, taking it in late spring and then again in early fall of your senior year will meet all application deadlines. Most students take these tests twice and sometimes three times. There is rarely much improvement after the third time, so 2-3 times is recommended.

4. How should I prepare for these tests?

Answer: The College Board is now collaborating with Khan Academy to provide high quality online test preparation at no charge. ACT offers its own test prep, accessible via their website. Many companies (Kaplan, Applerouth, Princeton Review, etc.) offer test prep at a variety of price points. Costs of test prep programs can be hundreds to thousands of dollars! Fortunately, GISNY has initiated an in-house ACT Prep course on Saturdays. The school subsidizes part of the course, and it is the best deal in town!

5. How do my scores get to my colleges?

Answer: **You must arrange** to have your scores sent directly from SAT and/or ACT.

6. What about SAT Subject Test? Do I need to take them?

Answer: Most colleges do not require them, and the ones that do vary in the number they require. Most commonly require two. **Check now to see if your selected colleges require them!** These tests are required mainly by selective and highly selective schools....like the Ivy League.

7. When should I take a Subject Test?

Answer: Take these tests by the end of your junior year! Remember: Most students **will not** need to take any Subject Tests, but if you are one of the ones who does, the fall of your senior year is too late to discover this. Please think about this now!!!

Helpful Websites for Standardized Testing

Test-optional schools: <http://www.fairtest.org/>

Schools that require SAT Subject Tests:

<http://www.compassprep.com/subject-test-requirements-and-recommendations/>

To register for the SAT: <http://sat.collegeboard.org/register/>

To register for the ACT: <http://www.actstudent.org/regist/>

All things College Board (test prep, redesigned test, etc.):

<https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat?navid=gh-nsat>

ACT test prep: <http://www.actstudent.org/testprep/>

SAT fee waivers: <https://sat.collegeboard.org/register/sat-fee-waivers>

ACT fee waivers: <http://sat.collegeboard.org/scores/send-sat-scores>

ACT Score reporting:

<http://www.actstudent.org/scores/send/>

SAT Subject Tests: <https://sat.collegeboard.org/about-tests/sat-subject-tests>

American High School and College Terminology

- **freshman** (grade 9) **sophomore** (grade 10) **junior** (grade 11) **senior** (grade 12)
- **GPA**-grade point average calculated from grades 9-12. GISNY does not calculate GPA and this is acceptable with U.S. colleges and universities
- **PSAT**-(preliminary scholastic aptitude test) an abbreviated version of the SAT which tests verbal, math, and writing skills. The PSAT is administered in school by Mrs. DeGenova. Scores do not count for college admission.
- **SAT Reasoning Test**-(3h 45min) Used by the majority of colleges as part of the admission process. Students take the test externally usually as juniors or seniors and can take it several times.
- **SAT Subject Tests**-(1 hour tests that test particular subjects) SAT Subject tests are not mandatory for all colleges. If they are required, students usually must take two. **Students must check the specific requirements of the colleges they are applying to.**
- **ACT**-American College Testing. The ACT tests school curriculum rather than being an aptitude test. This test includes a science section and tests more advanced math concepts. There is less emphasis on vocabulary, and therefore, more suitable for non-native speakers. More questions must be answered in a shorter period of time. Most of our students prefer the ACT.
- **TOEFL**-The Test of English as a Foreign Language measures the ability of non-native speakers to use and understand English as it is spoken, written, or heard in college. (4 hours)

THE TIMELINE

9th GRADE

- Review your academic progress. Keep your grades up!
- Explore various extracurricular activities.
- Find a summer job, do volunteer work, or attend a summer program.

10th GRADE

- Keep your grades up!
- Continue extracurricular activities.
- Begin narrowing down your activities and work toward leadership positions.
- Take PSAT for practice in October.
- Start attending college fairs and familiarize yourself with websites.
- Visit colleges, attend a summer program.

11th GRADE

SEPTEMBER-FEBRUARY

- Take the PSAT. It counts!
- Take the ACT/SAT, especially if you are applying for Early Admission or Early Decision.
- Register for SAT Subject Tests.
- Attend career presentations.
- Visit college-sponsored information evenings.
- Don't forget about community service hours.
- Visit college campuses/get a copy of an application to preview.
- Meet with me regularly!
- Get to know your favorite teachers well-ask for recommendation letters.

*****At our school, it is extremely important to secure those letters of recommendation early. Many of our teachers return to Germany, and some return unexpectedly.**

MARCH-MAY

- Start identifying appropriate colleges-make your preliminary list of schools.
- Consider an internship for the senior year.
- Attend college fairs.
- Take AP Exams in May.
- Meet with me to plan.
- Get college applications.
- Visit colleges over the summer.
- If you are interested in playing Division 1 or Division 2 sports in college, be sure to register with the NCAA Eligibility Center.

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN-GRADE 12

JULY

- Begin draft for common application essays
- Begin draft for activity list

AUGUST

- Polish draft for common application essays
- Polish draft of activity list
- Finalize list of schools and mark the deadlines
- Choose an Early Decision/Early Action school

SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER

- Keep your grades up!
- Take (or retake) SAT/ACT
- Give your final list of schools and deadlines to me. Include in your list the address and phone number of the Office of Admissions for each school you are applying to.

- Finalize your college essays. Start early!
- Arrange college interviews and practice for them.

EARLY DECISION DEADLINE: NOVEMBER TIMEFRAME

THANKSGIVING SHOULD BE YOUR PERSONAL DEADLINE FOR THE ENTIRE APPLICATION PACKAGE. TRANSCRIPTS AND LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION WILL NOT BE SENT OUT DURING THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS. NO EXCEPTIONS!

DECEMBER-FEBRUARY

- Send out applications on time.
- Watch deadlines!

REGULAR ADMISSIONS DEADLINE: JANUARY TIMEFRAME

MARCH-MAY

- Wait for notification letters (beginning of April).
- If you are waitlisted, write a letter reiterating your interest in being admitted.
- Decision time! Notify your school of choice by May 1 that you will attend.
- Thank your teachers! Send them a thank you note and let them know where you plan to study.
- Check your mail for information regarding orientation, housing, course selection, etc.
- Send your first payment on time!
- Get ready for an amazing adventure!!!

Congratulations on all of your hard work and your well-deserved accomplishments. We are proud to call you GISNY Alumni!



NOTES