

Payette High School College Planning Guide

I. Introduction

The purpose of the Payette High School *College Planning Guide* is to be a resource for parents and students during the complex process of moving from high school to college. A successful transition takes considerable planning and time, and the *Guide* is designed to provide broad suggestions for navigating the major stages as well as offer specific, targeted recommendations for certain key events.

Using this *Guide* is just one facet of the college planning process. A student's parents, teachers, counselor, coaches, relatives, and friends must play supportive roles during the many months of decision-making. The ultimate responsibility for much of the work, however, falls to the student. Each must take the initiative to research appropriate college choices, seek opportunities to enhance his/her chances for admission to the schools of his/her choice, and ask for timely assistance when necessary.

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II. Understanding Some College Application Basics

Factors That Determine Admission

There is no single determining factor in an applicant's admission – there is no magic formula. Most colleges rely heavily on the comparative rigor of the high school courses taken, the GPA, standardized test scores, letters of recommendation, the application essays, and extracurricular activities. Each college and university uses its own unique process to assess an applicant's qualifications.

College Preparatory Courses: The best indicator of student success in college is his daily performance in a demanding course load. Colleges do not compare high schools, they compare students, and admissions officers will look to see if a student has taken advantage of the academic opportunities available in high school. To be competitive at a time when colleges are experiencing a significant increase in the number of applications, a student should present a record with the highest level of a course offered in the core subjects: English, history, math, and science. In general, very selective colleges like to see eight to ten Honors/DC courses on a student's record.

Course Grades: Each college will examine the grades in the courses listed on your transcript. The transcript lists semester grades for each course in grades 9-12, and admissions officers will compare semesters and course grades to see if they remained consistent. Has the student gradually improved his/her grades in a subject over the course of the year? Colleges will look for patterns like this. Colleges are also concerned about the student's overall performance. Each year, a GPA (Grade Point Average) is computed on a 4.0 scale. Students will be able to gain extra points by taking Honors or Dual Credit Courses.

Class Rank: Payette High School does rate students based upon GPA. Class rank is usually written as two numbers (7 of 35). The first number represents the student's place in the class. The second number represents the total number of students in the graduating class. Scholarships sometimes stipulate that students must be in the top 10% or 20% of their graduating class. Class rank, therefore, can be very important for those students who are applying for scholarships. P.H.S. honors the top ten students in the graduating class. Students are placed in the top ten based on GPA and weighted classes. They must have 20 credits (semesters) of C.P., Honors, and/or Dual Credit courses.

Test Scores: Some colleges may have cutoff SAT and ACT combined scores for admission. Most, however, consider the scores within the context of a student's total profile. Colleges will view all scores submitted by ACT and the College Board, but they focus on the highest or best score in each category when they evaluate an applicant. High standardized test scores cannot take the place of a candidate's high school academic program and GPA. Do the student's test scores mirror his/her GPA? Colleges don't want a test taker. They want a student who will perform and achieve in their curriculum. Two year colleges will often accept COMPASS and/or ACCUPLACER tests or the ACT/SAT. For advice on which tests you should take, talk to your high school counselor or get in contact with the admissions department of your college/university of interest.

How To Prepare for Standardized Tests

The best preparation for good results on the SAT or the ACT is the daily hard work!

- Khan Academy offers free SAT preparation. Go to khanacademy.org/sat.
- The College Board offers a Question of the Day, the Official Online Study Guide, and practice tests at www.collegeboard.com/practice.
- The official SAT Study Guide and The Real ACT Prep Guide are available in libraries and bookstores. They can also be purchased through the College Board and ACT websites.
- ACT practice test questions and a Question of the Day can be found at www.actonlineprep.com.
- You can study at www.march2success.com for all tests.

On Test Day

- Be sure to eat a solid, healthy breakfast.
- Give yourself plenty of time to get to the test center.
- Be sure to test at the center indicated on your Admission Ticket.
- Use breaks to eat any snacks you have brought with you.
- Read the directions and test questions carefully.
- Answer the easy questions first. Go back to answer more difficult questions at the end of each section.
- If you get stuck on a question, eliminate obviously incorrect answer choices to make an educated guess.
- Check your answer sheet to make sure you are marking your answers in the correct ovals.
- Make sure you have several No. 2 pencils, a soft eraser, and a permitted calculator.
- Have your Admission Ticket and acceptable photo ID ready.
- Prepare small snacks to bring with you.
- Be well-rested and ready to go to the test site.
- Plan ahead to arrive at the test center with time to spare.

Sending Scores To Colleges

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Counselor Recommendation: Most colleges that use the Common Application and many others as well require a counselor letter. This usually consists of a general-questions form section and then a letter written by the counselor. The first part requires the applicant to complete information on current courses, provide personal data and agree to a statement regarding personal access to the counselor's letter. A student should waive his/her right to access the contents of the letter because this assures the college admissions office that the letter is an honest appraisal of the student. Your counselor completes the form with information about your GPA and character. Insights gleaned from your advisor, coaches, classroom teachers, parents, self-assessment, and interviews are used to describe your strengths within the context of your academic performance and participation in extracurricular activities.

Teacher/Principal/Coach, etc. Recommendation: You must ask this person to write you a letter of recommendation if the college requires it or you would like them to. Some universities do not require recommendations, and they will even request that none be sent. There are usually two parts to these recommendations. The first is completed by the student and includes applicant information, waiver of the right to access, and signature. The person writing the letter completes a second section by responding to questions on a list of the applicant's personal qualities, such as motivation, integrity, leadership, intellectual promise, and maturity.

Give your recommender a copy of your resume and share with them your reasons for seeking admission to specific colleges, as well as purpose of the letter. As many details as reasonable will help to write an accurate and supportive letter.

Essay: The college essay is a critical piece of your application for some colleges. As colleges review an increased number of applications, how can one student stand out when most of the candidates have good grades in a demanding high school program? The essay can make a real difference – a face emerges from the pile of papers and dry statistics. The essay can show how well you can analyze and write at the college level. Also, your passion, humor, enthusiasm, and ideology will be evident. Finding a unique “hook” to capture the attention of the admissions officer could make all the difference because they read many, many essays dealing with the same topic.

Financial Aid

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- **Loans:** These are often the most significant portion of a financial aid awards package and are paid back with interest once the borrower graduates from college. Interest rates on student loans are normally less than eight percent. An employed graduate should be able to make low monthly payments on his/her loans with no trouble at all. The federal government pays the interest on student loans while in college if the loan is subsidized. The student is required to pay the loan interest while in college on unsubsidized loans.
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- **Work-Study:** This type of financial aid requires the student take a job on campus upon enrollment. These jobs are normally part-time, and the pay is well above minimum wage. Money earned by the student through work-study can be paid directly toward tuition or given to the student to use for books, living expenses, and other campus fees.

You cannot receive financial aid unless you apply for it.

You do not need to wait until you have been admitted to a college to apply for financial aid, so the earlier you apply, the better your chances of receiving the needed financial assistance.

To be eligible for financial aid, all students must fill out a **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**. **FAFSA** forms are sent to a federal government clearinghouse that uses the information to determine overall financial need based on family income and assets. You can submit your **FAFSA** online at www.fafsa.ed.gov starting January 1st. Remember--the earlier it is completed the better; no **FAFSA** forms will be accepted before January 1. (Subject to a rolling application submission in future years) At the **FAFSA** website, students can also get more information about Federal Pell Grants, Federal Stafford Loans, Federal PLUS Loans, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, Federal Work-Study, and Perkins Loans. Once you have completed a **FAFSA** application, you will be provided with a **Student Aid Report (SAR)**, which summarizes the information that you have submitted on your **FAFSA** form. The **SAR** is sent to the colleges and universities you have listed on your **FAFSA** form. **Expected Family Contribution (EFC)** appears on page one of your **SAR** and indicates the amount of money your family is expected to be able to contribute toward financing your education. The schools that receive your **SAR** will use it to determine the types and amount of aid for which you qualify. They will attempt to distribute funds to make it possible for you to attend the school.

Applying for Scholarships

Have you heard that “millions of scholarship dollars go unclaimed each year,” or been told stories about outstanding students who couldn’t get a scholarship? The fact is, there are thousands of scholarships available. Many of them, however, have very specific eligibility criteria. A student, for example, might need to go to XYZ College, have a 28 ACT score, and also belong to a particular ethnic group. For another scholarship, a student might need to be a female in the upper 10% of her class with a specific major. **Even though it’s not easy to obtain scholarships, students and parents who are willing to invest the time and energy often find that their efforts pay off handsomely. When looking for scholarships, keep the following in mind:**

- Start early. Begin looking into scholarship possibilities during your junior year. **Finding and applying for scholarships takes a great deal of time and effort!**
- While groups and organizations offer numerous scholarships, most of the large scholarships are awarded by the colleges themselves. Contact the financial aid office of the college you’re considering and ask them for information on the scholarships they offer.
- Write your scholarship essay in the spring of your junior year.
- Look for local scholarships. These scholarships are generally for smaller amounts (\$100-\$1,000), but they’re usually easier to get. Payette High School Scholarship Booklet is the most up-to-date guide for local scholarships.
- Browsing the Internet, searching the financial aid and scholarship pages of college websites, or checking with Mrs. Rankin or Ms. Alvarado are good ways to identify possible scholarships. Some Internet resources include the sites listed below.
 - www.fastweb.com
 - www.scholarships.com
 - www.fastaid.com
 - www.collegeboard.org

A thorough source for financial aid research is *Financial Aid for Students: Print and Web Guides*, published by the Congressional Research Service. There are many sources for this document, and the easiest way to locate one is to copy and paste the title into a search engine.

Free scholarship search engines are available through the sites below.

- College Board www.collegeboard.com/student/pay/index.html?affiliateId=rdr&bannerId=pay
- FastWeb www.fastweb.com (They will sell your name to organizations)
- FinAid www.finaid.org

Parents may also want to research college savings plans at the websites below.

- www.savingforcollege.com
- www.collegesavings.org

Beware of Scholarship Scams! There are companies that claim they can match students with scholarships but are in fact fraudulent. Beware of any such bold claims. If you have questions about such companies, contact the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) at www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/scholarship/index.shtml.

III. The College Search Process

Selecting Colleges for Application

Before you can make your list of which colleges you will apply to, you need to think about your interests, talents, goals, and dreams. Your goal is to identify colleges that you can afford and where you will be happy – the colleges you select should match your ability, academic interests, and social needs. Once you have thought about these things and discussed them with your family, friends and counselors, you will have an easier time sorting through the hundreds of choices.

Information Resources

There are many resources at your disposal for researching and selecting colleges to which you want to apply. **The most valuable resource at your disposal is the Career Information System (CIS). Please visit:** <http://labor.idaho.gov/dnn/idahocareerinformation.aspx>. If you don't already have a username and password, talk to your counselor.

College Guides: A good way to begin is to get an overview of a college through comprehensive guides like *The College Handbook*, *Peterson's Guide to Four-Year Colleges*, *The Princeton Review*, and *Barron's Profile of American Colleges*. Colleges that pique your interest can then be researched more fully.

College Representative Visits to Payette High School: Every year, representatives from numerous colleges and universities throughout the country make visits to PHS. They talk with prospective students about opportunities at their colleges and about desirable qualities in candidates for admission. These visits provide an excellent opportunity for you to learn more about a particular college and to make a positive impression on a member of the admissions committee. Listen to announcements or check with the counselor for college visits. You need to sign up with your counselor to attend.

College Fairs: Large-scale college fairs are held each fall. There are two local fairs for you to attend. The Idaho Oregon Border College Fair will be held in October. All Payette seniors will be bused to this fair. The other is at the Boise Expo Center. This is an excellent opportunity to develop and expand your awareness of colleges and what to look for in a college. It is important that you register for this fair prior to attending. This contact can be important if you later apply to that college because the reviewers will note your earlier interest as they read your application profile.

College Search Websites: The Internet is the fastest way to research colleges. Through a college's website, you can access the catalogue of courses, get information about athletics and social life, contact an office, department, or professor, download campus maps and application materials, and take a virtual tour. Below are many useful sites that can assist you in identifying colleges to research further.

Planning and Individual Assessment Internet Resources

- <http://labor.idaho.gov/dnn/idahocareerinformation.aspx>.
- www.act.org
- www.allaboutcollege.com
- www.c3apply.org (College Connector/CollegeNET)
- www.college-visits.com
- www.collegeboard.com
- www.collegemajors101.com
- www.collegebound.net
- www.collegeview.com
- www.commonapp.org (The Common Application)
- www.fastweb.com

- www.makingcollegecount.com
- www.mycollegeguide.org
- www.myroad.com (The College Board)
- www.petersons.com (Peterson's)
- www.review.com (The Princeton Review)
- www.xap.com

College Admission Offices

National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities www.naicu.edu

International Colleges and Universities

Canadian Universities www.uwaterloo.ca/canu/index.html

General Education Online www.findaschool.org

Study in Canada www.studyincanada.com

The College Visit

One of the best ways to learn about a college is to schedule a visit. A college can appear quite different when you have spent some time on the campus and have talked to people there. You cannot get the same type of information by reading a view book or a catalog. Each time you visit a college, you get a clearer understanding of what you want for your college experience and can refine your list of potential schools.

IV. The Application Process

Admission Plans and Application Deadlines

Once you have drafted your list of colleges, you will need to plan a strategy to seek admission. Each standard admission plan has its own deadlines.

- **Regular Admission:** Almost all Idaho colleges use **February 15** as their regular admission application submission deadline. All application materials must be received before February 15. Some colleges have early deadlines. Applications pile up in the college admissions offices, and it is best not to wait until the last minute to apply because there could be thousands of applicants ahead of you for consideration. **Each college/university is different, so it is your responsibility to check on application deadlines for the schools you are applying to!** Decisions are usually mailed in late March and early April. You must generally respond with your choice by May 1.
- **Rolling Admission:** Some colleges will offer their decision as soon as an applicant's file is complete. The process usually takes two to four weeks once all the student's materials have been received. An accepted student must submit his notification of intent to enroll by May 1.
- **Early Decision (ED):** If you know exactly which college you'd like to attend, you may want to select this plan. Be aware, however, that you are required to have secured full financing in advance as there is no guarantee of financial aid if you are accepted. **Early Decision is binding; you are required to attend the college if you are accepted. The deadline for submission of all application materials is November 1 or December 1.** You should apply to other colleges, but you may apply to only one using the Early Decision status. Once you are accepted, you must withdraw your other applications. If accepted, you will need to submit a deposit. Notice of admission/rejection/deferral is usually in mid-December. If you have not researched colleges thoroughly; or if you are depending upon your senior year grades and test scores to improve your chances for admission to college, you should not choose this option.
- **Early Action (EA):** Unlike Early Decision, this is not a binding agreement. **If you choose Early Action, you must submit all of your materials by November 1 or December 1,** and you will receive college

admission decisions in January and February. You may apply to any number of schools for Early Action. An accepted student must submit notification of intent to enroll by May 1.

- **Early Action Single Choice:** Some colleges offer this admission option. The process is similar to Early Action, but Single Choice Early Action indicates that the college is your first choice. **All the application materials must be received before November 1 or December 1.** You may apply to other schools under regular admission, but you cannot apply to any other schools under Early Action or Early Decision.
- **Direct Admissions:** Starting Fall of 2015 preadmission letters will be mailed to all seniors that meet the GPA and SAT/ACT requirements. Direct Admissions will proactively admit Idaho public high school seniors to the state's public higher education institutions based on each student's grade point average (GPA) and SAT scores. Students are still required to apply to the school(s) they have been pre-admitted to.

Writing Your Résumé

Your résumé is an essential component of your college application process! In addition to your transcript and test scores, college admission directors need to see that you have been involved in extracurricular activities. This involvement can include school-sponsored activities, summer internships, work experiences, community service, and activities with your faith community. The résumé permits you to highlight the broad range of your activities and provide plenty of details of your skills and achievements. There is no single, correct formula to use when drafting a résumé. The most important quality of your résumé is that it is well-organized and presents information in a format that is easy to read. There is a great resume writing tool on <http://labor.idaho.gov/dnn/idahocareerinformation.aspx>. See your school counselor on how to use this tool. You also may want to experiment with a word processing program's Résumé Wizard feature that provides pre-formatted templates. No matter how your résumé looks visually, make sure it reflects what you have accomplished and what you would like an admissions officer to remember about you. Use details and action verbs to describe responsibilities and activities.

The College Essay (Not all Colleges Require an Essay)

“Why do I have to write an essay?” is a question that college counselors hear repeated every year.

Answer: The essay lets the admissions staff get to know you-- to get a glimpse of you beyond pure grades and test scores. The admissions staff wants to assess your ability to communicate and to organize your ideas clearly because a good writer is generally a solid student. In fact, the essay can bring you into the spotlight out of a crowd of applicants with similar academic credentials, and that could be a deciding factor in the admissions decision. Writing your college essay is often difficult because you have to write about yourself. A Payette High School student can definitely write an excellent college essay. You just need time to think about your topic and to get your ideas down on paper. Then you revise and edit your work and have it critiqued. Give each essay to one of the following for critiquing: an English teacher or your counselor. Any reader should receive your essays **at least three weeks** before you send them to colleges.

Formal Interviews

Why interview? Some colleges require each applicant to complete a formal interview. A face-to-face meeting gives you a chance to explain important things about yourself and a chance to understand and learn more about the college. And of course, the college representative can get an idea of your unique personality. These interviews are conducted either by a member of the admissions staff, a local alumnus/alumna of the college, or sometimes even a current student. It is very important to present yourself in a genuine and mature light. Although the interview is seldom the deciding factor in college admissions, if the student is borderline and the interview is impressive, you could be moved up in the standings.

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 - www.fastweb.com
 - www.scholarships.com
 - www.fastaid.com
 - www.collegeboard.org

A thorough source for financial aid research is *Financial Aid for Students: Print and Web Guides*, published by the Congressional Research Service. There are many sources for this document, and the easiest way to locate one is to copy and paste the title into a search engine.

Free scholarship search engines are available through the sites below.

- College Board www.collegeboard.com/student/pay/index.html?affiliateId=rdr&bannerId=pay
- FastWeb www.fastweb.com (They will sell your name to organizations)
- FinAid www.finaid.org

Parents may also want to research college savings plans at the websites below.

- www.savingforcollege.com
- www.collegesavings.org

Beware of Scholarship Scams! There are companies that claim they can match students with scholarships but are in fact fraudulent. Beware of any such bold claims. If you have questions about such companies, contact the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) at www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/scholarship/index.shtml.

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College Guides: A good way to begin is to get an overview of a college through comprehensive guides like *The College Handbook*, *Peterson's Guide to Four-Year Colleges*, *The Princeton Review*, and *Barron's Profile of American Colleges*. Colleges that pique your interest can then be researched more fully.

College Representative Visits to Payette High School: Every year, representatives from numerous colleges and universities throughout the country make visits to PHS. They talk with prospective students about opportunities at their colleges and about desirable qualities in candidates for admission. These visits provide an excellent opportunity for you to learn more about a particular college and to make a positive impression on a member of the admissions committee. Listen to announcements or check with the counselor for college visits. You need to sign up with your counselor to attend.

College Fairs: Large-scale college fairs are held each fall. There are two local fairs for you to attend. The Idaho Oregon Border College Fair will be held in October. All Payette seniors will be bused to this fair. The other is at the Boise Expo Center. This is an excellent opportunity to develop and expand your awareness of colleges and what to look for in a college. It is important that you register for this fair prior to attending. This contact can be important if you later apply to that college because the reviewers will note your earlier interest as they read your application profile.

College Search Websites: The Internet is the fastest way to research colleges. Through a college's website, you can access the catalogue of courses, get information about athletics and social life, contact an office, department, or professor, download campus maps and application materials, and take a virtual tour. Below are many useful sites that can assist you in identifying colleges to research further.

Planning and Individual Assessment Internet Resources

- <http://labor.idaho.gov/dnn/idahocareerinformation.aspx>.
- www.act.org
- www.allaboutcollege.com
- www.c3apply.org (College Connector/CollegeNET)
- www.college-visits.com
- www.collegeboard.com
- www.collegemajors101.com
- www.collegebound.net
- www.collegeview.com
- www.commonapp.org (The Common Application)
- www.fastweb.com

- www.makingcollegecount.com
- www.mycollegeguide.org
- www.myroad.com (The College Board)
- www.petersons.com (Peterson's)
- www.review.com (The Princeton Review)
- www.xap.com

College Admission Offices

National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities www.naicu.edu

International Colleges and Universities

Canadian Universities www.uwaterloo.ca/canu/index.html

General Education Online www.findaschool.org

Study in Canada www.studyincanada.com

The College Visit

One of the best ways to learn about a college is to schedule a visit. A college can appear quite different when you have spent some time on the campus and have talked to people there. You cannot get the same type of information by reading a view book or a catalog. Each time you visit a college, you get a clearer understanding of what you want for your college experience and can refine your list of potential schools.

IV. The Application Process

Admission Plans and Application Deadlines

Once you have drafted your list of colleges, you will need to plan a strategy to seek admission. Each standard admission plan has its own deadlines.

- **Regular Admission:** Almost all Idaho colleges use **February 15** as their regular admission application submission deadline. All application materials must be received before February 15. Some colleges have early deadlines. Applications pile up in the college admissions offices, and it is best not to wait until the last minute to apply because there could be thousands of applicants ahead of you for consideration. **Each college/university is different, so it is your responsibility to check on application deadlines for the schools you are applying to!** Decisions are usually mailed in late March and early April. You must generally respond with your choice by May 1.
- **Rolling Admission:** Some colleges will offer their decision as soon as an applicant's file is complete. The process usually takes two to four weeks once all the student's materials have been received. An accepted student must submit his notification of intent to enroll by May 1.
- **Early Decision (ED):** If you know exactly which college you'd like to attend, you may want to select this plan. Be aware, however, that you are required to have secured full financing in advance as there is no guarantee of financial aid if you are accepted. **Early Decision is binding; you are required to attend the college if you are accepted. The deadline for submission of all application materials is November 1 or December 1.** You should apply to other colleges, but you may apply to only one using the Early Decision status. Once you are accepted, you must withdraw your other applications. If accepted, you will need to submit a deposit. Notice of admission/rejection/deferral is usually in mid-December. If you have not researched colleges thoroughly; or if you are depending upon your senior year grades and test scores to improve your chances for admission to college, you should not choose this option.
- **Early Action (EA):** Unlike Early Decision, this is not a binding agreement. **If you choose Early Action, you must submit all of your materials by November 1 or December 1,** and you will receive college

admission decisions in January and February. You may apply to any number of schools for Early Action. An accepted student must submit notification of intent to enroll by May 1.

- **Early Action Single Choice:** Some colleges offer this admission option. The process is similar to Early Action, but Single Choice Early Action indicates that the college is your first choice. **All the application materials must be received before November 1 or December 1.** You may apply to other schools under regular admission, but you cannot apply to any other schools under Early Action or Early Decision.
- **Direct Admissions:** Starting Fall of 2015 preadmission letters will be mailed to all seniors that meet the GPA and SAT/ACT requirements. Direct Admissions will proactively admit Idaho public high school seniors to the state's public higher education institutions based on each student's grade point average (GPA) and SAT scores. Students are still required to apply to the school(s) they have been pre-admitted to.

Writing Your Résumé

Your résumé is an essential component of your college application process! In addition to your transcript and test scores, college admission directors need to see that you have been involved in extracurricular activities. This involvement can include school-sponsored activities, summer internships, work experiences, community service, and activities with your faith community. The résumé permits you to highlight the broad range of your activities and provide plenty of details of your skills and achievements. There is no single, correct formula to use when drafting a résumé. The most important quality of your résumé is that it is well-organized and presents information in a format that is easy to read. There is a great resume writing tool on <http://labor.idaho.gov/dnn/idahocareerinformation.aspx>. See your school counselor on how to use this tool. You also may want to experiment with a word processing program's Résumé Wizard feature that provides pre-formatted templates. No matter how your résumé looks visually, make sure it reflects what you have accomplished and what you would like an admissions officer to remember about you. Use details and action verbs to describe responsibilities and activities.

The College Essay (Not all Colleges Require an Essay)

“Why do I have to write an essay?” is a question that college counselors hear repeated every year.

Answer: The essay lets the admissions staff get to know you-- to get a glimpse of you beyond pure grades and test scores. The admissions staff wants to assess your ability to communicate and to organize your ideas clearly because a good writer is generally a solid student. In fact, the essay can bring you into the spotlight out of a crowd of applicants with similar academic credentials, and that could be a deciding factor in the admissions decision. Writing your college essay is often difficult because you have to write about yourself. A Payette High School student can definitely write an excellent college essay. You just need time to think about your topic and to get your ideas down on paper. Then you revise and edit your work and have it critiqued. Give each essay to one of the following for critiquing: an English teacher or your counselor. Any reader should receive your essays **at least three weeks** before you send them to colleges.

Formal Interviews

Why interview? Some colleges require each applicant to complete a formal interview. A face-to-face meeting gives you a chance to explain important things about yourself and a chance to understand and learn more about the college. And of course, the college representative can get an idea of your unique personality. These interviews are conducted either by a member of the admissions staff, a local alumnus/alumna of the college, or sometimes even a current student. It is very important to present yourself in a genuine and mature light. Although the interview is seldom the deciding factor in college admissions, if the student is borderline and the interview is impressive, you could be moved up in the standings.