

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1) I don't know where to apply. How can I find colleges?

There are a number of resources students can turn to when searching for colleges. The School Counseling Office has guidebooks for the public and private schools in Wisconsin that contain information about admission requirements for each campus, degrees and majors offered, tuition, housing, scholarships and financial aid, etc.

However, the best resources are online. Information about the UW-System schools can be found at <http://uwhelp.wisconsin.edu/>, and information about Wisconsin's private schools can be found at <http://www.privatecollegezone.org>. Two other informative sites to turn to are <http://wiscareers.wisc.edu> and <http://www.collegeview.com>. Both of these sites can function as college "search engines," where students can search for schools based on various criteria (e.g., size, location, majors offered, tuition, etc). Students who would like to use WISCareers should see Mrs. Hernandez in the School Counseling Office to obtain registration information.

2) How do I know what a college is looking for in an applicant?

Students should visit each prospective college's admissions page to find out what the school is looking for in an applicant. This page will also provide students with information on the various materials that need to be submitted in order to complete the application process (e.g., letters of recommendation, official vs. unofficial ACT scores, etc.).

3) Can I take easy classes my senior year?

If a student plans to attend a two- or four-year college following graduation, senior year is not the time to sit back and relax. One component of a student's college application that admission counselors weigh heavily is his or her senior year course load. Colleges want to see students taking increasingly difficult courses throughout high school. Taking a fourth year of mathematics, science, social studies, and even foreign language ensures that students are continually expanding their knowledge and skills; helps them perform better on college placement exams and be more prepared for the rigor of collegiate studies; sends the message that they value their education and are hard-workers; and just makes them more attractive applicants in general. Taking easy classes during senior year is a major red flag for admissions counselors, and chances are it will be to students' detriment.

4) When should I apply?

At the very latest, students should submit their college applications by the end of November. However, we school counselors ideally like to see applications submitted by the end of October.

5) **Why is it important to apply early?**

It is important to apply early to colleges for a number of reasons.

First, applying by the end of November will most likely guarantee that students do not miss any application deadlines (students should check their college's website to be absolutely sure). The very first application deadline in Wisconsin is December 1st of each year, for Marquette University. Students who apply before this date will not miss a single deadline for a Wisconsin public or private university.

Second, it is important to apply early because of student housing. Dorms and other housing options fill up very quickly at certain campuses, such as UW-Milwaukee. Applying early will increase students' chances of securing housing.

Third, applying early can be important for various scholarship or financial aid deadlines. Some colleges use a student's general application for admission as the basis for consideration for scholarships. If a student applies too late, he or she may miss those windows for scholarship opportunities.

Finally, students should apply early so that they can simply complete the college application process and not have to worry about it for months on end. It also frees up time to focus on applying for scholarships and financial aid.

6) **Can I still take the ACT or SAT?**

Yes!!! There are upcoming ACT test dates on October 22nd and December 10th. Log onto <http://www.actstudent.org> to register. The SAT is being offered on November 5th and December 3rd. Log onto <http://sat.collegeboard.org> to register.

7) **Why is it important to go on campus tours?**

Taking a campus tour is one of the most important things students can do as they are making their decisions regarding which colleges to apply to. Despite the increase in virtual tours on college websites, nothing can take the place of being on a college campus—seeing the student body, making connections with school staff, seeing the layout/size of the campus, and getting a feel for the general atmosphere of the school. Taking a tour can help students answer questions like: Will I fit in here? How far apart might my classes be? What else is there to do on campus? What do the dorms look like? Would I be happy here?

8) **When do I need letters of recommendation?**

With regards to college admissions, there are two situations when a student will need letters of recommendation.

The first is when the school actually requires them as part of the application process. Students should go to their prospective schools' admission websites and read through the application requirements to ensure that they submit all necessary materials.

The second situation in which a letter of recommendation may be needed is when a student is on the “bubble” in terms of admission standards (e.g., GPA, class rank, ACT/SAT scores, high school courses, etc.). Most colleges publish their admission criteria on their website or provide statistics for the middle fifty percent of admitted freshmen students. If a student finds that his or her GPA, class rank, and/or ACT/SAT score(s) fall just below, at, or above the published admission standards, it may be in his or her best interest to send a letter of recommendation along with the other application materials. A well-written letter of recommendation may be the deciding factor and could help the student earn a spot in the freshman class.

9) How many letters of recommendation do I need?

When it comes to letters of recommendation, quality is more important than quantity. One to two well-written letters should be sufficient for college applications.

10) Who should write letters of recommendation for me?

In most cases, students should ask a teacher from a core academic class (e.g., English, mathematics, science, or social studies) to write their letter of recommendation. Students may also ask a teacher from a class that pertains to their intended major in college. For example, students who plan to major in business can ask one of their business teachers for a letter. Letters of recommendation should never be written by a family member.

Another factor to consider when choosing someone to write letters of recommendation is how well the person knows you. Students want the individual writing the letter of recommendation to be able to provide specific information about their strengths as a student and as a person as well as contributions they have made to classroom, school, or community. It is very obvious, and therefore very unflattering to the student, when a letter of recommendation is general and unspecific.

11) When and how should I ask for a letter of recommendation?

Students who anticipate needing to send a letter of recommendation should ask someone now! In general, please be respectful of the individual’s time and allow them one to two weeks to complete the letter.

In the School Counseling Office, students can find a “Letter of Recommendation Request” form that can be completed and presented to those individuals being asked to write a letter. The form asks students to provide information such as courses taken in high school pertaining to their goals, activities, other awards/honors, work experience, personal strengths, cumulative GPA, ACT score, and class rank. When students provide this additional information, they will receive a much more informative letter of recommendation in return.

12) How can I get my transcripts sent to the colleges I've applied to?

The vast majority of students submit college applications online. Unfortunately, school counselors do not receive a notification when their students have submitted an application to a college, and so we are dependent on those students to tell us where their transcript(s) need to be sent. Shortly after submitting their application(s) online, seniors need to go to the School Counseling Office and fill out a "Transcript Release Request" form. It asks students to tell us where and when they applied and whether or not we need to send any additional materials such as ACT scores, application fees, and/or letters of recommendation.

13) When should I send letters of recommendation?

Letters of recommendation should be sent along with the transcript and ACT scores (if applicable). This will ensure that the college receives all of your application materials in one single envelope. If you consider the hundreds to thousands of pieces of mail that an admissions office receives each and every day, the chances of a letter of recommendation getting lost are much greater if students send it separately from their other application materials than if they send everything together.

14) Can you send my ACT scores?

It depends. Some colleges will accept an unofficial photocopy of a student's score report from Germantown High School. If that is the case, students should indicate on their transcript release request form that they need their ACT scores sent as well. However, some schools require official ACT reports directly from the testing agency. If that is the case, students will need to log onto <http://www.actstudent.org> and pay to have an official score report sent.

15) How do colleges make their decision?

Most colleges take a holistic approach to admissions. That means that they look at the student as an entire person. They do not simply look at students' grades, class rank, and ACT score(s). While those things are important, they also give significant weight to the courses students have taken throughout high school, extracurricular activities, volunteer and work experience, leadership positions, personal statements, and letters of recommendation. Colleges are looking for students who will not only be successful academically, but who will make meaningful contributions to the campus and surrounding community.

16) When will I find out if I'm accepted?

Every college will be different, but most will provide students with admission decisions 2-4 weeks after applying. If students apply during a time period when colleges are typically inundated with applications, such as in October and November, or close to any priority deadlines, it may take a few additional weeks to hear back.

17) Can I change a class mid-year after I've already applied?

Colleges make their admission decisions based on the information that students provide at the time of application. If a student alters any piece of the "puzzle" in a way that the college deems unacceptable, it has the right to rescind the student's admission.

If students wish to make changes to their senior year courses after they've applied, they need to contact each college, inform them of the potential change, and make sure that it will not affect their admission status. Only when students have gotten the "OK" should they see their school counselor and request the change.

18) Do colleges care about my senior year grades?

Absolutely!!! They do care and they do pay attention. At the end of senior year, students will need to submit final transcripts to the colleges they plan to attend. At that point, the college will review each student's performance. If he or she has continued to do well, there should not be any problems. However, if senioritis has taken hold and a student's grades have fallen, the college has the right to revoke his or her admission.

Students who plan to apply to UW-Madison this year should also know that they now request a mid-year transcript for the same purpose. Students who fail to submit this transcript or who have not maintained the level of academic performance they demonstrated freshman through junior year may have their admission revoked.

19) When do I make my final decision?

When students only apply to one school and are admitted, the final decision has already been made. They should send in their enrollment deposit and continue to complete and return any paperwork that is sent to them. However, when students have applied to multiple colleges, the final decision as to which school to attend will generally happen in the spring of their senior year. Again, a spot at the college is usually secured through payment of an enrollment deposit, which is typically due in April or May.

One major factor for most students in making their final decision is how much it will ultimately cost to attend college. If students have been accepted and completed their FAFSA early, they should begin to receive their financial aid award letters in March or April. With this information in hand, students and their families will have a more accurate picture of how much it will cost to attend each college.

20) How do I send my AP scores?

If the college a student plans to attend has not received AP scores, he or she will need to log onto http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/exgrd_rep.html to request additional score reports.