

APPLYING TO PRIVATE OR INDEPENDENT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

The terms “private” and “independent” are used interchangeably to describe colleges and universities that are not supported by state funding, and therefore can be much more wide-ranging in their academic offerings, admissions policies, cost of attendance, and campus life. Although many students think that they will not be able to afford an education at a private college, often they receive financial aid packages that compare favorably with those from public colleges and universities. Applying to a private college is usually more involved, however, than applying to a state college. Usually students have to write a personal essay, fill out a more complicated application form, get letters of recommendation from their college counselor and teachers, and may need to include writing samples from class work. Private colleges have different deadlines for application for admission and financial aid, so it is crucial to be well informed about each college’s policies, and to complete applications in a timely manner. It is also an excellent idea to have visited the college before you apply or once you have been accepted in order to make a decision about whether to attend that college.

If you are going to apply to a private college, here is what you have to do:

- Email or call the college and ask for an application packet. You can find out addresses and phone numbers in the College Center by looking through catalogs or reference books, surfing the web for the college’s home page using college resource guides on the internet. Most colleges have on-line applications on their websites or PDF applications for you to download and print. The web has the most up-to-date information on colleges!
- Read the application packet as soon as you receive it to make sure that you have taken the necessary SAT’s or ACT tests required for admission. Most colleges will accept either test, some require SAT Subject Tests, and most want you to have taken these tests by December of your senior year.
- Read the application carefully to find out the application deadlines, the topic for your personal essay, and other requirements such as writing samples or video or audio tapes of performances.
- Find out if you need to have teachers’ recommendations. If there is a specific form included, make a copy of it in case you need more later, then decide which teachers you will ask to write your recommendation. If a teacher seems hesitant or too busy, try someone else. Give teachers plenty of time to write your letter, give them a stamped envelope addressed to the college without your return address on it, and include a brag sheet with the teacher recommendation form so that they will have more information about you. If you are going to be asking the same teacher to write letters to several colleges, ask them to write a general letter for admission to college and for scholarship consideration, and have them give a copy to Ms. Warman to put in your file, in case you

need another letter when the teacher is off track. Do not pressure teachers to let you see what they wrote about you---their letters need to be candid and confidential. Most colleges will want teachers to mail their letters directly to the college, hence the stamped envelope from you. Some colleges want you to include the sealed letter of recommendation with you application--a good reason to give your teachers plenty of time to write for you so that your application won't be late because of your waiting for their letter!

- Look for a form entitled “School Report”, “Secondary School Report”, or “Counselor Recommendation”. Fill out the top portion with your name, address, social security number, and any other information such as your senior class schedule; sign it, attach a brag sheet, and give it to Ms. Warman right away, or at the latest before Thanksgiving. Don't wait until you have finished the application! Look to see if an official transcript is requested to be sent along with the Secondary School Report. If it is, ask Mrs Warman to send it along to the college. The Secondary School Report and letter of recommendation are sent separately to the college, usually before you have sent your application. If you change your mind and decide not to apply to a college after having given Mrs. Warman the Secondary School Report, please tell her. It takes an hour to write a good letter and she has many to write! If you want Mrs. Warman to write you a letter of recommendation, you must see her 3 weeks in advance before the due date of your application and schedule an interview (one hour). Pick up a brag sheet and complete it in detail. Also pick up a teacher evaluation form.

- Include at least 2 Teacher Evaluation forms with your Secondary School Report and Brag Sheet. These are “quickie” evaluations that your teachers fill out to give Ms. Warman a picture of you, as a student. Their favorable comments are quoted in your letter of recommendation, so the more more input there is from your various teachers, the richer your recommendation will be. Also include an autobiography or a copy of the personal statement that you have written for the UC system and this college, in the forms that you are giving to Mrs. Warman.

- Provide 3 first class postage stamps for each college for which you need a recommendation (Add a dollar for a Certificate of Mailing). Do not put the stamps on an envelope--it looks more “official” if your Secondary School Report arrives at the college in a Polytechnic High School envelope.

- It is a good idea to make a photocopy of each private college application to “practice” on. Turning in an application encrusted with “White Out” looks tacky. Read all the directions carefully as you fill out your “practice” copy, and then fill out the original application, printing legibly. It is not necessary to type your application unless specifically asked to do so. Another alternative to photocopying your application is to fill it out lightly in pencil, then go over your correct answers in ink.

- Pay careful attention to financial aid deadlines for each college. Look to see if the college requires a CSS Profile form. These can be filed in mid September and will be available in the College Center. The CSS Profile is a form in addition to the FAFSA

which you will send in between Jan 1 and March 2. You have to pay a fee for the CSS Profile form. Make sure that the answers that you put on your CSS Profile and FAFSA match. Make a photocopy of each form to keep for reference. Ask about scholarship applications and deadlines for each private college and apply for these on time!

- Pay careful attention to housing deadlines if you will not be living at home. Many students are admitted to college and then can't go because they didn't file their housing applications on time! Don't be left out!

- Always mail your applications at the post office and ask for a Certificate of Mailing. This little piece of paper will cost you 95 cents, but it proves that you mailed things on time. Keep Certificates of Mailing for test registrations, college and scholarship applications, and financial aid forms in a safe place!

- What about applying Early Decision? Applying Early Decision commits you to going to that college if you are accepted. If you really love one college above all others and have a good chance of getting in, applying Early Decision will let you know if you got in usually by December of your senior year. However, by taking this step, you agree not to apply to other colleges or withdraw your applications from other colleges while you wait to hear from your "Dream School." If you are admitted, you promise to go there. This takes the "sweat" out of worrying where you will go, but also limits your ability to give yourself other options at other colleges. If you are not admitted, you have to hurry to get in applications to other schools. Talk to Ms. Warman about whether this is a good option for you.

- Always ask Ms. Warman if you have any questions about college and visit the College Center often!