

Applying to College

Applying to college can be both exciting and stressful. Much of the stress can be handled through the cooperative relationship between the student, parent and the senior class guidance counselor. At the beginning of the senior year students should start thinking about career goals and what college will best meet these goals.

Seniors should consider the many options available to them including two year vs. four year schools, size, location and cost. These are all questions that will be answered from September to May!



The First Step

The first step is for the student to meet with his/her guidance counselor, either individually or with parents in order to do the following:

- 1) Analyze the Grade 9-12 transcript including GPA
- 2) Discuss the necessity and timing of standardized testing (SAT and ACT)
- 3) Develop a preliminary college list
- 4) Prepare a senior year timetable
- 5) Identify information resources; i.e. college guides, internet reference sites, college catalogues, college fairs, etc.

Practical Considerations

- 1) The four-year state colleges and universities in Massachusetts have explicit criteria for incoming freshmen. Students must have a 3.0 GPA (Grade Point Average) based on sixteen specific college preparatory courses. Vocational/Technical High School students are exempt from the state college foreign language requirement. The colleges will substitute extra math, science, computer or technical courses as part of the sixteen selected courses. A sliding scale utilizing SAT scores will be used to help students who don't meet the 3.0 GPA requirement. The Massachusetts public colleges and universities include University of Massachusetts Amherst, Boston, Dartmouth and Lowell, Bridgewater State University, Fitchburg State University, Framingham State University, Salem State University, Westfield State University, Worcester State University, Massachusetts College of Art, Massachusetts Maritime Academy, and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.
- 2) The Massachusetts Community College System allows students who do not meet the above criteria to seek a two-year Associates Degree and then transfer to the state college or university. Students who decide to go this route are not required to take the SATs. Upon application to a community college, students can designate themselves as a Massachusetts transfer student. This guarantees a transfer to a four-year Massachusetts state college or university providing they maintain a minimum grade average at the two-year college (currently approximately 2.5 on a 4.0 scale). The

community colleges in Massachusetts are all non-residential. To find more information on the Massachusetts transfer program, go to www.mass.edu/masstransfer.

- 3) Out of state colleges have specific institutional requirements. Some will require Tri-County students to have two full years of a foreign language. If required, seniors will need to have completed or be taking the final course in our Spanish sequence (Spanish III).
- 4) Tri-County students are allowed two excused absences for college visits per school year. Arrangements must be made in advance with his/her guidance counselor. A form needs to be signed by the parent prior to the visit and returned to school with a college admission representative's signature.
- 5) Tri-County will host a college fair in October. Information will be provided to students about any other local college fairs. Announcements will be made in advance regarding any college representatives that will be visiting the school.

The College Application



The college application is a cooperative process between the student and the guidance counselor. The student is responsible for the application, essay, fees, asking for the teacher recommendations and an “activity sheet” (if extra-curricula activities, honors, and awards do not all fit on the application). The guidance counselor will provide a letter of recommendation, school profile, and transcript. Students who are applying to four-year colleges must designate on the SAT application that their scores be sent to the colleges.

- 1) Students can apply on a paper application that can be requested by mail from the college admission office or downloaded from a computer. Most colleges also allow students to complete and submit applications electronically. It is essential that the student inform the senior class guidance counselor about any electronically sent applications so that the supporting documentation can be sent out (transcript and letters).

Students applying to four-year colleges will be taking the SAT Reasoning Test. Some very competitive schools will also require students to take the SAT Subject Tests. An alternative test, not administered by the College Board, is called the ACT. Students can apply to take the SAT or ACT going online to www.collegeboard.com or www.act.org. Tri-County's school code is **220864**. Students who utilize the College Board website should also complete the “My Organizer” link on the website. Fee Waivers are available in the guidance office for students who meet the financial eligibility criteria.

- 2) Most four-year colleges require a college admissions essay. Students should have their English teacher proofread their essay. Planning in advance is essential for an effective essay as is neatness.
- 3) It is good procedure to submit two teacher letters of recommendation with an application. The guidance recommendation is a separate summary recommendation. It is essential to choose the evaluator wisely. Students should choose academic teachers or a vocational teacher (if they plan on majoring in an area related to a Tri-County

major) who know them best. It is important to ask a teacher to write a recommendation correctly, usually by seeing the teacher after school, and providing the evaluator with a carefully completed Request For Teacher Recommendation form. Students should be courteous and give the teacher sufficient time to write the letter. Teachers should be instructed to give multiple copies of the letter to his/her guidance counselor to be included in the application mail-out.

- 4) Seniors should be very mindful of deadlines. Application deadlines vary. Some very exclusive colleges have a January 1 deadline. Deadlines vary but are usually between February 15 and March 15.

Financial Aid

The cost of attending college is a major expense. The costs vary from college to college. The non-residential community colleges are the least expensive. The Massachusetts State Colleges and Universities are considered public institutions and are much less expensive than private colleges. The total cost of attending college is the total of tuition, fees and room and board. Commuting students pay less but do not participate in the on-campus living experience. There are various types of college aid: scholarships, grants, loans, and work study. Tri-County will host a Financial Aid workshop in early January to assist with the financial aid process.



- 1) Information about private scholarships is available on the following websites: www.finaid.com and www.fastweb.com
- 2) The FAFSA or Free Application for Federal Student Aid will be available in the guidance office and on FAFSA.ed.gov on January 1. All colleges require this form to determine if the student is eligible for federal, state, or institution grants, loans or awards. Completing this form requires financial information from the calendar year preceding college attendance.
- 3) Many selective private colleges also require the CSS Profile. This form is also available in the guidance office and on collegeboard.org.
- 4) The local scholarship process has an April to graduation timetable. This information will be publicized in parent newsletters and announced to students. It is also a very good idea to inquire with local civic and religious organizations about private scholarships offered within the town.

Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority (MEFA)

The Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority (MEFA) is a self-financing, not-for-profit state authority dedicated to assisting students and parents in meeting the challenge of financing higher education. MEFA offers extensive services and provides critical information to help parents and students navigate the often-confusing college financing process.

MEFA's parent assistance services are available at no cost to all parents of Massachusetts's high school students. By registering online at www.mefa.org parents will receive the following services:

- Regularly scheduled emails that will assist them in the college financing process
- Timely reminders for critical deadlines and filings
- Access to telephone hotlines with financial aid professionals
- Advice regarding college award letters and options for paying the tuition bill

The web links available through www.mefa.org will assist families in applying for financial aid, exploring scholarships, calculating financial need, applying for educational loans, and learning about interest-free tuition plans.

For more information on the above or to schedule a college meeting, please contact the appropriate Guidance Counselor.

College Links

There are many websites available to assist students and parents in the college search. Tri-County uses the Your Plan For College website to assist students in career planning and the college search. Your Plan For College login and password information will be provided to the student at the beginning of each school year. The following are useful college links:

www.collegeboard.com – college search and test registration

www.act.org – college search and test registration

www.princetonreview.com

www.collegenet.com

www.yourplanforthefuture.org

