American Community School – Amman

University Advising Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

There are many guides to finding colleges and many manuals and books giving advice (much of it good) about how to go about finding and being admitted to colleges. There are also many guidebooks that describe colleges. The fact is that college admission has become a big-time business with major publishers investing heavily in preparing, publishing, and selling guidebooks, books of advice, manuals to improve students' essay writing, and everything else from how to work with a counselor to how to get ready to move onto campus.

In the midst of this, it is important for ACS-Amman students and their parents to know that help is available, that the school is invested in helping its students investigate, apply to, and be ready to be successful in college.

Although this booklet is addressed to ACS-Amman's students (the "you" referred to on many pages), parents may find it useful in understanding how the process is designed and who is responsible for what in the process.

Applying to college is, in a sense, an educational journey of its own. I hope this handbook will serve as a guide to help you along that journey to a successful outcome. Along the way you might experience a type of roller coaster of expectations, highs, lows, questions, stumbling blocks, and successes. We hope you take the journey seriously and, although it may seem to be a daunting task at times, the system *does* work and students *do* get accepted at colleges, and they *do* have success in college and in the life which follows.

So, let's get started …

A NOTE TO PARENTS

Let us start by acknowledging that the entire process of choosing colleges, applying, being admitted, and all that goes with it is difficult. It can try everyone's patience and good humor. It can sometimes strain the relationship between parents and students. Parents sometimes find themselves frustrated and confused, wondering what they should be doing to help their children through the process. It is difficult to know when to step back and let the student take the next step on his or her own terms. There are times when parents have the feeling that their children's decisions aren't based on the best available information or logic. Students sometimes feel that way about their parents' decisions as well.

At ACS-Amman, we believe that parents are major partners in the process of choosing, applying, and going to college. Although your son or daughter may not acknowledge it, your opinion matters (and there are studies which show that it does). That is why we encourage parent participation in the college selection and application process.

Having said that, it is necessary to be reminded that going to college is about the student, not about the parents. Stepping back from one's own needs, concerns, anxieties, and hopes and looking at what is best for the student is paramount. Not everyone is a scholar; not everyone ought to go to a competitive college; not everyone thrives under pressure and competition. What really is best for your child?

We all want our children to do well, even if we have some trouble explaining exactly what that means. We all want our children to achieve at the top of their abilities. The trick here is to recognize that it is *their* needs which need to be met, not *ours.*

Because parents are important in their children's lives (even though they often won't admit it), how parents respond is important. The off-handed remark disparaging a college suggestion often leads a student to the conclusion that the college is not worth investigating and it drops immediately from the student's list even if it represents a viable choice.

Despite the preparation an ACS-Amman education provides and all of our combined efforts, some students will not be admitted to the college of their choice. When a college admits 13% of its applicants and when over 80% of those applicants are in the top 10% of their graduating classes, it is very likely that even some of the very best students will not gain admission. If your child is one of them, that doesn't represent failure; it represents terrific competition. Even the strongest applicants must use care and spread their risk by applying to colleges with a range of selectivity.

It is important to remember that students must be seen for who they are and not where they go to college. For most students, the college search and application process is the first time they may be denied in a system they cannot control. This is a difficult reality to deal with and to absorb. We all should strive not to add to the burden by making students feel that they have failed us or themselves.

Many parents ask if there are recommended books about the process. While there are many fine reference works available, three, which are refreshingly candid and challenge some common misperceptions are *The College Admissions Mystique* by Bill Mayher, (New York, Noonday Press, 1999), *Looking Beyond the Ivy League* and *Colleges That Change Lives* by Lauren Pope (New York, Penguin, various dates).

The university application process is a learning experience, full of highs and lows, frustrations and triumphs, uncertainty and success. Thank you in advance for your support in this process; it is an honor to work with each student and family.

CHAPTER ONE: THE BIG PICTURE
PREPARING FOR COLLEGE DURING JUNIOR & SENIOR YEARS

COURSE SELECTION

ACS-Amman's curriculum for the 9th - 11th grades has adequately prepared students to embark on a college search. ACS-Amman's graduation requirements assure that students meet minimum college entrance requirements for most universities.

It is important to know however, that some universities, for example the university system of North Carolina, require a minimum of four years of mathematics. The fourth unit should be one that requires Algebra II as a prerequisite. Students who complete Algebra II in 11th grade and who elect not to continue with mathematics in 12th grade will not meet that requirement. While this will not prevent a student from attending literally hundreds of colleges, it will mean that student will not have met the requirements to apply to a university in the North Carolina system. Students and parents need to be very aware of the significance of choosing to "opt out" of math and other academic courses in the senior year.

Why course selection is important:

When college admissions officers look at a transcript, they look for "transcript quality." There are three parts to transcript quality: breadth, depth, and performance.

Breadth:

This is shown through a combination of continued study in the basic areas of English, history, mathematics, science, and foreign language. Students handicap themselves by focusing only on minimum graduation requirements – competitive colleges are interested in students who maximize their academic studies.

This does not mean that students should not take electives in courses that focus on their interests, whether in math, science, the arts, or computer science. It does mean that colleges expect electives to demonstrate a student's interest in a subject area and not just meet graduation requirements.

Depth:

Colleges want to see that students have challenged themselves in some area(s) and have taken advantage of opportunities to challenge themselves in Advanced Placement courses.

This raises the question about the appropriate number of Advanced Placement courses. While colleges always prefer "A's," they also want to see if you have the willingness, confidence, and ability to take an academic challenge. There is no simple formula for calculating how many and which AP courses to take, but there are two general guidelines which can be helpful:

1. In general, no more than three Advanced Placement courses are advised during the senior year
2. Students who do not make a grade of at least a "C" in an Advanced Placement courses are not helping themselves meet the "depth" expectation by the colleges. A poor grade does not show academic ability, even in an AP class.

Performance:

In all cases, better grades are preferable than lower grades. It is important to realize that a lower grade does not necessarily keep a student out of a college, but if a student's grades are average within the school or if there is a downward trend that will be taken seriously by colleges. Conversely, upward trends are noted and often, slow starts can be

overcome by improvement over time.

College admissions officers are quick to tell you that **the single most important part of a student's application is the transcript**. Now is the time to pay particular attention to it._The junior year contains two of the four most important semesters in your high school career. (The two terms of your senior year are the others.) While a good junior year won't erase problems you may have had earlier, colleges pay serious attention to trends in your grades and this is the time to see improvement if it is going to happen. At the same time, if you have a strong record in 9th and 10th grade, you need to continue it.

_____ **To Do**: Universities generally publish minimum course expectations as part of their admissions literature and in their catalogs. Students should check these documents. A good rule of thumb is that students should take as challenging a curriculum as possible and still be successful, with at least five "core" courses each year.

UNIVERSITY VISITS

Another helpful thing to do in junior year is to visit college campuses. You do not always have to visit universities to which you plan to apply it can be helpful to do 'Prototype' visits. For example:

A "national" private university: Duke University, Georgetown
A "national" research university: Univ of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Univ. of CA – Los Angeles
A "national" large research university with a technological slant: Virginia Polytechnic Institute
A women's college: Barnard, Wellesley, Smith
A national liberal arts college: Rice, Colby, Haverford
A regional liberal arts college: Guilford College, Earlham
A regional state university: Univ. of N. Carolina-Greensboro, Univ. of Massachusetts - Amherst

To schedule a visit, simply check the college's website (usually under one of these headings: "Visitors", "Visiting the Campus" or "Prospective Students"). Universities quite often don't offer individual appointments, but they do tend to have information sessions and tours at scheduled times. You should call to make an appointment for either one. The website generally provides instructions if the college requests that you do so.

It is a good idea to call at least 2-3 weeks in advance of a visit to be sure of the college's procedures and to register if there is a limit on the number of visitors the college can handle on a given day. It is not a good idea to just "show up." You might be disappointed.

_____ **To Do**: Sign up for the mailing list (either paper or email) of any university you may be interested in. It can be helpful to get notices about scholarship deadlines, upcoming events, and application pointers. Also consider planning a trip to visit potential universities or at least "prototype" universities.

When to visit

It is ideal to visit colleges when school is in session. That being said, it is better to visit during the summer when school is not in session, then to not visit at all. Students may consider using spring break of senior year to visit the few universities they are serious about prior to making the May 1 commitment to a single university.

TIP: If at all possible, do not enroll at any college if you have not visited it. While there are occasionally exceptions to this, it is vastly preferable to spend the time and money to visit before making a commitment so significant without actually seeing the school. It is very difficult to know that a college is right for you if you haven't seen it in person.

What to do on a visit

- *If you have the opportunity to meet individually with someone from the admissions office, take it*. Parents, remember that although the college will be solicitous of your questions, the visit is about the student and the college, so don't be surprised if the admissions officer wants to talk with your student alone and then invites you in for questions. Make sure that you have questions prepared to ask of the faculty whom you have arranged to meet.

- *If you have the opportunity to visit a class, take it*. Often, the college will require that you set this up in advance of your visit. You will have a better idea of how things work at that college if you do that. Never miss an opportunity to meet faculty or coaches if it can be arranged. It is important to remember, however, that these people will almost always be encouraging, so don't come away from a meeting with a faculty member/coach sure you will be admitted because he/she said he/she thought you would fit in well.

- *If you have the opportunity to eat on campus, do so*. Remember, food is an important part of your four years at the college. Check out who is in the dining room or snack bar. What do people look like? How do they act? Are they all the same or is diversity apparent? Sit with some students and ask questions. You'll get a sense of what it is like to be a student there.

- *If you have the opportunity to read the campus newspaper, do so*. It will tell you a lot about what is and what isn't happening on campus. For the same reason, check out the bulletin boards. What's going on—or not?

- *Stay overnight in a dormitory if the college allows it*. This is especially important for Early Decision students. You will have the opportunity to see what it really is like to be a student there. Normally colleges want at least two weeks advance notice for an overnight visit, sometimes more. Check with the admissions office to get their requirements.

- *Visit the bookstore*. What is for sale--just textbooks and cool college stuff? What about food to take back to the room? What about computer supplies and general reading or books about the things you study in the required reading?

- *Don't trust your memory*. Whenever you visit a campus, jot down your impressions. It is a simple fact that if you are visiting several colleges over several days, someone (you or your parents) will get something mixed up. Note taking forms are available on the ACS Website and in the counseling office.

TIP: Most of the time, the college will set up the structure of the visit, including a tour. Tour guides are usually students who work for or volunteer in the admissions office. It sometimes happens that a tour guide just doesn't "click" with you. You should not use your response to the tour guide as a reliable indicator of the nature of the school or whether you will be happy there.

TIP: If you visit a college, always fill out the card in the admissions office. That way the school has a record of your visit and you will be added to the mailing list. Some colleges will use this information as "demonstrated interest" in their college in the admissions process.

EXTRACURRICULARS

It is important for students to continue activities out of class, whether that involves sports, music, theater, working, service, or any other activity you enjoy and from which you receive satisfaction. Remember, an in-depth focus on a limited number of things is better than a scatter-shot attempt to participate in everything. Colleges want to see what interests you and how deep that interest goes, so sticking with something is important, as is obtaining positions of leadership.

Consider some kind of summer experience, perhaps something different from the experiences of previous summers. An internship, an extended community service, a summer program, or something that shows initiative on your part is an indication to a college that you are a person with interests and the initiative to pursue them.

_____ To Do: Start putting together a list of your activities and their dates including special recognitions or awards. Continue and or increase your involvement in activities that are meaningful to you.

A SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT SENIOR YEAR

Seniors are beginning the most important year of their careers at ACS-Amman. Don't make the mistake of thinking it's over except for the application process. The idea that senior year should be easier than junior year is a myth. Senior year is the time when you must give your best effort to school and to balancing school demands with all the other demands that choosing and applying to college will place on your time, energy, and patience.

You may be tempted to "slack off" on your course load or your level of intensity in class. **Don't do it!** Keep working. Even after you've been accepted, remember that offers of admission are always contingent on completing the year at about the level you were at when you applied. If you have been wait-listed or deferred admission, a drop in performance between the time when you applied and the time the college goes to its wait-list can be fatal.

CHAPTER TWO: FOR THE DETAIL ORIENTED
CHECK LISTS FOR ELEVENTH & TWELFTH GRADES

ELEVENTH GRADE

January-March: Schedule a meeting with your College Counselor as soon as possible to discuss your record and your goals and to develop an initial list of colleges to investigate.

Begin researching the list of colleges developed by you and your counselor.

Plan college visits during spring break or summer vacation.

Register for the SAT and/or SAT Subject Tests in May and/or June.

Plan for summer programs, work or internships.

March-June: Take SAT, SAT Subject Tests (if necessary for you), and the ACT.

Continue researching colleges. Meet with the College Counselor to review your progress and findings before the end of the school year. A second, refined list of colleges to investigate often follows this meeting.

Take AP exams in May.

Summer: Continue college visits. Keep accurate notes. Narrow your choices to eight to ten colleges, including colleges in each category (Reach, Target, Probable).

TWELFTH GRADE

All Year: Keep your grades up! Remember: college officials review final transcripts.

Fall: Meet with your College Counselor to review progress, check strategy, finalize your college list, and decide on teacher references.

Request teacher references; give teachers the pertinent forms, inform them of the deadlines. Preferably give each teacher 1-month notice before your first deadline, however you must allow at least 2 weeks notice.

Attend college information programs (fairs and regional college-sponsored receptions).

Attend meetings held at ACS-Amman with college representatives.

Register and retake/take SAT I, SAT II, and ACT in October and/or November, if indicated.

October 1: Make decisions about whether you will be applying to any college under the ED or EA plan and begin work on the applications. Release test scores for ED/EA colleges no later than October 1. As soon as you know, formally notify your College Counselor of your decision to apply ED/EA with due dates. *

*They are not all the same. For example:

EA at UNC-Chapel Hill is November 1
ED at Duke and UPENN is November 1
ED at George Washington University is 11/15 and 1/15

Work on application essays in your Writing class. Choose essay topic(s) based on your college list and begin to work on the essays.

If financial aid is a consideration, inform your counselor. Obtain information on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at www.fafsa.ed.gov and the CSS PROFILE form, if needed, at www.collegeboard.com.

Begin preparation of regular applications to colleges.

November: Finalize your list of colleges and prepare a list all with due dates.

Send test scores to colleges as soon as possible. Allow 4-5 weeks for official scores to reach colleges from ETS or ACT.

December 4: Final date to request Transcript and Secondary School Report forms be sent to all colleges with application due dates prior to January 31**.**

December: If applying for financial aid you can find FAFSA form on the web. The College Counselor has a limited number of paper copies.

January: If applying for financial aid, complete and submit FAFSA and PROFILE, Part II.

April: Send a deposit to the college of your choice prior to May 1 (Candidate's Reply Date).

May: Take AP exams as appropriate

May 15: Request that a final transcript be sent to the college that you will be attending.

ALL YEAR: Tell your counselor the results of the colleges' decisions on your applications. Inform your teacher references of the results of the colleges' admissions decisions and thank them for their support.

CHAPTER THREE: SEVEN POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND TO MAINTAIN PERSPECTIVE

There are lots things to consider and lots of things to do when investigating, applying to, and choosing a college. It is easy to get lost in all the questions, problems, decisions, procedures, and pressure to get into just the right college. One way of not getting overwhelmed is to keep your mind clear about some of the larger things which can be a type of guidepost as you deal with classes, activities, applications, essays, interviews, campus visits, publications, DVDs, telemarketing, direct mail, and parental concerns. Here are seven major points to keep in mind. Remember them; they'll help you keep on course.

THE FIRST POINT: What do I want from college?

Keep asking yourself:

- Why am I going?
- Whom do I need to please?
- Do I know what I want?
- Does this college offer what I want?
- Do your homework. What credentials does the "average" freshman have?
- Do I meet or exceed requirements?

THE SECOND POINT: Quality versus Selectivity

There is a big difference between "Quality" and "Selectivity." Selectivity is the ratio of applications to students admitted. Some lesser-known colleges have selectivity ratios as high as some of the better-known colleges, but they may be the better choice for a particular student. Just because a college has more applicants than spaces, does not mean that it is the "best" college for you. Also, it is not the only mark of quality. Many highly rated colleges have large classes and use teaching assistants (normally graduate students, some in their first year of graduate school) to conduct the "discussion" sessions of large lecture classes.

Don't be fooled by the "student: faculty ratio." It is much more important to know the average class size of Freshman English, Introduction to Psychology, and Biology or Chemistry. Just because the faculty: student ratio looks low does not insure quality of instruction or availability of faculty or even that classes are small enough for you to get your questions answered.

THE THIRD POINT: Do your best work in school.

The single most important thing in your application is your transcript. Work with the college counselors and your advisor to develop a course plan that will help you to explore and to show off your strengths.

All colleges want students who have challenged themselves and who have succeeded. Don't confuse quantity with quality.

THE FOURTH POINT: Understand what you bring to the college.

We are all special with different interests, backgrounds and experiences. Each one of the almost one million students who will apply to college next year is special too. Have a sense of what is special about you and be sure that is communicated in your application.

THE FIFTH POINT: Have a life.

Don't worry about trying to prove your superiority by doing everything. Colleges want students who are:

- Interested in something
- Good at something
- Have a passion and follow it
- Interesting people

THE SIXTH POINT: Present yourself properly

- Set up an email address that is appropriate for use when contacting colleges. Make it a part of your daily routine to check for email at that address until you enter college. Many colleges continue to send important information to their students in the summer before they enroll at the college.
- Demonstrate interest
- Visit the campus if possible
- Does your application reflect well on you or is it completed with a minimum of care and effort?
- What does your essay tell people about you?
- Have you followed the application guidelines and instructions?

THE SEVENTH POINT: What about my major?

Do you really know what you want to study? Here are two interesting facts:

- More than *half* of the students who enter college do so with an "undeclared" or "undecided" major.

- On average, most students who enroll in college will change their major – and many more than once.

So, if you don't know what you want to study, don't be afraid to say so – and don't pick a major just because someone says you should be interested in it.

If you really are interested in a specific major such as electrical engineering or computer science or business, use the catalogs of the colleges you are considering to find out exactly what is required for that major. You may be surprised. You may discover that you really don't want the major you thought you did or you may discover that colleges you are considering have very different requirements for completing the same major. You can find this information in college catalogs in the counseling office and on-line at the colleges' web sites. Look under "Academic Program."

_____ **To Do**: Investigate careers you are curious about in the Occupational Outlook Handbook at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/>. For hundreds of different types of jobs the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* tells you the training and education needed, expected earnings, future job prospects, and working conditions.

_____ **To Do**: Totally confused about your future prospects? Try taking a fun and interesting personality survey at <http://www.careertest.net/cgi-bin/q.pl>. The test will give you a personality type based on the Myers Briggs assessment and then provide a list of careers. More information on your "type" is available in the counseling office.

CHAPTER FOUR: USING THE COLLEGE COUNSELOR

The counselor is here to help students (and parents) through the maze of finding the right college, getting through the application process, and selecting the college that meets your goals.

To do this, students and parents are encouraged to think of the Guidance Counselor as a resource, a consultant who can help you through the process in a number of ways:

- Helping students clarify what they are looking for when they look for a college
- Helping students understand how to search for a college
- Providing guidance about possible schools to investigate
- Helping students understand and complete the application process
- Helping students with essays, applications, and preparing for campus visits
- Preparing the school recommendation which accompanies applications
- Reviewing curricular and course decisions with students to help them be as well-prepared and as competitive as possible
- Arranging for college representatives to visit ACS-Amman to meet with students
- Providing information for financial aid and scholarship searches
- Suggesting, urging, explaining, and supporting

The Guidance Counselor consider each student an individual with a particular set of goals, needs, strengths, desires, and wishes. The college-counseling program is designed to help students arrive at their goals as much as is possible. While no one can guarantee a particular outcome, the goal of the program is to help students make good selections, to go through the process, and to have choices.

After students have met individually with his or her college advisor, parents are encouraged to make appointments to talk with the counselor about any questions on the college process. At the beginning of the senior year, another meeting with your counselor is scheduled to review progress and findings and to make mid-course changes if appropriate. The goal is to have a list of no more than eight to ten colleges. Normally students are urged to apply to no fewer than four colleges and no more than eight colleges, with six being the average. An exceptions to this rule would be an international student who needs financial aid in order to fund a US education.

The counseling office has an array of materials available to help you learn more about colleges in general and about your college choices in particular. The High School Counseling page on the ACS-Amman website provides links to sites that take you directly to college web sites, search engines, financial aid information, career and college major programs, and application engines.

Representatives from college admissions offices visit campus, most often during "travel season," September through mid-November. Students are urged to meet with visiting college representatives and arrangements have been made to enable senior and juniors to be excused from class to do so.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCHING COLLEGES
FINDING SCHOOLS THAT "FIT"

Start your research with some facts:

1. Where is the college? Can you locate it on a map? Is it too close? Too far? Is it too cold or too hot there?
2. What size is the college? How many students are undergraduates?
3. What is the college's selectivity ratio?
4. Does the college offer majors that interest you?
5. Is the college coeducational or single-sex? How much does that *really* matter to you?
6. How many of the college's students graduate in 4 years? In 5 years? In 6 years?
7. How many of the college's freshmen return for their sophomore year?

Where do you fit in on the college's campus?

1. What is the middle 50% of test scores for students for both Critical Reasoning and Math? Where does that place you?
2. What is the mean grade point average of the entering class?
3. Are freshmen guaranteed housing on campus? If not, where do people live?
4. Are extra-curricular activities that interest you available?

Visit the college's web site, read the guidebooks, and look at the college's literature.

1. What are the college's strong academic programs? (Fiske Guide and Princeton Review's "Best Colleges" are helpful here.)
2. What courses are required to graduate?
3. Does the college have academic programs that interest you (for example, cooperative education, internships, study abroad, interdisciplinary majors, 3-2 programs, etc.)?
4. What is the school's social life like?
5. Do the pictures and the language the college uses to describe itself attract you? Why or why not?
6. What do students at the college say about it? (The guidebooks by Princeton Review, Fiske, and The Insider's Guide (Yale) are helpful here.) Do you know someone who actually attends now as opposed to fifteen years ago or someone who visited a friend there?
7. What is your general impression of the college?

What is the admissions process at the college?

1. What are the application deadlines?
2. What does the application contain? Is an essay required? Two? Three?
3. Is an interview suggested or required? Is an interview available from staff or alumni?
4. When may you visit the college? What is its policy regarding campus visits? Overnight visits?
5. Can you visit classes or just take a tour? What classes are you interested in visiting?

If you want to continue to consider a college, answer these questions:

1. Am I a strong candidate for admission at this college?
2. If I am, what does the selectivity ratio tell me?
3. If I am not a strong candidate for admission, what are my chances?
4. Do I want to visit this college?
5. What additional information do I need?

_____ **To Do**: Keep a file with results of your research with a page or folder for each college is strongly recommended. Later, when you have narrowed down your choices, keeping a folder on each college (information, applications, etc.) is a good way to stay organized.

CHAPTER SIX: WHAT ARE COLLEGES REALLY LOOKING FOR?

It used to be simple: Everyone knew that colleges were looking for good students who were well-rounded people and who may have had a special talent the college was looking for.

It isn't simple any more. Colleges, selective colleges in particular, don't admit students; they build classes. Admissions officers are increasingly interested in helping to build a community of students who make up the college. Therefore, they look for students who bring a variety of gifts and interests and experiences to their institutions. Most selective colleges could fill their freshman classes with straight "A" students and still not admit everyone who is qualified. (The Ivy League colleges admit one or two of every ten applicants.) In this situation, admissions officers look for students who not only have great academic credentials but also will make the college a more interesting place. This is what it means to say that colleges don't just admit students; they build classes.

Primarily, colleges are looking for diversity. Diversity does not mean a single emphasis on ethnicity but refers to a wide variety of factors students bring with them: academic interests, geographical balance, ethnicity, economic backgrounds, religious beliefs, special interests (from sports to arts to website creation), lifestyles (city, country, suburban), place of origin (international students), political interests and beliefs, accomplishments, commitment to community service, and many other categories and factors. The reason colleges value diversity is that they believe (and recent research suggests the belief is well-founded) that a diverse community provides greater opportunities for all students, including the opportunity to expand their awareness and interests and to learn from each other.

Different authors list different groups of students colleges look for, and there is lots of room for variation including very conservative or religiously affiliated colleges, which have particular missions which students are expected to support. In general, all admissions officers recognize seven categories, whether they are stated or not.

- *The Academic Star:* No matter what else an admissions officer is looking for, an outstanding student always has an edge. Faculty like academic stars, especially if the student has a demonstrated passion for a particular subject.

- *Special Talent:* Special talents come in a lot of forms. Athletic talent may come to mind first, but equally important are other talents such as excellence in music or drama or visual arts. This category also might include students with particular commitments to community-building and community service.

- *Legacies:* It is still true that being the son or daughter of an alumnus or alumna can be important, especially if the college is a private college. Significant family involvement with the school's fund-raising activities will probably be noticed and appreciated as well.

- *Special Backgrounds:* Most colleges pay attention to under-represented minorities and students from different cultural, ethnic, economic, and religious backgrounds.

- *Regional Diversity:* Most colleges are interested in enrolling students who are not from their own back yards. Thus, being from North Carolina could be a plus at a college in Oregon or Maine. They also pay attention to applications from students from other areas of the world.

- *Academic Interests:* College admissions offices are asked to fill classrooms. Depending on the size and relative strength of the applicant pool in engineering, chemistry, or anthropology, a student's academic interest may provide a boost in any given year.

There is a seventh, almost overlooked, category as well. That is the category of good students who bring an interest in life and engagement in activities to campus. Since most students fall into that category, it may be the most competitive. Nonetheless, it does make up the largest category of students on campus.

CHAPTER SEVEN: MAKING GOOD USE OF SUMMER

ACS-Amman students have participated in community service projects around the world. Students have helped to build houses for the needy here in Jordan, have raised money to put in wells in Cambodia, and have worked at UN Refugee schools. On the surface these experiences seem to be a generous use of a teenager's time, a laudable endeavor. They are that, but they also provide something more. Parents of these and other students talk about how their children gained enormously from involvement in summer opportunities. Regardless of the location or the work there are common themes:

- Learning about another culture and other traditions from firsthand experience can prompt a sharpened awareness of one's own views and experiences and of the importance of being able to frame a personal philosophy
- Developing responsibility for others and one's self
- Learning about the "real" world—often quite different from the cushioned, safe world of their upbringing
- Learning how to adapt to new situations, a valuable skill for everyone
- Learning to live and to work with others in a mutually productive way

- Realizing that individual effort matters and that, frequently, through the effort of many individuals, things change.

There are opportunities galore for students to engage in during the summer. There are academic camps and programs based at colleges and prep schools. (Although many students prefer a non-academic program after a year of academic rigor here.) There are specialized programs focused around possible career interests, the arts, or sports. Still others offer travel and/or community service projects. They may vary in length from a week to six weeks and some offer scholarships. Numerous local organizations are delighted to have high school students volunteer during the summer or during the school year.

Every year students produce thoughtful and thought-provoking college essays that focus on these often powerful and certainly memorable summer experiences. It is not surprising that many seniors choose the college essay topic: "Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, or risk that you have taken and its impact on you."

For more information on summer options check out the following websites:

- Peterson's summer opportunities: http://www.petersons.com/summerop/code/ssector.asp
- Summer Internship Search:

_____ **To Do**: Give serious thought to your summer plans starting now. No need to leave Amman or spend a lot of money, just find a way to explore and express your interests and talents this summer.

CHAPTER EIGHT: INTERVIEWS

Interviews may be the most misunderstood part of the admissions process. Many colleges, especially large colleges and universities, do not offer personal interviews. Some offer interviews by alums only. Some recommend interviews and some require interviews. Sometimes it varies by program.

The best rule of thumb is to check the admissions web site or application checklist to see what the college's procedures are. *If an interview is available, seize the opportunity!*

The days when interviews were used to separate those students who would be admitted from those who would not be admitted are long gone. The real purpose of the interview is threefold:

- Interviews give admissions officers a chance to give you information.
- Interviews give admissions officers a chance to get to know you as a real, live person, not just on the basis of the papers which make up your application.
- Interviews give you a chance to ask questions.

Interviews also show that you care enough about the college and the process you are going through to extend yourself. As more and more colleges are factoring in "demonstration of interest," interviews become a good way to show that interest.

Interviews usually are not comprised of scintillating conversation where you are expected to demonstrate your superiority as a student and leader whom the school cannot live without. They tend to be relatively matter-of-fact in tone and helpful to both you and the admissions officer who will make notes about your questions, interests, and general attitude. So, while you shouldn't go into an interview unprepared, you also shouldn't think of an interview as a test you need to pass.

Basic University Interview Tips

- **Be on time**. If you are going to be late, call the office and tell them. Show that you are considerate and courteous enough to make the effort.
- **Dress naturally**. Jackets and ties for males and dresses and heels for females are probably overkill and will be viewed that way. Be neat, clean, and tucked in. Tie your shoes or sneakers. This isn't a time to be cool and it isn't a time to show off.

  Parents: "Business casual" is perfect. You can be sure that the tour guides will be dressed comfortably, even in shorts in very hot weather.
- **Practice your listening skills before you open your mouth**. And, answer the question. If you don't know the answer to a question, saying so, can often keep you from getting into trouble.
- **If you are a bit of a smart aleck, curb it**. Humor can backfire if the other person doesn't get it.
- **If you are shy, try not to answer a question with a one-word answer**. The interview is a conversation. You need to do your share of the talking.
- **Don't forget eye contact**.
- **Don't chew gum**.
- **Remember this is a semi-formal situation**. "Like, you know…." isn't appropriate but neither is a display of your complete vocabulary.
- **Don't try to "oversell" yourself**. Admissions officers see too much of that and are rarely impressed. The purpose of the meeting is information, not sales.
- **Parents**, remember it's your child's interview, not yours. Stay in the background.

QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK AT AN INTERVIEW

1. What are the most popular majors on campus? Which ones would you consider the strongest?
2. Where do most of the students come from?
3. What type of student doesn't do well here?
4. Would you describe the campus as conservative or liberal?
5. What about diversity? Would a _____ student (fill in the blank with ethnicity, religion, or another category) feel comfortable here?
6. I have a special need. How can the college meet it?
7. I'm interested in pursuing _____ (medical school, vet school, etc.).
8. How many students here do that? Where do they go to graduate school? Is there a special advising program for my interest?
9. What is the average size of a freshman (English, psychology, biology) class? Do fulltime faculty teach all of the classes? If there are discussion sections of large lecture sections, who teaches them? Who reads the tests and the papers?
10. What's the biggest problem for freshmen in adjusting to this campus?
11. What percentage of students stays on campus for the weekend? If the answer is less than 80%, ask why. What do students do for entertainment during the week and on weekends?

Tip: This is an important question. You really can't trust your neighbor or friend's opinion, especially if they leave campus often. Get the facts before you make up your mind, not just someone's opinion.

12. When and where do students study?
13. When and where do students party and hang out?
14. What's the school's policy on alcohol and drug use? (You can be sure they're against it, but what you want to know what the reality is on campus.)
15. Tell me about Greek life on campus. When is rush and how is it conducted?
16. Tell me about housing and whether students really can get any work done in their rooms.

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD BE READY TO ANSWER AT AN INTERVIEW

1. What are you looking for in a college?
2. Why did you pick this college? Why are you considering this college?

   Tip: "It's a good school" is a lame answer. "You are well known for your international focus in the curriculum" is not.
3. What do you hope to gain from college?
4. What other colleges are you visiting? What other colleges are you considering?
5. Do you have a first-choice college? ("Not yet" is an acceptable answer.)
6. Do you know what you want to study? ("Undecided" is an acceptable answer. A major that the college does not offer *is not* an acceptable answer.)
7. What courses do you like best?
8. What courses do you like least?
9. What is your favorite thing to do outside of school?
10. What are you reading?
11. What is your favorite book? movie? band? music? why?
12. What have you done that you are most proud of?
13. If I asked your friends about you, what would they tell me?
14. If I asked your teachers about you, what would they tell me?
15. What was the biggest decision you ever made?
16. If you could take a year off and do anything you wanted, what would you do?
17. What kind of person do you want to be?
18. Who do you most admire? Why them?
19. If you could change one thing in your school, what would it be?
20. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
21. How do you expect to change as the result of going to college?
22. Tell me about your interests outside of your academic work. Which is the most important? the most meaningful? the most satisfying?
23. Describe the perfect weekend.
24. If you had the power to change something about our society, what would it be?
25. What else should I know about you? (Silence should not be your answer. Think, in advance, of one or two adjectives that describe you and be prepared to give an example.)

Finally, don't read anything into the length of the interview. Sometimes 15 minutes is the right length, sometimes an hour is the right length. Be respectful of the interviewer's time; he or she might only have a half-hour with each student.

CHAPTER NINE: WHAT ABOUT EARLY DECISION?

There are three types of "Early" programs:

Early Action (EA) is a program that allows a student to apply on a given date before the normal application date and receive a quick decision (usually within four to eight weeks). Early Action programs normally are not binding but give the student increased options. Usually (there can be exceptions to this), colleges with Early Action programs allow students to make simultaneous

applications to more than one college or university. It is advisable to read the fine print very carefully.
Rolling Admissions is a type of Early Action program already built into their system. (This usually allows students to apply by a certain date and colleges make admissions decisions as the applications arrive.) It is always better to apply earlier rather than later to a school with Rolling Admissions policies.

Early Decision (ED) is a program that allows a student to apply on a given date before the regular application date and receive a quick decision (usually within four to eight weeks). *Unlike Early Action programs, Early Decision programs are binding and exclusive*. What this means is that students who apply ED are making a commitment to that college and, if accepted, they will enroll. Since this is a commitment, only one ED application can be active. *Students who are applying for financial aid should be very cautious about applying under an ED plan. Since this is a commitment to enroll, if you are accepted, not knowing whether the financial aid package will be sufficient for you to attend, makes this a risky venture.*

Some colleges do, in fact, give students who might be in the middle of their applicant pool a boost if the student applies ED. This is not true of all colleges, however. Students should check this out carefully. Admissions officers usually are very candid about this issue. ED is not a means of boosting your chances if you are not particularly competitive at that college, however.

CHAPTER TEN: MANAGING STANDARDIZED TESTS

Standardized tests are an important part of the college admissions process. The exact weight is somewhat difficult to determine. Some prestigious colleges no longer require them. A few colleges refrain from counting the tests heavily, preferring to rely on an analysis of a student's transcripts and other factors. For the vast majority of colleges, however, tests are still required and play an integral part in the admissions process.

Colleges and universities use tests differently. Some very large universities use test scores in combination with other statistical factors to create an admissions index. At colleges which use that system (largely because they have too many applications to deal with individually) tests may count more heavily than at colleges which use tests as a way of validating other information.

How important are scores? If a college asks for them, it will use them. But colleges do use them differently. Almost every college admissions officer will say that scores are used to verify what the transcript says or to help them spot an over-achiever or an under-achiever. In general, the larger the school, the more mechanical the process is and the more important the scores. At large universities that do not request letters of reference or essays, scores certainly are important.

At very selective schools, scores play a different role, usually confirming what the application, essay, transcript, and recommendations tell the admissions officer. To quote the Dean of Admissions of one Ivy League university: "High scores alone won't get you in but low scores are a flag we cannot ignore."

Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT)

The PSAT is a mini-SAT Reasoning Test and takes 2 hours and 10 minutes. It consists of two 25-minute reading sections, two 35-minute math sections and a 30-minute writing skills section.

The PSAT is administered at ACS-Amman in October. All juniors (and sophomores) are advised to take the test as it gives valuable test preparation information and practice to students at a very reasonable cost.

The PSAT mirrors the SAT with some differences. Since the SAT includes topics from third-year, college-preparatory math, which American curriculum schools know as Algebra II, the math content level of the PSAT/NMSQT will also be raised, although not to the same degree as it is not reasonable to test juniors and sophomores on subject matter they have not yet taken. Another difference is that the SAT includes an essay, but the PSAT/NMSQT does not. Here's why: Nearly 2.7 million students take the test, and not enough readers are available to grade this number of essays with sufficient speed to allow timely delivery of score reports to students and schools. Secondly, the cost of scoring an essay would significantly increase the cost of this currently inexpensive test.

Some important points about the PSAT:

- Each section of the PSAT is scored on a scale of 20-80. Add a zero to your PSAT score to get an estimate of your SAT score.
- The PSAT is a practice test for the SAT and does not appear as part of the student's application to college.
- Colleges may purchase the names and addresses of students based upon certain information that the student has provided (scores in certain ranges, major interest, gender) so they can begin the process of identifying potential applicants and mail information to those students. If a student does not want to participate in that process, permission does not have to be given. It makes no difference in calculating your scores.

National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMSQT)

The NMSQT is the same test as the PSAT. Only the PSAT taken in the student's junior year counts as the NMSQT. The results of the PSAT are used to select entrants for the National Merit Scholarship, National Achievement Scholarship, and National Hispanic Scholarship program. In order to receive the scholarship, students must be US Citizens. More information about this program is found in the PSAT information flyers given to all juniors and sophomores. The information is also available at www.collegeboard.com.

SAT Reasoning Test (formerly known as the SAT I)

The SAT is a 3 hour and 45 minute examination given six times each year. The SAT I tests critical reasoning, mathematical reasoning, and writing. Scores range from 200-800 in each area. Students take it at Jordan University. ACS-Amman is not a test center for the SAT and, therefore, does not administer the test.

Students are responsible for registering for the SAT. ACS-Amman cannot register students. Only students (or their parents) may register.

☞REGISTRATION

- Online: at www.collegeboard.com. Recommended for all students.
- By phone: students may re-register (register for a second or third SAT) by phone at 1-800-728-7267 (1-800-771-7600) for an additional $10 fee.
- By mail: use the form provided in the SAT Registration Booklet available in the counseling office.
- In person at AMIDEAST. Note that AMIDEAST sets its own registration window. More information on AMIDEAST is available in the appendix of this booklet.

☞WHO SHOULD TAKE THE SAT

Most likely all students will need the SAT or the ACT. Because you will be graduating from an American curriculum school, even other national university systems will want to see American standardized tests.

☞HOW MANY TIMES SHOULD I TAKE THE SAT

Most students take the SAT in spring of the junior year and again in early fall of the senior year. For example, students might want to take the SAT in May or June, the SAT Subject tests on the opposite month, and retake the SAT in October. Taking the test more than 3 times is not recommended and 2 times is generally sufficient. Educational Testing Service and College Board studies indicate that more than three tests tend to fall in a very predictable range and that there is usually no advantage to keep taking the test. Remember that ETS policy is that when one SAT test score is reported, they are *all* reported.

SAT Subject Tests (formerly known as the SAT II)

SAT Subject Tests are one-hour tests measuring knowledge and skill in particular subject areas. Students may take up to three tests on the same test date but may not take SAT Reasoning Test and SAT Subject Tests on the same date. There are 20 SAT Subject tests exams offered six times a year, but not every test is available each test date.

Many colleges require one to three SAT II exams. Because there is so much variation regarding what exams different colleges require, it is very difficult to give general advice as to which exams should be taken. It is your responsibility to check the requirements of each college. Many universities will want to see a Math test and some specify that it needs to be Math 2. Be advised that taking Math 1 and Math 2 will NOT count as 2 separate tests. If you have questions about which tests to take, please speak with your College Counselor.

☞REGISTRATION
Same as the SAT Reasoning Test.

☞WHO SHOULD TAKE SAT SUBJECT TESTS
Not everyone. Generally speaking they are only required by highly competitive US universities, but individual research is required. Universities that require subject tests generally want to see 2 or 3 different subjects.

☞HOW MANY TIMES SHOULD I TAKE A SAT SUBJECT TEST
Most students take a particular test only once, but repeat testing is possible.

_____ **To Do**: As you become interested in universities, make note of SAT Subject Test requirements so that you can register for the appropriate subject tests by the deadlines.

TIP: Students taking AP classes in 10th or 11th grades with grades of B or better may want to consider taking the corresponding SAT Subject Test at the end of that academic year.

NOTE: Some colleges accept ACT exams (see below) in lieu of the SAT Reasoning Test *and/or* SAT Subject Tests. It may be in the student's interest to explore this option. You must check with the individual college about their requirements or recommendations for testing.

Advanced Placement Tests (AP's)

AP exams are given in May and each exam lasts about three hours. Scores range from 1-5, with 5 being the highest score. Colleges often award credit for scores in the 3-5 ranges, but credit policies vary widely among colleges. Sometimes a score of 3 will exempt a student from taking a required course but not exempt the student from the credit-hour requirement in a subject area. Sometimes a score of 5 will be counted for college credit, reducing the number of courses a student must take to graduate. Students are responsible for understanding and pursuing a particular college's policy.

☞REGISTRATION
No separate registration is required, but students will need to pay the scoring fee prior to taking the exams.

☞WHO SHOULD TAKE AP EXAMS
At ACS-Amman, students who take Advanced Placement courses must take the corresponding AP exam.

☞HOW MANY TIMES DO I TAKE AN AP EXAM
AP exams are only administered once each year and repeating subjects is very rare.

ACT (American College Test)

The ACT is an alternative to the SAT exams. It is a four-part test of English, mathematics, reading proficiency, and science reasoning with an optional 5th part in writing. Scores range from 1-36, Unlike the SAT I, the ACT is more like a subject test. Students who perform at a high level in the classroom but whose SAT scores are low may find that their scores improve by comparison when they take the ACT. Additionally, some colleges accept the ACT in lieu of SAT II exams and others in lieu of SAT I and SAT II exams. ACT offers an optional "Writing" section. If you plan to take the ACT you should check with each college in which you are interested to learn whether they require the ACT Writing exam. You can learn more about this test and the ACT test at www.act.org.

☞REGISTRATION
Online registration at www.act.org is the only registration method. Students must have the test center code number when registering. This is because ACS maintains a secure campus and will not allow open Internet registration.

☞WHO SHOULD TAKE THE ACT
Most likely all students will need the SAT or the ACT. Because you will be graduating from an American curriculum school, even other national university systems will want to see American standardized tests.

☞HOW MANY TIMES SHOULD I TAKE THE ACT?
If the ACT ends up being a stronger test for you than the SAT, it is probably worth doing a second test in October or November of your senior year. This is the case for about one third of ACS students. If your SAT is stronger, then there is no need to retest at all.

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)

The Test of English as a Foreign Language is designed for international students whose first language is not English and who have not been in English-speaking schools for more than four years. The TOEFL is meant to help colleges assess whether your English skills are adequate to understand college-level texts. Each university will set its own minimum required score, generally varying between 70 and 110. See your guidance counselor for advice about taking this examination.

☞REGISTRATION
Online at www.toefl.org or at AMIDEAST. See appendix for more information on AMIDEAST.

☞WHO SHOULD TAKE THE TOEFL?
The TOEFL has nothing to do with citizenship and everything to do with your proficiency in English. Each university has its own rules about who should take a TOEFL, but generally speaking if any of the following situations fit you, then you should probably take the TOEFL:

- You have been educated in English for less than four years
- English is not your first language
- You are bilingual AND you scored less than a 500 on your SAT Critical Reading

☞HOW MANY TIMES SHOULD I TAKE THE TOEFL?

Most students take the TOEFL only once, but others take it multiple times in order to reach the minimum score required by the universities of their choice.

SENDING TEST SCORES TO UNIVERSITIES

It is the student's responsibility to send official test scores from the testing services to colleges. ACS-Amman cannot do that for you. You may do this by entering the college's code at the time you register or at the time of testing. You avoid charges for sending scores to up to four colleges if you use this method. If you release scores to colleges after the examination date, there is an extra charge for each SAT, SAT Subject Test, TOEFL and/or ACT score that is sent. Contact the Educational Testing Service or ACT either by telephone or on the web to send scores to colleges.

TESTS AND EARLY DECISION/EARLY ACTION CANDIDATES

If you think you might be a candidate for an Early Decision or Early Action application (normally an application which is sent to a college by a specified deadline, usually by November 1), you will want to plan your program of testing to allow for that change in the normal calendar of events. For example, you might want to take the SAT in May, the SAT Subject Tests in June, and retake the SAT in October and, if necessary, retake SAT Subject Tests in November. Taking any exam in December may result in the score reaching the college too late to be taken into consideration for Early Decision or Early Action.

TEST PREPARATION

Students should not go into a testing situation without some preparation. Certainly, students who have taken a PSAT in the sophomore and junior years and have worked on the practice tests prior to these should feel comfortable taking the SAT.

At the very least, a student should study the test preparation material supplied by the testing companies in their registration booklets. There is also online SAT preparation information found at www.collegeboard.com, including the "SAT Question of the Day." For students who feel that more practice is necessary, there are a variety of test preparation methods, ranging from books to short courses to extensive courses. Currently AMIDEAST offers SAT I preparation courses, but ACS plans to offer a course on campus in conjunction with Global Professional Training to help students prepare for the May and June test dates.

Test experts agree on one thing, students who read outside of school perform better on both the critical reasoning and mathematical sections of standardized tests than students who do not.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: WHAT DOES A COLLEGE APPLICATION CONTAIN?

College applications may range from three or four pages to over fourteen pages. Each college determines what information it wants, but applications contain several things in common. Generally speaking an application can be broken into two parts: the school's documents and the student's documents.

ACS GENERATED DOCUMENTS

1. Your transcript shows what courses you have taken and what grades you received at the end of each course. It is the single most important piece of information the college admission officer has and tends to correlate most strongly with college performance. In most cases, your transcript will

need to be sent in a sealed envelope by ACS Amman. Any copies sent by you are often considered "unofficial".

2. The ACS-Amman Profile *(included with every transcript)* is a key document that tells the admissions officer what courses are available, how the school grades, the proportion of students who attend college, where ACS-Amman's students have been admitted, standardized test information, information about Advanced Courses and AP exam results. Admissions officers use this information to compare your transcript against what is in effect the School's transcript. This information is essential to helping universities understand the academic record of individual students, as we do not rank because of our small size and highly mobile population. All colleges are accustomed to receiving transcripts from schools that do not rank. (At least one highly selective college reports that over 40% of its enrolled students attend high schools that do not provide a rank-in-class.) The ACS-Amman Profile is an essential piece of information for the admissions office because it is the source of their knowledge of how you have done in relation to other students at ACS-Amman. You can find a copy of the ACS-Amman Profile on the ACS-Amman web site and in the appendix of this booklet.

3. The Counselor (Sometimes called School) Recommendation is a general assessment of your academic and personal history. It is important that your counselor is able to talk knowledgeably about you. Much of the information about you comes from the parent questionnaires and our meetings together. Please take them seriously.

4. The Secondary School Report Form is part of the student's application, but it is completed by the college counselor. It provides information about the student from the high school's perspective – such as grade point average and relative difficulty of schedule.

5. Teacher Recommendations are another critical component of your application that comes from the school. Some colleges ask for teacher recommendations, some do not. Some ask for one recommendation, some ask for two recommendations. Some ask for recommendations from a particular teacher (English and math are the most common), and some let you choose. What they are interested in is information about you in school, such as do you show interest in the subject or just in your grades? Do you accept criticism and work on improving? Are you consistent? Are you an inquisitive student or just argumentative? Are you active in class or do you do just enough to get by? The College Counselor will be happy to help you make the decision about which teachers you want to ask to write recommendations.

Some students feel the need to include teacher recommendations if the college doesn't ask for one. If you want to do that, go ahead, but understand that the college may or may not read it.

Should I waive my right to see the recommendation? For US schools the answer is, "Yes." The simple fact is that most admissions committees look for that waiver because it not only tells the college that you trust your recommenders but it also gives them the sense that they are getting the real story from your recommender.

How you should request a recommendation: Contact the teacher and ask if he or she is willing to write a recommendation. Do not assume the answer will be yes. Many teachers simply receive too many requests to respond to them all positively. Sometimes teachers do not think they can be honest and helpful to you at the same time. Always remember that the teacher is doing a service for you – you do not have the right to demand that any teacher write a recommendation.

When you ask a teacher for a recommendation be sure to:

1. Give the teacher any forms the college may want the teacher to complete. Even if the teacher writes a letter, that form, properly signed by the teacher, should accompany the letter.
2. Give the teacher a large envelope or folder with the list of the colleges to which you are applying, the deadline due dates and any necessary forms for them to complete.

3. Ideally this will all be done 1 month prior to your first due date. Two weeks notice is minimum.

6. Mid-Year Reports: As the vast majority of ACS student applications are sent prior to the end of first semester, in January the school sends an updated transcript to each university you applied to prior to Winter Break. Many schools have a MidYear Report Form that can be turned in at the same time you turn in other paperwork to the counseling office.

7. Final Reports: A final transcript is mailed in June to the university where you plan to enroll. It is your responsibility to notify your college advisor as soon as you send your enrollment deposit to the college. *University admission deans review all final transcripts of incoming students to make sure that students have maintained the same academic level on which they were offered admission. Do not jeopardize your admission by presenting declining grades for your senior year.*

STUDENT GENERATED DOCUMENTS

1. The Application: At larger universities, and at many regional state or public universities, the application is purely factual, asking only for biographical information, addresses, and other statistics. State-supported universities also ask for certification of address and other residency information. Complete this information only if you are applying for in-state resident fees. A college with a more personalized admission process is more likely to have a longer application, request a more detailed list of activities and involvements and an essay.

2. Standardized Test Scores: like it or not, most colleges and universities still require test scores. They are useful because they do provide a standardized common denominator to help admissions officers measure you against all the other applicants.

> In all cases, *you are responsible for arranging to have "official" test scores sent to the colleges to which you are applying.* Contact the College Board at 1-800-728-7267 (1-800-SAT-SCORE) or www.collegeboard.com (or www.act.org for the ACT) and request that the scores be sent. You will find the college's code number at the College Board or ACT web site or in the registration booklet for the exam.

3. Essays: Many colleges request essays, others do not. Some ask for two essays and some even ask two or three short answer questions in addition to essays. When you know that you will be applying to a particular college, you should begin thinking about writing an essay. You can call a college in late summer and ask what the essay topics will be. If a college is a member of the Common Application group, you can review the topics found there. Most of the applications essays fall into certain categories.

Typical US University Essay Topics:

1. The personal statement (tell us about yourself)
   Alternate versions: What else do we need to know about you?
   What did we not ask that we should have asked?
   Write page 127 of your autobiography.
   Describe your 25th high school class reunion biography.
   Reflect on a picture or object of significance to you.
2. Significant experience, achievement, decision, activity
   Subcategory: Leadership experience/opportunity
3. Influential person or event
   Alternate versions: Interview with a person in history
   Great book/movie/painting/other art for
4. Reflect on a quotation – this question is really about whether you have thought about an issue deeply and have reached a conclusion.
5. Important Issues

Alternate versions: Social movement – *subcategory:* "Diversity"
Ethical issue
Political issue/movement

6. Predict the future
7. Other topic of your own choosing

Typical UK University Topic (cited from the UCAS website):

UCAS suggests you include some or all of the following points in you UK university statement:

1. Why you have chosen the courses you have listed. Remember that, although each university or college that you have applied to cannot see your other choices, they will all see the personal statement.
2. What interests you about your chosen subject? Include details of what you have read about the subject.
3. What career plans you have for when you complete your course.
4. Any job, work experience, placement or voluntary work you have done, particularly if it is relevant to your subject. You may want to include the skills and experience you have gained from these activities.
5. Any involvement in widening participation schemes such as summer schools or mentoring activities.
6. Any subjects you are studying that do not have a formal assessment.
7. Your social, sports or leisure interests.
8. Your future plans.

Typical Canadian University Topic

Canadian universities generally do not ask for essays. When they do, they tend to want a "statement of purpose" that closely follows the UK questions.

If you look at these questions you will see that *they are all about you*. The essay is your opportunity to let the admissions staff get to know you, to give or amplify information requested in other parts of the application, to give some insight into the depth and complexity of your thinking and to demonstrate your writing style. **It should go without saying that your essays represent you and that they should represent your very best work.**

Some colleges ask to see a graded piece of academic work – usually a history or English essay with your teacher's comments and the grade on it. A photocopy is acceptable, but not if it looks as if you tried to change or correct something on it.

4. "Other" Information:

- *Resume/List of Activities*: Students should feel free to include a more complete resume as an attachment. But be sure to complete the application sections which request information about activities, interests, sports, etc., as well. Remember to put your name, address, and – if you have one - Social Security Number *on the top of each page* you submit.

- *Extra recommendations* may be useful *if* there is someone in the community or an employer who knows you *very well and can provide information that is not available* in another part of your application. Even if the recommendation is from a politically important person or an important alumnus of the school, if the recommendation doesn't talk about you as an individual and about something particular you have done, it does not need to be a part of your application.

- *Portfolios* are a possible addition. If you are an *accomplished* musician, artist, writer, etc. you might want to send samples (a tape or slides for art portfolios). But remember that you will not get these materials back and only do this if you have reached a point in your level of accomplishment that you are truly outstanding. If you have taken part in a summer activity or taken a course, consider including a transcript or recommendation if that is appropriate.

Most students will not need any "extra" pieces. Sending too much can be as big a problem as sending too little – always check with your College Counselor before making that decision.

CHAPTER TWELVE: CHOOSING THE FINAL LIST

In the current admissions climate competition for available spaces is keen and even excellent students with interesting resumes will find themselves in greater competition than they expected. The number of high school seniors is on the increase and they all seem to be submitting an increasing number of applications. This has led to more competition for each space. The "selectivity index" is often a student's biggest hurdle, not his or her preparation or school record.

In this situation, it is not wise to limit yourself to a small number of college choices, especially if you are applying to highly selective or very popular colleges and universities. Perhaps the best strategy is to spread your applications over a range of selectivity and entrance difficulty. While students are encouraged to "think big" and to try for entry at any college they believe best suits their needs, realism is essential also.

Based on this, we recommend that students identify 6-8 colleges to which they will apply. These colleges should fall in to three categories:

- "*Reach*" colleges: Colleges that admit fewer than 40% of their applicants). The lower this percentage drops the more competitive the admission. Reach colleges also include colleges where you are not in the top 25% of the profile of the freshman class.

- "*Target*" colleges: Colleges that admit more than 40% and where you are in the middle 50% of the profile of the freshman class.

- "*Probable*" colleges: Colleges that admit no less than 65% and where you are in the top 25% of the profile of the freshman class.

How many in each group? That is a decision based on your college search and your academic, testing, and extra-curricular records. In any event it is a smart strategy to select at least one college in each category and even smarter to select two. It is suggested to choose 2-3 Reach, 2-3 Target, and 2-3 Likely/Probable colleges.

The hard part in this is to take an honest look at your record. How many A's are on your transcript? in what subjects? Remember, colleges still look at transcripts first and the first thing they look for is depth, breadth, and performance. If your "A's" are not in the "core" or "solid" courses in English, foreign languages, history, math, and science, your transcript is not as competitive at highly selective schools as the one that does have "A's" in those areas.

What about "safe" schools? Please do not make the mistake of thinking of a "Probable" college is not one that needs to be researched thoroughly. "Probable" schools exist for every student, but the goal should be to find the best match of college and student, not to find a college you don't want to go to but will apply to anyway "just to be safe." *Experience shows that students who follow the strategy suggested above are successful in their college searches because all of their colleges meet their criteria.*

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: COMPLETING THE PAPERWORK

Applications are easy to find. They often are part of the materials you receive from colleges when you call, write, or e-mail a college for information.

Tip: If you write to a college requesting an application, you might wait weeks until you actually get it. Most colleges revise their applications over the summer and that process takes time, so plan ahead.

If you want information from a college, you can get it several ways:

- Use the college's website. Look for the section labeled "Admissions" or "Prospective Students." Most contain a "contact us" button to request admissions information and applications. Most also contain both printable and on- line versions of their applications.

- Call the college admissions office. The number is available on the college's website or in the many handbooks available in the College Counselor's office. *The College Handbook,* published by the College Board, lists all accredited colleges alphabetically by state and lists their mailing addresses, telephone and fax numbers and e-mail addresses.

- If you have the time, you can write to the admissions office. A simple post card is sufficient. All it need say is: "I am a junior (senior) at ACS-Amman and I would like to have information about admissions and an application for admission. Please send the information to (use your formal name--not your nickname, your mailing address, and your phone number). If you have a specific major in mind or are interested in a particular program or want to be contacted by a coach or band director, etc., it is customary to state that you want information about that program.

NOTE: Students are welcome to use the ACS-Amman's mailing address for university materials:

PO Box 310	*street address*:
Dahiat Al Amir Rashad	8th Circle Near Royal Auto Club
Amman 11831 Jordan	Amman 11831 Jordan

Common Applications

UNITED STATES

- The Common Application (used by more than 300 US schools) is available from www.commonapp.org. If you use the website, you can either download the form (and the school supplement if it is available – sometimes colleges prefer to mail you their supplement after they receive the basic Common Application) or send it directly via the Internet. Be sure to print out a copy of the Secondary School Report for the school counselor . Many colleges make it possible to apply directly through their websites. This is a perfectly safe way of applying; it does not make a difference to a college whether you apply by hard copy or on-line. In fact, many colleges now prefer to have you apply on-line.

- University of California uses a common application for all of its campuses.

CANADA

- The only province in Canada to make use of a common application is Ontario, which uses the Ontario University Application System (www.ouac.com). The application collects demographic data and forwards it to your universities within Ontario. The application is typically not available until mid to late October.

UNITED KINGDOM

- All Universities within the United Kingdom are applied to through the University College Application System (www.ucas.com). The exception to this would be students applying to Foundation Programs. While some Foundation Programs use UCAS, most have a separate application.

Can I fill in the application by hand?

While it is preferable to use a method of preparing applications which results in clean, typed pages, handwritten applications are perfectly acceptable provided they are legible. If your handwriting is not clear, try to use one of the other methods of preparing your application such as one of the web-based application sources. Remember, an admissions officer reads many applications in a day and, in a sense, the application *is* you. If your application is sloppy or difficult to read, it sends a poor message to reader about your commitment to the college.

It is recommended that you photocopy the application and fill out the photocopy. Make your mistakes there, not on the original that goes to the admissions office. It is also highly advisable that you retain a copy of the completed application for your files. If, for any reason, your application does not arrive at the admission office, you can fax a copy immediately.

Any part of the application that is not on a form (such as essays and other personal information or statements) should be neat and legible. Each page should have the student's name, address, and social security number on the top of each page.

What is due when and where?

While universities set their own deadlines, they have a fairly predictable pattern with competitive universities being due by January 1 and less competitive universities being due by February 1. When you know where you will be applying, you are to bring the Secondary School Report Form (part of the paper college application or download this part of the college application form) with the top portion filled out to the college counseling office. <u>You must provide this information no less than a minimum of two (2) weeks in advance of the college's deadline due date</u> in order for your counselor to gather all of the information necessary to complete the forms and write your recommendation. It is your responsibility to know the deadlines for your applications and to complete all the requested information in a timely manner.

NOTE: For students with application deadline due dates between December 15, 2008 and January 31, 2009 all forms must be turned in to the counseling office no later than December 4, 2008.

For students to have enough time to complete their part of the applications on time and with a minimal amount of stress **the following mailing deadlines are suggested for students:**

First application:	October 15
Second application:	November 1
Applications due before Jan. 31:	December 1
Applications due after Jan 31:	January 15

It is strongly recommended that students applying to colleges with "rolling" admissions complete their applications and submit them by November 15.

If you are applying electronically, print a copy of the completed application before you send it. Your college counselor will be happy to look it over, if you wish, before you push the "send" button.

When you have decided to apply to a college, do the following:

1. Remember to let your counselor know what your plans are about your applications and, if you have questions, make an appointment to review the application to be sure you understand how to complete it or to have your counselor read essays, etc. Keep in mind that suggestions for change are not intended to be criticisms but positive suggestions to make your work better.

2. Ask your intended references if they will write a letter for you and give them the appropriate

materials and deadlines.

3. If you know you are going to apply to a college, there is no need to wait until the deadline. Take the Secondary School Report Form and complete the ACS-Amman University Application Mailing Form.

4. Complete the application, essay, and all other sections you are responsible for. Either submit the form online or provide the paperwork to the counseling office and it will be mailed along with your transcript and other supporting materials.
   TIP: Make a photocopy of your application. Applications can be lost or misfiled, especially at colleges with a high volume of applications.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: APPLICATION ETHICS

It is unfortunate that over the past 10 years college admissions officers and college counselors have seen a growing number of students and parents who, in an attempt to manipulate the system to their favor, are crossing the boundary between doing smart things to help assure a desired outcome and doing things which are inappropriate.

ACS-Amman takes a firm stance on certain ethical issues. The admissions process is not a "game" to be won at any cost. It is a complex process that demands a great deal of integrity on everyone's part.

Here are some examples of crossing ethical boundaries:

- Applying to binding Early Decision programs to more than one college or university.
  The whole point of a binding ED program is to make a contract: "If you accept me, I will withdraw all my other applications and attend your university." Many colleges now require that the college advisor sign the application along with the student and parents. ACS-Amman will not send transcripts to more than one ED school or to any other schools once a student has been admitted under a binding ED program.

- Failing to withdraw your applications to other colleges when you have been admitted under a binding Early Decision program. It isn't fair to those colleges or to the students who have applied to them for you to continue in the process "just to see what happens."

- Attempting to gain release from an ED decision because you have changed your mind.
  The only acceptable reason for requesting release from your contract with your ED College is the inability to work out appropriate financial aid. You and your parents should factor this into your decision to apply ED in the first place.

- Having someone else write or "heavily edit" your essays. When you sign an application, you are indicating that it is *your* work.

- Submitting deposits to more than one college. If you are admitted to a college which requires a deposit by May 1 and wait-listed at your favorite college, you can send the deposit to the college to which you were offered admission. If you then are offered admission from the Wait List at your first choice college, you should send in the deposit to the latter college and <u>immediately</u> notify the first college that you are withdrawing. Your Guidance Counselor can advise you about this conversation and what is the appropriate behavior.

- Stating an intended major that you have no intention to pursue because you think it might help your admission chances.

- Describing inaccurately your activities and accomplishments. Putting things in the best light is

one thing, fabrication is something else.

- Stating to more than one college that it is your first choice.

Reporting Violations of Student Conduct to Colleges and Universities

An increasingly difficult area of concern is the situation in which a student has gotten into social or academic difficulty in school and wants to keep it off his or her record. If you have done something serious enough to warrant suspension or dismissal, that record will be a part of your school history. Your counselor is honor-bound to report that if asked by the college, as are you. Other, minor infractions generally are treated that way by colleges: as minor infractions. Suspensions and dismissals need to be acknowledged and dealt with forthrightly.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIPS

Financial assistance comes in several forms.

- *Financial aid*, which is based on "need." "Need" is a technical term, not a judgment.

  Need is based on an analysis of your family's ability to contribute to college costs. That analysis yields a dollar figure that your family is expected to provide. Need is the difference between the "Expected Family Contribution" and the cost of attending the college. Because college costs vary, need may vary from college to college.

  Colleges have different strategies for meeting need. Some meet all need with loans and work programs. Some meet all need with a heavier concentration of grants than loans. The best advice is to ask questions about the school's financial aid policies. Call the school's financial aid office and ask – you are entitled to clear answers.

Need is established by filing two forms:

1. **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**. This form, available in the fall, is the basis of all financial aid. The easiest way to file is to do so on the web at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Your College Counselor will have a few paper copies in the office. We recommend filing it as soon as possible but no later than January 30, even if you are using estimated income and expense information (there is a check-off on the form to indicate that). It takes approximately four (4) weeks to process this information and send it to the colleges. Delays in filing the FAFSA may have adverse effects.

2. **CSS PROFILE**. Many private colleges and a few state universities want more information than the FAFSA requires. PROFILE is the form used to obtain that information and you can fill it out on line at www.collegeboard.com. Part I of the PROFILE goes to the College Scholarship Service (CSS) in Princeton. You should file it as early in the fall as you can once you have developed your list of probable college applications. You will receive Part II of the PROFILE to complete which is returned to CSS. When the form has been processed, the suggested family contribution is sent you and the colleges. This is particularly helpful since you can get an early read on your family contribution, before the information from the FAFSA is available. (Since the information requested on the PROFILE is more detailed than the FAFSA, the family contribution can be different.)

How is need met? Need-based aid breaks down into three types: Work-study (job), loans, and grants.

What about merit aid? Merit-based aid is based on the recognition of special skills, talents, or past academic success. Merit aid sometimes is tied to need as well. Occasionally, students will be asked to file a separate scholarship application, but in the past few years, the application for admission is used most often for awarding special scholarships based on merit.

Although the vast majority of financial assistance is in the form of need-based aid, there are a number of scholarships, grants, and other forms of financial assistance available. Colleges are happy to provide information about grant and scholarship programs they maintain. Some of these programs are highly competitive. Some are virtually automatic if a student has certain academic credentials. Consult the college's admissions literature for information.

There is an excellent website, fastweb.com, which is a major source of information about scholarships. It also has warnings about the many scams that unfortunately exist. Companies that, for a fee, promise to locate a specific number of sources of financial aid may approach you via the mail or on the web. Do not respond. You should not pay to apply for a program or to be registered with a financial aid service.

> **TIP:** If financial aid is critical, consult with the college admissions office before applying for ED. Be sure you understand their policies regarding meeting need and whether you can be released from your part of the contract, if the aid is insufficient.
>
> **TIP:** There are several sources of information that can give you a ballpark figure for your Estimated Family Contribution. Financial aid estimators are available through a number of websites such as www.collegeboard.com

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: STUDENT ATHLETES

Students who are interested in playing sports in college are encouraged to speak with their coaches, with the Athletic Director, and of course their college counselor.

If you want to participate at either the NCAA Division I or Division II levels, you must complete the NCAA Clearinghouse Initial Eligibility form. This form can be filed at any time in your senior year, but we suggest that you file it before the end of September.

You can find information about the process at the NCAA website www.ncaa.org. Coaches from Division I and II colleges prefer that you file the form early so they can be sure of your academic status.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFERENCES

If you have documented learning differences, have used those accommodations in the classroom, have filled out the SSD (Services for Students with Disabilities) Eligibility Form, and have received approval from the Educational Testing Service (for the SAT) or from ACT as someone who is eligible for accommodations, you are entitled to those accommodations in standardized testing. This must be done early. Please see me immediately if this situation pertains to you.

Colleges are not allowed to ask if you have learning disabilities, but it can make a difference in your ability to learn at an optimal level in college. Therefore it is generally considered a good idea to self-disclose this information so that the college has the opportunity to fairly estimate your chances of success and whether it is able to offer you the range of support you require.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: CONCLUSION

This handbook covers a great deal of information. If you read it and heed it, it should help you stay

on track during the college search process. Yes, there is work to be done—research to do, essays to write, deadlines to meet—but try to keep the process in perspective, and remember that things will work out! Your counselor is here to help. Be in contact whenever you have questions.

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