

# APPLYING FOR COLLEGE?

## TAKE SOME ADVICE FROM THE PROS

By Joe Cockrell

For many of us, choosing where we are going to spend the four years after high school is the most important choice that we make in our youth. By the time you are a senior, you will have undoubtedly been “encouraged” by your friends, family and relatives to apply to a certain school. Increasingly, the popular lunch topic with your high school buddies has a similar theme as your dinner conversation. “So, have you thought about which school you are going to apply to?” might be the first words to break the awkward silence.

There are more than 3,000 colleges and universities in the United States. With so many to choose from, you should start talking about colleges with your parents, teachers, and counselors early in your high school years so you have time to make a good decision. The earlier you begin the college search process, the better it is for you.

“The best thing that a student can do is be prepared; don’t wait too long to start looking at potential schools,” said Roby Blust, Dean of Admissions at Marquette University. “It’s never too early. By the end of your junior year you should at least have a good idea of what schools interest you.”

Blust and other college admission experts recommend that you begin the college selection process as a sophomore (or even freshman) by researching some potential schools and discovering the college application process.

“Gather information, make a list of likes and dislikes and see what schools might be best for you,” Blust said. “If you start early, by the time you are a senior, you can focus on specific details.”

It wasn’t too long ago that you had to go to the library or a bookstore to find resources to give you guidance on the college application process. Now there is a wealth of information available to you online. So take a break from the chat room for a minute and do some surfing at potential schools. You can get a good feel for what they offer from the website, and even take a virtual tour of the campus at many university websites, but nothing beats going there yourself.

“Perhaps one of the most important things to consider when choosing a school is to tour the campus in person,” said Christian Eichenlaub, a senior at Marquette University. “The feel on a campus is the most important aspect of where you will be going. Take the tours, shadow the students. You may find that the perfect school for everybody else isn’t right for you. It is cheaper to find that out now than later.”

“Considering this is probably the biggest life-changing decision I ever had to make, it can be very scary,” says Blake Wallace, also a Marquette senior.

Wallace says that if he could do it all again he would have started the college selection process earlier; it took him until his sophomore year in college to figure out what school fit him best. He transferred from the University of Missouri to Marquette after his freshman year.

Once you are at least partly complete with the college search process, the next issue is being admitted. The college admissions process need not be overly stressful if

you have prepared yourself well and put the time necessary into a good application. Similarly, if you are in the upper quartile of typical applicants, you probably won't have to worry too much about the admission process. If you are applying to more selective schools, or to popular programs that tend to be more selective than the school as a whole, you will have to work a bit harder to prepare an application that highlights your strongest features. And if you are targeting extremely selective schools, the admissions phase will be challenging and require significant effort on your part. Be familiar with that school's admission requirements and make sure that you submit all of the required materials well in advance of the deadline. Have other people (teachers, parents, guidance counselors) review your application materials before sending them out.

Almost all colleges and universities require a high school diploma and SAT or ACT scores. They differ widely, however, in their selectivity -- in other words, how high your grades and scores must be. In addition, many may have additional requirements such as essays or letters of recommendation. It is important to find out the admissions requirements for each university you plan to apply to well in advance. You don't want to find you're missing some requirements at the last moment. Admissions offices for most schools can be found on their websites.

Some people may tell you that your ACT scores and high school grades mean everything while an equal number would tell you that you need to have good recommendations, great college application essays, and lots of extracurricular activities. Is there a correct answer? Yes, do well on all of them. Since your parents and friends may not be entirely objective on your chances, you need to speak with your teachers and counselors.

For more information about college applications and financial aid, log on to <http://www.marquette.edu/pages/home/student/undergrad>

### **Here are some things that the experts at Marquette University recommend:**

1. **Be Inquisitive.** Ask a lot of questions and be thorough in your research; don't leave any questions unasked.
2. **Be Organized.** The college application process spans a lot of time and you will have many documents from multiple schools; make a file for each school and keep them organized for easy reference. Have your materials (transcripts, essays, etc) prepared and neatly organized.
3. **Be Aware of Deadlines.** The college application process is very deadline oriented. Make sure you know the deadlines for applications, applying for scholarships, deposits.... Be familiar with those deadlines and give yourself enough time to complete all of the necessary materials.
4. **Be Careful.** Read application materials carefully and be sure to follow instructions. Have others (parents, teachers, guidance counselors, etc.) review your application materials, especially essays, before sending them in.

5. **Be the Difference.** Brag about yourself in your college applications! Colleges want to know more about you than your GPA and test scores; talk about what you have accomplished outside of the classroom in extracurricular activities or organizations. Marquette students have a reputation for academic excellence and service to the community. We even look for those qualities in potential students. But we also want to learn more about your activities, your interests and your passions — the things that make you who you are.