



MERCERSBURG

**Mercersburg Academy
College Counseling
Handbook**

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Greetings from the College Counseling Office!

We hope you will find this handbook a useful tool as you move through this next year. We have done our best to anticipate your questions and hope that you will be able to find most of your answers in these pages. What follows is a combination of advice, explanations, procedures, and policies, some Mercersburg-specific, some not.

Please use this handbook in conjunction with your Family Connection account. There you will find links to extensive resources on all aspects on the college search.

To our parents: We want you (really, we *need* you) to be active participants in this process. To that end, we will do our best to keep you informed of your child's progress. Conversely, we encourage you to be as open as possible with your child and with us about your expectations and, if applicable, your boundaries, whether they be geographic, financial, or otherwise. We invite you to contact us at any time in the search with questions you may have, to meet with us any time you may be on campus, and to join our college admission and financial aid workshops in the spring. We encourage you to pay particular attention to the section in this handbook outlining application procedures to understand the responsibilities that rest with your child. As we will tell students repeatedly over the coming months, they own this process. We will help them when they ask us (and often when they don't), but they need to understand that their role is central to a successful search.

To our students: You are the *you* we keep referring to in the pages that follow. While your search is a collaborative process, ultimately you are the one who will be going to college. To that end, we'll expect you to take the lead in the process. You'll be the one researching the colleges. You'll be the one keeping tabs on your deadlines. You'll be the one writing your essays and completing your applications. Your counselor will be here to help you through the process, from our first meeting until the day you accept an admission offer. But we won't do it for you. Use this handbook wisely. Almost everything you need to know is right here. If you can't find an answer, then ask your counselor. And if you aren't sure what to ask, then tell us that as well. Conducting a college search is hard work, but it shouldn't be frightening, and it shouldn't be lonely. Nor should you allow it to ruin your senior year. You have abundant resources at your fingertips. Use them.

Sincerely,

William R. McClintick, Jr., Director of College Counseling
Frank Betkowski, Associate Director of College Counseling
Caroline Sanders, Associate Director of College Counseling
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MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY

The College Counseling Office at Mercersburg Academy assists each student in finding the best possible post-secondary match. Just as the mission of the Academy prizes the diverse backgrounds of its students, so too does the college counseling process strive to appreciate this diversity. That Mercersburg students apply to and enroll in a wide range of colleges and universities reflects the enormous variety among their interests, talents, and priorities.

College counseling is distinct from college placement. Central to the process is discussion about academic program; potential for success and degree of effort required within a given program; general demeanor among students; quality of relationships among students, faculty, and other advisers; and attitudes towards the school—real, perceived, or otherwise. Throughout the process, the college counselors help students clarify their thinking about college options; make intelligent and informed choices; present themselves and their credentials as accurately, fairly, and clearly as possible; and resolve any difficulties or confusion that arise along the way.

The college search is an educational process, a journey of self-discovery replete with challenges, rewards, and responsibilities. **We assume that students who are preparing themselves to go off to college within a year will possess the motivation and self-discipline to seek the help needed rather than wait for the counselors to come to them. In all steps of the process we expect students to take initiative and be aware of the procedures and deadlines.** *Careful planning, realistic thinking, and a willingness to adjust – if necessary – previously held and possibly unreasonable goals are essential to finding an environment that fits the needs of the student.* The college counseling process is a partnership among students, parents, and counselors. We need your input, we welcome your questions, and we stand ready to assist.

THE COLLEGE SEARCH TIMELINE

This timeline will give you an idea of how your college search will unfold. It notes important benchmarks along the way. You will find detailed information about many of these bullet points in the sections that follow.

JUNIORS (Ninth Graders)

- Earn the best grades you can. Plan to take the most challenging course of study you can handle. Work hard.
- Get involved: athletics, the arts, publications, student government, etc. Play to your strengths or try something new.
- Read, READ, **READ!** This is the only proven method for achieving a high SAT reading score.
- What are you planning for the summer? If you are not working, you ought to be involved in some other activity. Visit the college counseling office and ask about summer enrichment opportunities.

LOWER MIDDLELERS

- Keep working hard to earn the best grades you can. Enroll in challenging courses.
- Be dedicated to your co-curricular activities and sports with an eye toward leadership positions as an upperclassman. Depth is more important than breadth: it is better to excel at one or two things than be a mere participant in many.
- Keep reading!

FALL

- Take the PSAT in October. It does not count, but it is good practice for next year's PSAT as well as for the SAT. However, the test is used internally to determine placement in honors and AP courses. (Next year, the PSAT will also be the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test.)

SPRING

- Review the Recommended Testing Schedule mailed home during spring break. Register on time for June Subject Tests if necessary.
- Again, what will you be doing this summer? If you are also traveling with your family, visit colleges and universities along the way.

SUMMER

- Consider fulfilling your test prep requirement

UPPER MIDDLE

- Enroll in AP courses where available, but maintain good grades.
- Read some more!

FALL

- Take the PSAT in October. **This year, it is also the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test.**
- Attend admission officer visits (provided you are available).

WINTER

- Choose your college counselor.
- Register for the January SAT before you leave for winter break. (Athletes: check your game schedule first!)
- Do the assignments we give you over break.
- Take the January SAT.
- Meet with your college counselor to compile your long list. Begin researching those colleges.
- If you have not yet fulfilled your test prep requirement, participate in one of the test prep options – in-class or online – offered by the school.

SPRING

- Try to visit college campuses during spring break and long spring weekend. Tour the campus, attend an admission info session, and visit a class or two if possible. You may not be able to schedule an interview yet.
- Review the Recommended Testing Schedule mailed home during spring break. Register in March for the May SAT. Register in April for June Subject Tests if necessary. (Athletes: check your game schedule first!)
- Pare down your long list, and meet with your college counselor a second time to discuss your progress. Contact these colleges to get on their mailing lists.
- Plan your senior schedule with your college counselor.
- Take the May SAT.
- Attend the College Counseling and Financial Aid Workshops.
- Athletes: now is the time to contact college coaches.
- Take Subject Tests in June if recommended

SUMMER

- Visit college campuses. Attend admission information sessions, schedule interviews (if offered), tour the campus, visit with coaches, and meet with financial aid officers.
- If you have not yet fulfilled your test prep requirement, this is your last chance.
- Once again, what opportunities does the summer hold for you?

SENIORS

- If you are not in the habit of checking e-mail regularly, start now!
- Be mindful of application deadlines. The college counseling office needs transcript requests from you at least two weeks in advance.

SEPTEMBER

- Work toward finalizing your short list.
- Discuss the possibility of applying Early Action or Early Decision if you have identified a first-choice college.
- Register for the October SAT. (Athletes: check your game schedule first!)
- If you want your test scores included on your transcript, you must sign a release form in the college counseling office.
- Attend meetings with visiting admission officers.
- Division I and II recruits: register online for the NCAA Initial Eligibility Center (formerly the NCAA Clearinghouse).
- Begin drafting your essays. Talk to your counselor *before* you begin.

OCTOBER

- Take the October SAT.
- Ask teachers to write letters of recommendation. (Be sure to provide any college-specific forms.)
- Register for the November SAT/Subject Tests. This is the last possible date to test for EA/ED applications! (Athletes: check your game schedule first!)
- Attend meetings with visiting admission officers.
- Visit any college campuses you've not yet seen.
- If any of your colleges will require the CSS PROFILE for financial aid, you and your family must file it online at www.collegeboard.com.
- Finalize your list of colleges.

Beware of Early Action/Decision deadlines (usually November 1). Submit transcript request forms at least two weeks in advance

- Complete and submit applications for colleges with rolling admission as soon as possible

NOVEMBER

- Take the November SAT/Subject Tests (these tests occur in time for EA/ED applications at most, but not all, colleges and universities). Be sure testing agencies have sent official test scores to the colleges which require them.
- Register for the December SAT/Subject Tests if need be. (Note: Mercersburg is not a test center in December. Plan to take the test at Waynesboro High School, unless you are an athlete with an away game.)
- Work on your college applications. Thanksgiving Break is a great time to tackle them – even if you applied ED!

DECEMBER

- Take the December SAT/Subject Tests.

- Make sure you have requested the SAT and TOEFL programs to send official score reports to all colleges that require them.
- Be mindful of deadlines. Submit your applications, and PHOTOCOPY anything that has not been saved electronically.
- Register for the January SAT/Subject Tests if necessary.
- Make sure your teachers have written their recommendations.

JANUARY

- File your FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1. Pay careful attention to the financial aid deadline and requirements of each college.
- Take the SAT/Subject Test if need be (these scores will be 'on time' January deadlines!).
- Be sure testing agencies have sent official test scores to the colleges which require them.

FEBRUARY & MARCH

- Most financial aid deadlines fall in early February!
- Mid-year (i.e. winter interim) grades mailed to colleges.
- Wait...
- If any colleges have admitted you, visit them during spring break

APRIL

- Share your admission decisions with your college counselor.
- Visit your top choice schools—even if it's for a second or third time. Most colleges will have special admitted student programs designed to provide an in-depth view of the institution.
- Review any waiting list decisions with your college counselor and follow the procedures on the Waiting List Tip Sheet.
- If necessary, review your financial aid packages with your college counselor.
- Notify colleges you do not plan to attend so that they can begin to admit students from their wait lists.

MAY

- ***May 1: You must send a deposit to the college of your choice by this deadline. Do not send more than one deposit.***
- Share your enrollment intentions with your college counselor.
- Beware the senior slide! Colleges will receive your final transcripts. A drop in grades may cause them to reevaluate their offer.

STANDARDIZED TESTING INFORMATION

The college counselors facilitate registration for the exams described below. The college counselors do not, however, register you for the exams. We will provide you with frequent reminders about looming registration deadlines, but it is your responsibility to make sure you meet the deadlines. Registration materials are available in the college counseling office, though most students find the process easier to complete online. Online registration requires a credit card number.

A word of caution to students: Take special care that your name, address, birth date, and Social Security Number are identical each time you register. Using a nickname on one test but not on another, or using your home address at one sitting but your Mercersburg address at the next, will create headaches beyond your wildest imagination. If you notice any discrepancy, correct it immediately.

Keep these numbers handy; you will need them to register for the SAT and Subject Tests:

Mercersburg School (or CEEB) Code: 392-570
Mercersburg SAT Test Center Code: 39-418

SAT: While recent media attention has highlighted movement away from the SAT by prominent colleges and universities, make no mistake: the SAT is not going anywhere any time soon. How the test is used, however, varies greatly from school to school.

We recommend that you take the SAT twice in your upper-middle year, in January and in May. The results of these two dates, along with your academic record, will enable us to help you tailor your list as you decide which colleges you will visit over the summer. Historically, Mercersburg has been an SAT test center in October, November, January, May, and June. You may also take the SAT in March and December, but you will need to do so at a neighboring school; Mercersburg is not a test center for these dates.

SAT Subject Tests: The SAT Subject Tests evaluate knowledge of specific disciplines: math, sciences, foreign language, etc. The more selective a college, the more likely it will require SAT Subject Tests—usually two, sometimes three. As you prepare to apply to colleges, you must make sure you know what each college will require.

ACT: Unlike the SAT which measures verbal and mathematical reasoning skills, the ACT is a subject based exam that evaluates four areas: English, math, reading, and science reasoning; there is also an optional essay. The ACT may be used as a substitute for the SAT at nearly all colleges and, in some cases, as a substitute for both the SAT and SAT Subject Tests. Mercersburg is a testing center for the October and April test dates only. With the changes in the SAT, you may want to consider trying the ACT in April of upper middler year to see how the test feels compared to the SAT. If you are more comfortable with the

format of the ACT, you should talk to your counselor about the most appropriate testing strategy for you.

TOEFL: The TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is a near-universal requirement for any student whose native language is not English. Ideally, you will take the test twice, once in spring of upper middle year, and again in fall of senior year. The spring date is especially important because it provides a benchmark to help you and your counselor determine how realistic your college aspirations may be *before* you head home for the summer. Mercersburg will likely be a test center twice in each school year, and we will assist you in TOEFL registration.

Testing Schedules: Every March, the college counselors create a recommended testing schedule for each student. As noted above, you should take the SAT in January and May of the upper-middle year. The June test date should be reserved for Subject Tests. We make our testing recommendations based on your curriculum and your grade level. Since many of our classes coincide nicely with material tested on the Subject Tests, we will sometimes recommend these exams for students as early as junior year (ninth grade). We do not make these recommendations lightly, so if you have questions about why we did or did not recommend a certain test at a certain time, ask us. You should use the fall test dates (October, November, and December) to complete any outstanding requirements or to bump up your scores if you think you can do better. There is no limit to how many times you can take the SAT, nor is there anything inherently bad with taking the test several times. That said, two or three stabs at it ought to suffice. By that time, your scores probably will have leveled out.

Here are the Subject Tests most commonly taken by Mercersburg students and the corresponding classes that prepare students for the exams. In general, if a student is earning grades in the mid- to upper-80s, we will recommend the student sit for the test. Whenever a student's record is inconsistent or the grades are slightly lower than the range mentioned above, we will defer to the judgment of the teacher.

| <u>Subject Test</u> | <u>Mercersburg Course</u> |
|---------------------|---|
| Math Level 1 | Math 30S and 30H |
| Math Level 2 | Math 40S, 40H, or AP Calculus (AB or BC) |
| Foreign Language | All 40 level courses and above |
| Chemistry | Chemistry 30H or AP Chemistry (NOT Chem 30) |
| Physics | Physics 30H (NOT AP Physics) |
| Biology (M) | AP Biology (NOT Biology 30) |
| US History | AP US History (NOT History 30) |
| World History | AP World History (NOT History 20) |

Score Reporting: When you register, and again on the day of the exam, you can choose to send your scores to as many as eight colleges: four at no extra charge, and up to four more for a fee. If you need to send scores to additional colleges, or if you decide after the test date that you want scores reported, you will be charged a fee for each report sent.

Note that the College Board has reintroduced Score Choice, which allows you “the option to choose which scores (by test date for the SAT and by individual test for Subject Tests) you send to colleges - in accordance with an institution's stated score use practice.” Score Choice seems to be a good option for Subject Tests. However, for the SAT, you will want to exercise Score Choice only if you achieve your best reading and math scores on the same date - and that does not always happen. Besides, most colleges will 'mix-and-match' your best scores anyway. Also, many of the most selective colleges and universities have opted out of Score Choice and will continue to require all scores. Finally, if you use Score Choice, you will clearly want to hold your scores until you are finished with standardized testing, which means never using the four free score reports included in the test registration fee; the additional fees for sending scores later by Score Choice may add up.

Mercersburg Academy does not automatically record standardized test scores on your transcript. To report scores on a transcript, you need to sign a release form. **Even though the College Board has re-introduced Score Choice, you cannot pick and choose which SAT dates are recorded on your transcript.** The testing record attached to your transcript is cumulative. For more information on this topic, read the section in this handbook on Application Procedures.

Test Prep Classes: Because standardized test results play a very significant role in the admissions process at the vast majority of colleges and universities, we want to make sure that Mercersburg graduates have every opportunity to maximize their scores. In an effort to make this a reality for all of our students, we have instituted a test prep requirement. We offer a variety of options to meet the requirement. **Ideally, students should meet this requirement over the course of the summer. In that regard, we strongly encourage you to find options in your local area or through an online offering over the summer.** On campus, we provide two options for students to choose from: first, there are SAT prep sessions on campus with the Kaplan firm. These programs are time-consuming and expensive; however, they offer proven results to the students who take their work seriously, attend the sessions on a regular basis, and do all of the required homework. Due to the expense of such programs, we offer financial assistance for those families who are currently receiving need-based aid from the Academy. Secondly, we provide an online SAT prep course free of charge. While this is certainly an attractive option financially, consider your learning style and whether you would benefit more from an ‘in-class’ experience or working independently online.

Institutionally, we feel it is important for students to take their test preparation seriously. We don't want anyone to go into the application process without having taken the time to put his or her best foot forward in this important area. Our hope is that either through summer opportunities or on-campus offerings every student at Mercersburg will prepare well for standardized tests.

Certainly, we will accept ACT prep in place of SAT prep to fulfill the requirement.

Extended Time Testing and Other Accommodatons: Students who have documented learning or physical disabilities can qualify for additional testing time or other accommodations (use of a computer, etc.). You may apply for this nonstandard administration if you have been tested for a learning disability or physical disability within the past three years and if you have on record at Mercersburg a signed statement from a licensed clinical psychologist, physician, child study team, or learning disability specialist indicating that you require extra time on both major evaluations and standardized testing. Please note that you must apply to the testing agencies in order to receive extended time on standardized tests; in other words, simply being approved for extended time here at Mercersburg does not automatically allow you the same accommodations on standardized tests. **But you will need your college counselor's help in order to do this. For more information, talk to your college counselor or Mercersburg's Director of Learning Services.**

STARTING YOUR SEARCH

Mercersburg students are uniquely fortunate in that the school has a college counselor whose most fundamental duty is to provide a comprehensive program to help students in the junior and lower middle classes (the ninth and tenth grades) and their parents to prepare for the college admissions process. Along the way, you will be meeting with Ms. Sanders in large and small group settings to discuss different aspects of the process, but you may also meet with her individually as well if need be. So if during your underclassman years you seek guidance in the process, feel free to contact Ms. Sanders.

Then, in December of your upper middler year, you will meet as a class with the college counseling staff to receive your PSAT scores and formally kick-off the process. During winter break, we want you to have some serious conversations with your parent(s) about priorities. And sometimes, their priorities and your priorities won't necessarily coincide. It's best to get that ironed out at the start. We'll also be sending you home with some assignments. Mostly, we'll be asking you to do some self-assessment and report on your activities, interests, skills, and values. Your responses will help us help you narrow the field of college choices.

After winter break, you and your counselor will sit down for your first meeting. You won't be able to schedule this meeting until you have completed the assignments from winter break. Generally, that's an opportunity for us to get to know each other a little better using the information you've provided from your homework assignments. More specifically, we'll be asking you a lot of questions to spark your thinking about the kinds of options that exist. Do you want a big school? A small school? Something in between? What does size even mean, anyway? A liberal arts college? How about a comprehensive university? Do you know what the differences are? Ever consider a women's (or men's – there are a few) college? And what about location? City? College town? Rural area? How close to (or far from) home do you want to be? How do you occupy your time out of class at Mercersburg? At home? What have you done and do you plan to do with your summers? What classes excite you? What classes put you to sleep? Where do you shine? Where do you stumble?

Chances are you've already thought about some of these things. Maybe you have some answers. Maybe you have none. Either is fine. Don't ever apologize for being undecided. It means you are open to new ideas and suggestions and places.

If you have specific colleges in mind, we want to know that. The ultimate goal of the meeting is to create your "long list" (so named because it is, quite literally, a long list). If your interests (academic, geographic, and otherwise) are specific, you will probably find a lot of similarities among the schools we suggest. If you are more open, we may recommend very different types of schools for you to research so you can get a sense of the variety of places that exist. We will also suggest schools that span a range of selectivity. In the end, we want to ensure that the colleges to which you apply represent a range appropriate for your interests, finances, academic performance, and test scores. Your list may not

change much at all between our first meeting and the time you apply to colleges. Alternatively, we may wind up scrapping the initial list entirely as you begin your research and discover new opportunities. Or you may just wind up changing your mind—and that’s fine, too.

To start your research, you’ll want to use the resources in our office and on the internet. The college counseling office maintains a library of guidebooks, college catalogs, view books, and media. The internet can provide you with extensive—sometimes overwhelming—information as well. When using college websites, try to dig beneath the polished veneer the marketers have created. Also, be wary of online college admissions forums; while these sites are staffed by college admission professionals, too much of the content is posted by students and parents, and it is mainly unreliable and oftentimes incorrect.

During spring and summer breaks, you should continue your research by visiting as many colleges as you can. By the time you return for your senior year, you will have narrowed your list considerably—and, in fact, may even have a final list. Throughout the fall, we are visited by admission representatives from colleges across the country. You should attend as many of these meetings as possible. More and more, colleges are taking student interest into account when making admission decisions. One of the ways in which you can show interest is by attending these on-campus information sessions. Typically, the representatives who visit will be the same people reading your applications, and they can find these conversations very useful. By late fall, you should be close to a final list. After that, it’s just a matter of applying—and waiting.

Here are some books you might want to use to get started:

The Fiske Guide to Colleges by Edward B. Fiske

Colleges That Change Lives by Loren Pope

College Unranked: Ending the College Admissions Frenzy edited by Lloyd Thacker

Questions and Admissions: Reflections on 100,000 Admission Decisions at Stanford by Jean H. Fetter

The Insider’s Guide to Colleges edited by the staff of *The Yale Daily News*

Letting Go: A Parents’ Guide to Today’s College Experience by Karen Levin Coburn and Madge Lawrence Treeger (a great resource you may find more useful at the end of the process)

PLANNING A COLLEGE VISIT

It doesn't matter how many viewbooks you read or websites you surf: there is simply no way to get a sense of how a college campus really feels until you visit. And, as we mentioned in the last section, some colleges are now counting student interest among the variables they consider when making admission decisions. Nothing demonstrates this interest more than visiting campus. Here are some tips to help you make the most of your time there.

First, do some research before you go using the resources online and in the college counseling office. If you haven't yet received any material from certain colleges, you should be able to find what you need on their websites. This background information will help you plan your visit efficiently and decide what questions you'd like to ask once you get there.

While there isn't one best time to visit a college campus, there are a few times that are not especially good. Visits made during vacations or exams will give you an incomplete and often inaccurate picture of the school. While you can see what a college physically looks like anytime, you'll want to talk with a variety of people—admission counselors, financial aid officers, students, faculty—to learn what the place is really like. And you can't do that if they're not around. (That said, it's better to visit a campus at a non-optimal time than not to visit at all, so if summer visits work best for you and your family, that's fine.)

It makes sense to spend at least a half day at each school you are considering; if you can manage, spend all day, especially on larger campuses. After all, this is where you may be for the next four years, and you want to determine if the college will be a good fit for you.

Phone ahead to the admissions office to find out what you can do during a visit and what you need to sign up for ahead of time. You will probably visit the admissions office, most likely for a group information session, perhaps for an individual meeting. Individual meetings may be evaluative interviews; you can find out by contacting the admissions office. Be sure to ask about proper dress, as well as time and length of sessions. Try to arrive a few minutes early to avoid last minute anxiety. For either group or individual sessions, come with questions that you want answered. There is nothing wrong with making a list ahead of time; it shows that you're prepared. Avoid questions, however, that are easily answered by reading the school's recruitment materials, like how many students attend the school or the availability of a certain major. Also, *you* need to be the person asking the questions – not your parents!

A visit to the admissions office is often part of a campus visit, but that alone is not sufficient to explore a college fully. It's important to include time to look around the campus, both on your own and with a tour guide. You may want to sit in on a class, talk with a professor or a member of the athletic staff, or visit the music department. If part of the reason for your visit is to talk with one of these individuals, don't hope to drop in on the day of your visit; make appointments ahead of time. You definitely should make time to talk with current students. A

visit to the library, student union, art museum, or bookstore will help give you a sense of what the institution is really like. Some schools have programs to host you overnight in a dorm; if you are interested, ask the admissions staff about it when you call ahead.

A college may send you an invitation to its “Open House,” a day or weekend full of programming designed to highlight that school’s strengths. While an Open House can be a useful introduction to what a school has to offer, it is not always the best reflection of what a school is like. On these days, the college will be swamped with visitors. A school that prides itself on the personal attention it offers its students may not in fact be able to demonstrate that quality on a day it is besieged by 150 visiting families. This is not to say that you shouldn’t attend Open Houses. Just keep the visit in perspective. If you want a visit centered around your interests and your interests alone, an Open House will not offer that opportunity.

Be sure to view the college critically in terms of your own priorities for the next four years. Consider both the academic and social life of campus as well as any other points that are important to you. Throughout your visit, make some notes about your impressions and the information you gained at the college. (A colleague at another school suggests that her students purchase a postcard from the campus bookstore and use it to record their immediate impressions of the school.) Taking a camera isn’t a bad idea, either. You’ll find all these resources useful later on.

Finally, be wary of the opinions of others. Just because your best friend or your cousin or your teacher or your mother’s business partner’s daughter loved or hated a place doesn’t mean that you will too. Trust your own instinct regardless of what others have to say. You owe it to yourself to form your own opinions.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

Applying to colleges can be a cumbersome process. To make it run as smoothly as possible, and to make sure that everything gets to where it needs to be by the time it needs to be there, we've outlined the steps you'll need to follow. If you have questions, please ask.

Admission applications generally comprise the following items:

- the student application
- essay(s)
- the application fee
- a transcript, secondary school report, and counselor recommendation
- standardized test scores
- teacher recommendations.

Not all colleges will require all items, and it is your responsibility to keep track of what each college needs.

| What You Send | What We Send |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the application, including essays• the application fee• official test scores• ANY and ALL supplemental materials (CDs, DVDs, etc.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• SSR and counselor's recommendation• transcript and school profile• teacher recommendations |

Here are the procedures you need to complete to ensure materials are sent by appropriate deadlines:

1. Obtain a **Transcript Request Form** from the college counseling office. You need a transcript request for each college to which you apply. This form allows us to track your application. Generally, a completed transcript request is due in the college counseling office at least two weeks prior to the deadline. If you do not give us at least two weeks notice, we cannot guarantee that we will meet the deadline. There is one major exception to this two-week rule:

- **All transcript requests for January 1 or January 15 deadline schools are due to your college counselor no later than the Friday after you return from Thanksgiving break.**

Again, if you miss these internal deadlines, we cannot guarantee that we will meet the colleges' deadlines. Again, **you must complete a Transcript Request Form for each college or university to which you apply. Without it, we have no way of knowing that you are applying.**

You should review at least one application (preferably the Common Application if you will be using it) with your counselor. You'd be amazed at what a second set of eyes can catch.

2. Application fees can vary widely and can be paid with a personal check, money order, or a check from the student bank made out to the college. (The amount will be charged against your Mercersburg account.) If you are using a check from the student bank, be mindful of the bank hours, especially if you have waited until the last minute. (Better yet, don't wait until the last minute.) Increasingly, colleges will accept credit cards as a method of payment; indeed, this is often the only payment option when completing an application on line. Some colleges will also waive their fees if you apply online or by a certain date.

If you think the application fees may create an undue financial burden on your family, talk to your college counselor. We can help you determine if you are eligible for fee waivers.

3. You must follow these steps to obtain your **Teacher Recommendations**:

- Be sure to afford faculty plenty of time in which to write the recommendations. So, by **November 1**, identify two (2) teachers to write on your behalf and ask these individuals IN PERSON if they are willing to do so. If you are applying to colleges with **Early Action** or **Early Decision** deadlines of November 15 or earlier, you must make this request by **October 1**.
- Obtain two (2) **College Application Teacher Recommendation Receipts** from the college counseling office. The receipts confirm that the faculty you have asked have agreed to write a recommendation on your behalf. Faculty will keep the top half of the receipt; you will return the bottom half to the college counseling office. Be sure to inform the faculty of your earliest application deadline. You also ought to inform the faculty about the college(s) to which the letter will be sent.

Once you have returned the receipt to the college counseling office, the teachers will be given access to your application information; they will draft letters and submit them electronically to the college counseling office through Family Connection. We will then mail the recommendations along with your transcript.

However, in some instances, a college will require a specific form(s); in other words, it will not accept the Common App or other generic forms. Be sure to supply the college-specific form(s) to your recommenders.

Here are some suggestions for choosing the teachers who will write for you:

- Ask a teacher who has taught you in a traditional academic discipline in either the upper middler or senior year. References from advisers, unless they have taught you, are not much help to the admission committee.
- You don't need to ask the teacher who knows you best outside the classroom; colleges want to hear primarily about your ability as a student. Is there a class in which you worked particularly hard to earn the grade you did? Is there a class in which you made a significant amount of progress over the course of the year? The best recommendations don't necessarily come from the teachers who gave you the highest grades.

- Consider what you plan to study. If you are undecided, that's fine. But if you are applying to an engineering program, for example, the college will probably want to hear about your math and science ability.

If you would like to supplement your file with a recommendation from a coach, employer, adviser, or clergy person, that's fine as long as these references do not take the place of letters from your teachers. (Keep in mind that colleges are not impressed by letters from politicians or CEOs or Joe Alumni unless these people have served in one of the roles suggested above.) Three letters should be the maximum number you send. These additional recommendations should be mailed directly to the colleges by the individuals who write them.

4. Most colleges will require that you submit **Standardized Test Scores** from the SAT, ACT, and/or Subject Tests. It is your responsibility to know which colleges require what scores. Always check the college website or the most recent admission publications to verify this information.

Many colleges require that scores be sent directly from the testing agency. These are known as "**official scores.**" It is your responsibility to know if a college needs official scores. As a rule of thumb, the larger the school, the more likely it will expect official scores; state university systems always require official scores as well. If a college asks for official scores, it is your responsibility to see that the college receives them. You can find detailed instructions for sending scores in the SAT and ACT registration booklets available in the college counseling office or online at www.collegeboard.com and www.act.org.

If a college does not specify official scores, it generally means the college will accept scores from your transcript. As test scores are the property of students, Mercersburg Academy does not automatically record them on your transcript. To report scores on a transcript, you need to sign a release form. Here are some important points to keep in mind as you are deciding which option to choose:

- **Even though the College Board has re-introduced Score Choice, you cannot pick and choose which SAT dates are recorded on your transcript. The testing record attached to your transcript is cumulative.**
- If you have signed a release form and you are also applying to testing-optional colleges and do not want those colleges to see any scores, you must request that your test scores not be included with your transcript; otherwise, scores will be sent.

6. **For international students only:** Almost all U.S. colleges require a Certification of Finances, notarized proof that you have enough funding to support your study at the institution for four years. Generally, this statement must be verified by a bank official. You may want to gather this information during the summer and bring it back with you so you have it on hand as you apply to colleges. If you plan on applying for financial aid, you may still need to follow these steps along with completing a financial aid application. See the Financial Aid section of this handbook for more information.

TO RECAP STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE APPLICATION PROCESS:

- Keep track of each college's individual requirements.
- Know your application deadlines.
- Complete a transcript request for each college to which you apply, and return it to the college counseling office at least two weeks in advance of the deadline. Submit January 1 and 15 deadline requests no later than the Friday after you return from Thanksgiving break.
- Ask two teachers for recommendations by November 1 (by October 1 if you are applying EA/ED).
- Determine what test scores are required at each college, and make arrangements to have those scores sent, either as part of your Mercersburg record or through an official score report from the testing agency. Note which schools require official test scores, and request the testing agency to send them well in advance of the school's deadline.

And one final word of advice: **PHOTOCOPY** anything that has not been saved electronically.

DEADLINES AND EARLY PROGRAMS

Deadlines: While deadlines vary from school to school, the admissions world has some significant benchmarks: November 1 and November 15 for most early programs; January 1, January 15, February 1, and February 15 are other common regular decision deadlines. The more selective the school, the earlier the deadline is likely to fall. Unless a school explicitly states otherwise, these are postmark deadlines.

More often than not, January 1 will be the earliest regular decision deadline you see. There are some notable exceptions, however. The University of California and California State systems, for example, have deadlines of November 30. Many public universities have instituted “Priority Deadlines” well in advance of January 1, most notably, Penn State, which has a priority deadline of November 30. While they may have a later “final” deadline, you would be foolish not to meet the priority date. You should also take note of (and meet) any special filing dates for scholarships and honors programs, some of which require application materials in advance of the regular admission deadline.

Many public universities and some private ones sometimes publish what appear to be very late deadlines, well into the late spring and early summer. These schools typically make decisions on a “rolling” basis, reviewing applications as they arrive. When the class is full, it’s full, so if you are applying to any schools with rolling admissions, your best bet is to send an application as early as you can. Only in the case of rolling admission will you benefit by sending your application in early. While we don’t recommend that you wait until the last minute to send your other applications, there is absolutely no advantage to submitting your application weeks before a school’s deadline.

Early Decision and Early Action: Many colleges and universities have created three admission programs that enable students to fast-track the application process: Early Decision, Early Action, and Restricted Early Action. Early Decision (ED) plans require that students apply to their first choice colleges in the fall of the senior year, often by November 1. Colleges typically notify students of their decisions in December; if admitted, a student must withdraw all other pending applications. Early Action (EA) plans operate along the same general timeline but do not require a commitment of students; anyone admitted under an EA plan will have until May 1 to make a final choice. Restricted EA applies a restriction on the front end; students applying Restricted EA may not apply elsewhere under an ED or REA program, but they still have until May 1 to make a final choice. To confuse matters, some colleges offer both EA and ED programs, while others have two rounds of ED, with their ED II deadline sometimes falling later than the regular decision deadline!

EA is a very user friendly plan: apply, hear early, and, if admitted, take comfort in the letter you’ve got in your back pocket as you wait for answers from your other schools. You have no obligations to attend.

ED is a different animal altogether. It is true that—statistically speaking—you *may* have a better chance of being admitted to some colleges in the ED round than you would in the regular pool. That said, you should not seriously consider applying ED at any school unless you have:

- researched all the colleges on your list thoroughly;
- identified a clear first choice;
- visited that school at least once (and preferably more than that); and
- decided you will not need to compare financial aid offers from other schools.

Why all the caveats? Because ED requires a commitment that EA and regular decision do not. When you apply ED, you sign a contract stating you will withdraw all other applications if admitted. Also, your college counselor must also sign the ED agreement, and we are bound by the code of ethics of the profession to sign only one ED agreement for any one student. It's one thing to decide early in the senior year where you will apply. It's another matter entirely to decide where you will attend. Do not make this decision lightly, and do not be goaded into it by promises of an easy road to admission. You should be especially wary if you know your ultimate college choice will be based on finances; committing early will not allow you to compare need-based aid or merit scholarship offers from other schools.

If you apply under an early program, you will receive one of three decisions in December (or January, depending on the college's timeline): admission, deferral, or denial. Colleges most often deny a student in the early rounds when they know the student will not be competitive in the regular pool; it's their way of helping you focus your attention on realistic options. A deferral, on the other hand, is decidedly not a "no". A college will defer an early applicant if it believes the candidate has a fighting shot in the regular decision pool. Because you may be denied or deferred under an early program, you ought to have your other applications ready to go.

YOUR APPLICATION

Before you begin to write your applications remember this: what you submit is a reflection of you, the candidate. They should be thorough, thoughtful, well-written, and error-free. If you don't take your applications seriously, then why should the admission committees?

The Common Application: Should you use it? In a word, yes. The Common Application is accepted by 300+ private colleges and a handful of public ones. They would not subscribe to this resource if they didn't believe in its worth. Many colleges, in fact, use the Common Application as their own institutional applications; open the viewbooks, and there they are. The Common Application allows you to complete a single application that you can transmit to any college that accepts it. It saves you a tremendous amount of work, and we highly suggest you use it.

Be aware that many colleges require supplements to the Common Application with varying degrees of complexity. It is your responsibility to know if your college requires a supplement and how to obtain it. This information is listed clearly in the Common Application itself, along with deadlines and testing requirements for each college.

The Essay: Except for the SAT, no part of a college application seems to elicit as strong a reaction among students as the college essay. Some fear it, others loathe it, and many wonder why they have to write it at all. But regardless of your own personal feelings, consider this one fact: the essay is the only piece of the application over which you have absolute control. So why not use it to your advantage? Before you can figure out how to make the most of your essay, though, you should probably take a moment to think about why the essay is there in the first place.

College applicant pools tend to be self-selecting. This means that the students who have applied to the college have determined ahead of time (most often with the help of their counselors) that getting admitted is a possibility—even if that possibility is a reach. The result is an applicant pool that is generally similar in academic achievement: good grades, good testing, good course selection, etc. As you can guess, it doesn't take long before those students start to look alike, at least when it comes to the numbers. So that's why colleges ask for other things: extracurricular activities, interviews, recommendations—and essays.

The essay is your voice in the application. When put in context with the other pieces, it should help admission officers learn as much about you as they can. One of the myths of essay writing is that there is some "right" topic, and unless you stumble across it, you are doomed. This is simply wrong. Don't try to second-guess what admission counselors want to read. The truth is that they want to read whatever you want to write. That's the only way they will ever get a sense of who you really are.

That said, however, there are some tips you should keep in mind. First of all, don't waste the opportunity. Essays about frivolous topics might be fun to write, but chances are they won't really help the admission committee get to know you very well. Admission officers want to see that you have spent some quality time reflecting on who you are and how you can best present your strengths. Here's a suggestion: take a look at the teacher evaluation forms included in the application. See all those boxes they ask the teachers to check, the ones rating your academic promise, leadership, creativity, reaction to setbacks, and the like? Take a few minutes to think of specific examples that illustrate one of those qualities. You might just stumble upon a good topic.

Next, talk with someone about what you plan to write. A conversation with your college counselor or a writing center consultant can help you clarify your thinking during the process.

Also, don't bite off more than you can chew. World hunger, homelessness, and the AIDS epidemic are problems worthy of serious attention, but they are incredibly complex issues. Trying to fit them neatly into two typed pages may make your genuine concern seem like superficial understanding. This isn't to say that you shouldn't write about important topics such as these. Just make sure you know what you are getting into.

Try to avoid the obvious. Case in point: maybe you are considering writing about your transition from your former high school to Mercersburg. It's a fine idea, an illustration, perhaps, of a major life-change for you. But now consider how many of your classmates have had the same experience, not to mention all the other students at boarding schools across the country. And now consider how many hundreds of essays admission officers read each year. Suddenly, your story becomes a common story. You can still write about this; in fact, you'll probably compose a darn good essay. But the likelihood that your story will stand out from the rest is diminished. Other tired themes include: 'The Jock Essay (or how I learned the value of teamwork, perseverance, hard work, etc. by winning/losing the championship game, playing through my injury, sitting the bench, etc.) and 'The Travel Essay' (or "Even though my host family and I lived in vastly different cultures, we learned that we are all humans beings who share common goals and values"). Keep this in mind as you choose a topic.

Most importantly, show, don't tell. Make the reader the twelfth man on the soccer team, the ninth singer in the Octet, another student in an AP course. And the best essays are those that let the readers draw their own conclusions. Any essay that ends with, "Because of this experience, I now know the value of (insert appealing quality here)" hasn't done its job. Let your essay speak for itself.

Finally, **PROOFREAD YOUR ESSAY!** Then proofread it again. Then give it to someone else to proofread for you. Careless editing can ruin an otherwise perfect essay. Granted, given the volume of applications, admission officers don't generally read with red pen in hand, but if you don't care enough to edit your essay, admission officers may question your interest in their school — and that certainly is not the message you want to send.

Regardless of what you write, remember this: a stellar essay won't get you in, nor will a lousy essay necessarily keep you out. It is merely one piece in the puzzle. If you have a weak academic record, chances are the essay won't make much of a difference. On the other hand, if you are a top-notch student, you can probably squeak by with a so-so essay. But most applicants fall somewhere in the middle. With admission officers constantly on the lookout for reasons to admit you, make sure you use your essay to give them a fe

INTERVIEWS

You might hear conflicting information about the function and significance of the interview in the college admissions process. That's because the role the interview plays varies from school to school. Most large universities have moved away from personal interviews simply because of volume. In larger schools where personal interviews are still available, the emphasis tends to be on giving information rather than on gaining an impression of the candidate for use in the admissions decision. Most small colleges, however, highly recommend an on-campus interview (distance permitting) as a way of knowing you more personally—and possibly determining your interest level.

You can best prepare for an interview by anticipating the questions you might be asked. Some that are not out of the realm of possibility could be:

- Why did you choose to attend Mercersburg?
- What do you like about the school? What would you change?
- What are your favorite classes and why?
- Tell me about your family.
- How did you learn about our school?
- What activities are most meaningful to you?
- Do you keep abreast of current affairs? If so, how?
- How do you spend your summers?
- How would your teachers and/or friends describe you?
- What are the most important factors in your choosing a college?
- What do you read outside the curriculum?
- Is there anything you want the admission committee to know that may not be addressed by your application?

Don't be surprised if the topic of grades and test scores never comes up. Admission officers can find that information easily enough. The interview is to learn about those things they can't get from the few pieces of paper that comprise your application. Also, don't be surprised if you find yourself sitting across from a current student instead of an admission officer. Many colleges train senior interns to interview prospective students during busy times of the year. Use this as an opportunity to learn as much as you can from a student perspective and don't worry that the person you're speaking with is "just a student." Alternatively, a college may arrange for you to meet locally with one of its alumni. That's a great opportunity to learn about the mileage the alum feels he or she received from his or her college degree. Alumni love talking about their alma maters and are impressed by intelligent questions about how their lives and careers have been impacted by their college experience. If you wind up talking to a student or alum, remember that an interview is an information exchange, not a referendum on your candidacy. Compared to an on-campus interview with a member of the admissions staff, an alumni interview carries relatively little, if any, weight, in the admissions decision. Have the interview anyway and still put your best foot forward. Rest assured—for as much faith as they have in their volunteers, admission committees do not cede their decision-making role to students and alumni.

Here are some other tips for a successful interview:

- Make your appointment as far in advance as possible.
- Bring a map of the campus and the admission phone number so you know where to go and can call if you find you are running late.
- Make sure you allow for sufficient travel time—including finding a parking spot.
- Be prepared to ask intelligent, pertinent questions.
- Dress appropriately: neat, but not overly formal.
- Get the name and title of your interviewer. If you enjoyed your visit and plan on applying, be sure to write the interviewer a thank you note.

Most importantly, be sincere, be confident, and be yourself. Unless you suffer a complete breakdown in social skills the morning of your meeting, an interview can only enhance your application.

FINANCIAL AID

Finances may or may not have an impact on where you ultimately attend college. If you and your family will be going through the financial aid process, here is some (admittedly very basic) information to help you out. Financial aid is too complex an issue to be addressed fully in this handbook. Fortunately, internet resources abound. We strongly encourage you to use the financial aid links on the college counseling website to supplement what's written here. (The following information applies only to US citizens and permanent residents. See the end of this section for information on international students.)

Let's start with the basics: How much does college cost? This will vary, depending on tuition, fees, room and board, books, personal expenses, and transportation. In gathering information, be sure to consider all the charges; they will define the cost of your attendance. But based on availability of financial aid and financing options, the "sticker price" you see in guidebooks or catalogs may not be what you and your family will actually have to pay.

College financing is a partnership among families, colleges, and government. While application procedures may vary from school to school, you'll want to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). This government form collects information about your family's finances and is available online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. The FAFSA cannot be filed prior to January 1. Many private schools will also ask you to submit the College Scholarship Service's PROFILE form. You can find PROFILE www.collegeboard.com. The FAFSA and PROFILE collect similar information; the main difference is that the FAFSA asks about income while the PROFILE also asks about assets. Each college to which you apply will have its own priority filing date for these forms. It is your responsibility to know these dates and to meet them. Failing to file on time does not necessarily mean you will be shut out. Colleges with limited aid budgets, however, often distribute their aid by filing date to students who miss the priority deadline. **These forms ask for information from your tax returns; you and your parents should estimate your financial information if you have not yet filed tax returns.** You can always correct the information later. Additional forms may also be required. Be sure to check on a college-by-college basis.

Financial aid officers use this information to calculate your expected family contribution, or EFC. That amount is then compared to the college's cost of attendance. If it is equal to or greater than the cost of attendance, your family will be expected to finance the full cost of your education. But if your family's resources fall short of the college's costs, you demonstrate need and may be eligible for financial aid.

You can get a sense of what your EFC might be very early in the process by using a financial aid calculator online; try www.finaid.org, a public service site generally regarded as the most comprehensive source of student financial aid information available.

Aid comes in three basic forms: grants/scholarships, loans, and student employment. Grants are available from federal and state sources and private organizations, as well as from the colleges themselves. Some are awarded on the basis of need, others in recognition of talent and performance.

Student loans, primarily the Federal Stafford and Perkins Loan programs, are students' largest sources of support: you borrow from the fund now, your interest is deferred until you graduate, and you repay after college. If you do not qualify for need-based loans, you may obtain what's called an "unsubsidized" loan; this means that you'll be responsible for paying the interest that accrues during your college enrollment.

Student employment allows you to earn money while you're in school. Many students and parents wonder how work and study mix, but research shows that students who work part-time often perform better than those who don't work. You can often find jobs in dining halls, libraries, offices and labs. Working can also help you define your career goals and limit the money you must borrow.

Your financial aid package will depend on the cost of attendance, your family contribution, and how a college chooses to proportion its aid. Wealthy colleges may be able to offer substantially more grant aid than loans. Colleges with smaller aid budgets may be forced to do the opposite. Many colleges will not be able to meet your full need. If this is the case, they will often provide you with information on alternative loan sources, either through the federal government or third party lenders. Colleges will usually supply a list of lenders; these are the colleges' preferred lenders; be sure to look elsewhere as well so you can obtain the best terms and rates; again, try www.finaid.org.

If you know that finances will play an important role in your final decision, you'll want to make sure your list includes at least one or two financial aid back-ups—that is, schools (often public colleges in your home state) your family can afford without significant aid or, for high achieving students, colleges at which you may be a strong candidate for merit scholarships. That said, don't eliminate a college from your list just because of a high sticker price—at least not at the outset. Given all the financing options that are available, costs which seem insurmountable at first glance can often prove to be quite workable. And if you have any doubts or questions, just call or e-mail the financial aid offices at the colleges you are researching. You'll likely find that they are as eager to help you as you are to be helped.

Finally, be sure to use the internet to search for scholarships. One particularly useful site is www.fastweb.com. It allows you to search a database of 600,000 scholarships by various criteria.

International Students: Financial aid for international students at American colleges and universities is scarce and tends to be reserved for the most academically talented students, even aid which is based on financial need. Many colleges require proof of your ability to fund your education, called a Certification of Finances, notarized proof that you have enough funding to support your study at the institution for four years; generally, this statement

must be verified by a bank official. That said, you may also be eligible for academic or athletic scholarships or even need-based aid, though eligibility varies from school to school. If you are applying for financial aid, you will need to complete the International Student Financial Aid Application available online or from college financial aid offices.

Because financial assistance is so limited, you will have to be resourceful and explore every possibility. Excellent sources of financial aid to study in the United States are organizations in your home country. Your own government may have financial aid available. (Usually this support requires that you return home after your education is complete.) Contact the cultural attaché at your embassy or your ministry of education for more information, since there are many awards that require you to be nominated by your government. There may also be private organizations in your home country that provide support for study in the United States. Businesses, foundations, and religious groups might have funds available. You should also use the internet to search for scholarships. One particularly useful site is www.fastweb.com. It allows you to search a database of 600,000 scholarships by various criteria, including nationality.

Please note that the United States government student assistance programs, including the Pell Grant, Stafford and PLUS loans, and work-study programs, are not available to international students. However, there may be aid available from the United States government for students from specific countries. Finding out if there is any financial aid from the United States for students from your country by contacting your embassy and the Department of State.

Finally, you should always consider having an educational back-up in your home country or in a country other than the United States. Canadian universities offer an excellent education and are substantially less expensive than their US counterparts. The United Kingdom may be a good option for residents of the European Union as you will be eligible for financial assistance, but admission is often exceedingly difficult owing to very strict quotas.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Athletics: Through the years, Mercersburg has sent many student-athletes to collegiate sports programs at every level from Division I to Division III. We have a great deal of experience in helping students with the college recruiting process and ask that all prospective student-athletes keep us informed if they plan to compete in college athletics. Athletic talent can serve as an important hook in the admission process if used properly, but dealing with college coaches can also confuse matters. It is important that students use the college counseling office to help them complete their NCAA initial eligibility application online and to develop a comprehensive recruiting strategy in conjunction with our own coaching staff. It's helpful to think in terms of two college lists: one driven by a particular sport, the other with viable admission options regardless of coach interest. In either case, you must make sure you are comfortable with all aspects of your college choice, not just the athletic one.

Visual and Performing Artists: If you are applying to arts programs (particularly Bachelor of Fine Arts programs), take care to note any special requirements or deadlines they may have. Admission is often contingent upon an audition or portfolio review, and it is your responsibility to keep track of these requirements and schedule whatever appointments are necessary. Our fine arts faculty are eager to work with you on your audition or portfolio, but please make sure you allot enough time to prepare work which best represents your talents. In most cases you will be applying concurrently to both an institution and a program within that institution, and it is possible that you may be admitted to one and not the other.

ADMISSION DECISIONS AND DEPOSITS

May 1 is an important date in the admission process. Colleges agree to hold their offers of admission open until May 1, and students must respond to their offers by that date (postmark deadline) with a non-refundable admission deposit. Any college that requests an admission deposit prior to May 1 must grant you an extension until that date if you request it.

No matter how difficult your decision may be, do not send deposits to more than one school. "Double depositing" is a highly unethical practice and will not be supported by the college counseling office. If a college to which you have committed learns that you have done the same at another institution, both have the right to rescind their offers. Upon your graduation, the college counseling office will send a final transcript to one college and one college only.

Waiting Lists: Even the most selective colleges will offer more acceptances than they actually have places in the freshman class. They do this because they know not all the students they admit will choose to attend. As a result, they frequently maintain a "Waiting List" of students to whom they can offer places should their freshman class turn out to be smaller than they anticipated. Obviously, most colleges will not know what the situation is before May 1, for colleges give accepted students until that date to indicate to them their intentions. Even after the May 1 reply date, it frequently takes several days or even weeks before the college knows (a) whether they are going to go to their Waiting List, or (b) the extent to which they will be able to go to it.

If you find yourself on a Waiting List at your preferred college, you are in a difficult position. On the one hand, a Waiting List offer is an indication from the college that you are in every way admissible; there is simply insufficient room to make a firm offer. On the other hand, because those colleges will have offered places to a larger number of freshmen than they have room for, there is no guarantee that the Waiting List position will ever be more than just that. It is a kind of limbo state. However, because the offer of a Waiting List is an indication that you are academically and in other ways admissible to the college, the Waiting List offer is a signal to the you, your family, and your counselor to provide to the college as much new, useful information as possible. In the spring of your senior year, we will send to you and your parents a Waiting List Tip Sheet outlining the steps you should follow if you wish to pursue the Waiting List offer. Meanwhile, plan on submitting a (non-refundable) deposit to another college by May 1.

The Senior Slide: Three words: Don't do it. In every acceptance letter, there is a qualifier that reads something like this: "This offer of admission is contingent upon successful completion of your current academic program." Translation? If you decide to coast through the remainder of your senior year with grades that are not comparable to those you presented to the college in your application, the college can yank its offer. Do not take this as an idle threat. It has happened before, and the outcome is never, ever pretty.

MEMBERSHIPS AND POLICIES

In the world of college admissions, networking is an essential element of what we do. Thus, in an effort to maximize the visibility and name recognition of Mercersburg Academy, membership and active participation in a variety of national and regional associations is an important part of our work. The Mercersburg college counselors maintain memberships in the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), The College Board, and the Pennsylvania Association for College Admission Counseling (PACAC). Members of the college counseling staff travel to the annual meetings of each of these associations on a regular basis. In addition, members of the college counseling staff will typically spend a total of three to four weeks each year visiting college campuses across the country.

Of particular note, as a member of NACAC, Mercersburg Academy agrees to adhere to the association's Statement of Principles of Good Practice. This document serves as the professional code of ethics for both high school and college members. In addition, NACAC has also developed a Statement of Student's Rights and Responsibilities, which clearly outlines the rights of students in the admissions process. Copies of either of these documents are available on the NACAC website or through our office.

One of the important items addressed in the NACAC Statement of Principles of Good Practice centers on the disclosure of disciplinary actions. To that end, we have developed the following policies:

Policy concerning seniors who have already applied to colleges and are required to withdraw from Mercersburg: The college counselor will advise the student to make immediate plans to receive a high school diploma or its equivalent and to inform the colleges of those plans and the withdrawal itself. The responsibility of notifying colleges of the withdrawal lies solely with student and his or her parents.

Two weeks after the student's departure, the Academy will send the student's final transcript to those colleges where the Academy has already filed a transcript and recommendation on the applicant's behalf, including any colleges to which a student has already been admitted. The transcript will include grades through the last recorded marking period and will indicate the student left school along with the date of withdrawal. If any admission officers contact the Academy with questions regarding the withdrawal, the college counselor will ask them about their knowledge of the situation before answering their questions candidly. If the counselor determines their understanding to be incorrect or incomplete, the counselor will refer them back to the student for clarification.

Should a college at which the student has been accepted decide to rescind that offer because of the student's withdrawal from the Academy, the Academy is under no obligation to pursue other college possibilities for that student.

Policy concerning students placed on Warning or Final Warning during their tenure at Mercersburg: If a student has been placed on Warning or Final Warning during

his or her Mercersburg career, and if a college specifically asks the Academy to report any disciplinary action or lapses in integrity, then the college counselor is obligated to answer the question in a forthright manner. In all likelihood, the college will also ask the student to self-report any disciplinary action, and the student should be candid and thoughtful in his or her response. If a college does not ask about a student's disciplinary record, the college counselor will not disclose the information.

Policy concerning financial aid search services: The college counseling office has also adopted the following policy in an attempt to assist families who have been contacted by financial aid search firms:

It is not uncommon for parents of seniors and upper-middlers to receive solicitations from firms or individuals offering to help them identify sources of financial aid to assist in paying for the student's college education. **These services typically require a fee and in many cases duplicate the efforts available free of charge from the college counseling office, from the financial aid office at the college to which the student has applied, or online.** Because of this, our current policy follows the position statement developed by the Pennsylvania Association of Financial Aid Administrators which encourages families to pursue financial aid information through the high school counselor and college financial aid office. At this time, we do not believe that the commercial providers of financial aid information offer any distinct advantage over the current resources available to families for free.

Families who plan to apply for financial aid should start their search for funding in the upper-middle year and take advantage of the **free** and confidential services available in the college counseling office and the Academy library, as well as online.