

**Senior Parents Guide to  
College Admission**

HELPING MAKE THE

**RIGHT**



**CHOICE**

**PLANO WEST SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL  
2010-2011**

## **Table of Contents**

<b>College Application Process .....</b>	<b>Page 1</b>
<b>ACT &amp; SAT Test Dates .....</b>	<b>Page 2</b>
<b>THEA/ACCESS/ACUPLACER .....</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>College Application .....</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>Housing .....</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>Recommendations/Essays.....</b>	<b>Page 5</b>
<b>Transcripts.....</b>	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>Athletic Recruiting .....</b>	<b>Page 7</b>
<b>Learning Differences.....</b>	<b>Page 7</b>
<b>Service Academies and ROTC Scholarships .....</b>	<b>Page 8</b>
<b>Financing Education .....</b>	<b>Page 9</b>
<b>FAFSA-Step by Step .....</b>	<b>Page 10</b>
<b>Texas Grant .....</b>	<b>Page 11</b>
<b>Scholarships .....</b>	<b>Page 12</b>
<b>Helpful Websites .....</b>	<b>Page 13</b>

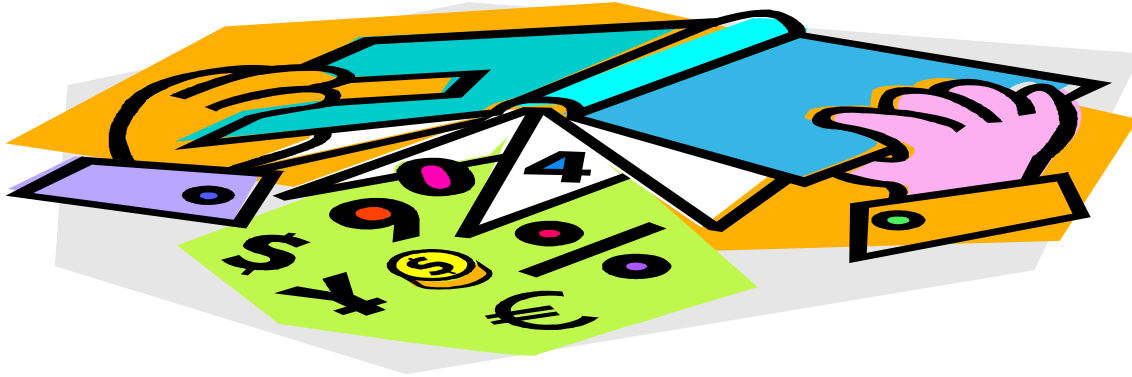
## College Application Process

- Visit colleges
- Finalize SAT/ACT scores
- Access college applications
- Request recommendations (blue packet) three weeks in advance
- Prepare resume
- Write essay
- Request transcript: follow-up at a later date
- Submit application
- Attend college interview (if required)
- Complete NCAA clearinghouse form (if applicable) at start of senior year
- Apply for scholarships
- Submit FAFSA



## College Visit

With an abundance of colleges available not only in the United States but also internationally, choosing a college may be daunting. The college visit, as a tool to narrow this selection, is invaluable for several reasons. First, a student has the opportunity to experience the campus personally to see whether or not the college meets expectations. Factors to consider are: distance from home, size of university, type of surrounding community, climate, demographics of student body, atmosphere on campus, and programs available for students' needs. Second, the college visit presents an opportunity for a student to become personally acquainted with various individuals on campus instead of an indiscriminate name on a paper file. In order to make a college visit, schedule an appointment either through the admissions office or via the college website. The college visit form, which is available from the subschool principal's office, needs to be completed and returned for attendance purposes. The absence is considered "excused" but will count against final exemptions second semester. A sample of the form is in the student "Off to College" booklet. A thank you letter to the admissions officer is a nice gesture. It will likely go in the student's application folder as a sign of interest in the college.



## Testing SAT/ACT

The SAT or ACT is usually required by colleges; however, the emphasis colleges place on the test varies. Colleges sometimes require a specific test. Many Plano West students chose to take both tests in order to keep their options open. It is not unusual for a person to perform better on one test than the other. Students should take the ACT and SAT during the spring of the junior year. This allows time to retake the test in the fall of the senior year if scores are not satisfactory. Most colleges will take the highest one-day test score, regardless of how many times the test is taken. Because most scholarships are processed between December and April of the senior year, the best score results can then be included in the application.

Note: There is a difference between the SAT Reasoning and the SAT Subject tests. Some universities consider SAT Subject tests as factors in the admissions process; others use the scores to place students in the appropriate level of classes during enrollment. Check the individual college website or application to determine whether this is a necessary requirement to complete.

## SAT & ACT Test Dates

<b>Test</b>	<b>Test Dates 2010/2011</b>	<b>Registration Deadlines</b>	<b>Late</b>
<b>SAT</b>	October 10	September 9	September 23
	November 7	October 1	October 15
	December 5	October 30	November 12
	January 23	December 15	December 30
	March 13	February 4	February 18
	May 1	March 25	April 8
<b>ACT</b>	June 5	April 29	May 13
	September 12	August 7	August 8-21
	October 24	September 18	Sept. 19-Oct. 2
	December 12	November 6	November 7-20
	February 6	January 5	January 6-15
	April 10	March 5	March 6-19
	June 12	May 7	May 8-21

# THEA/ACCESS/ACUPLACER

Students beginning classes at a public community college, public technical school or public university in Texas must take the THEA test, or an approved alternate, if they are not exempt from the requirement.

Exemptions include:

**SAT:** A combined score of 1070 with a 500 minimum on both the critical reasoning and mathematics test

OR

**ACT:** A composite score of 23 with a minimum of 19 on both the English and mathematics test.

OR

**TAKS** A minimum score of 2200 on the math and on the language arts with a writing sub score of at least a 3.

The **THEA** test is not an admissions test. Students cannot be denied admission to a public institution of higher education based on the THEA test score. Tests are given on college campuses (such as Collin College); the testing dates are limited. If not exempt, students need to be sure to apply to take the test during their senior year. For more information on the THEA go to [www.thea.nesinc.com](http://www.thea.nesinc.com).

## College Applications

In general, applications may be obtained online or from the college. Typically an application fee is required. Most colleges will not waive the application fee unless the student qualifies for the free or reduced lunch program.

### Apply Texas Application

Texas has a common application for freshmen and undergraduate transfer students wishing to apply to any Texas public university. This allows students to complete one application, on line, and submit it to as many Texas public universities as they wish. Check individual college requirements to ensure that all the necessary parts of the application are completed (for example, the essay portion). The Apply Texas Application must be submitted electronically. Students should visit [www.applytexas.org](http://www.applytexas.org) for more information and to complete the electronic application.

### Universal Common Application

Many private universities utilize a common application that is available electronically. This is available in the counseling center or visit [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org).

# *What Colleges Look For*

Colleges may consider some or all of the following criteria:

- Difficulty of high school courses
- High School Grade Point Average/class rank
- SAT I or ACT
- Essay/personal statement
- Extracurricular activities
- Community service and volunteer work
- Letters of Recommendation
- Interview with an admissions counselor
- Minority Status/Legacy to college/First Generation College Student

In addition, students' level of motivation and maturity, academic strength of the senior year schedule, as well as significant academic improvement in the last year of high school are particularly important.

**School achievement** has been the single most important factor in admissions decisions since the college Board began tracking this information in the early 1980s.



## *Housing*

Become familiar with the housing procedures, including the refund policy, for each college to which application is made. Many schools require freshman students to live on campus. Housing applications are generally sent with the acceptance letter or shortly thereafter. Because of the housing shortage on some campuses (i.e. UT Austin), it is recommended that this process is completed very early in the student's senior year.

## ***Recommendations***

Many private colleges seriously consider recommendations from high school counselors and/or teachers. The colleges use these as evidence of a student’s potential, character, and classroom effort. Individuals at school who are familiar with the student’s work ethic and behavior are best able to give the college a fair and valuable assessment. In order to obtain a counselor letter of recommendation, it is necessary to complete a blue packet. This is described in the student information packet. When requesting a recommendation, please give the counselor at least ***three weeks notice*** to complete this process.

## ***Writing the College Essay***

Many students consider the essay the most dreaded part of applying to college. Actually, it is a rare opportunity for the student to talk directly to the colleges’ admissions committee allowing them to see the applicant as a thinking and feeling individual. Whereas the application and the transcript simply give the committee facts and statistics, the essay allows the student to be much more personal. Other than an interview, it is the student’s only chance to share his/her thoughts, insights, and opinions, to highlight accomplishments, and to convey a sense of maturity and outlook on life. Many colleges and universities will either give a topic to write about or present several specific topics from which to choose. Regardless of the topic chosen, the student should observe the following guidelines:

### **Do’s and Don’ts**

Do	Don’t
reveal yourself in your writing	wait until the last minute
write in your own voice and style	write what you think others want to read
take time to organize your thoughts, developing a logical progression from one idea to another	Exaggerate
set a tone that is appropriate for the topic	use a flowery, inflated, or pretentious style
write with enthusiasm, vivid details, and interesting examples	neglect the technical part of your essay (grammar, spelling, and sentence structure)
leave room for flexibility, humor and creativity	be guilty of plagiarism
narrow your topic and be as specific and illustrative as possible	be sarcastic or melancholy
accentuate positive things about yourself	use generic examples or “gimmicks”
include unique life experiences and small incidents that have made an impression on you	
try it out on your family, friends, English teacher or counselor...edit	

Never underestimate the importance of the college essay. It is well worth the time and effort to submit the best possible finished product. The college essay may set the student apart from others and be the determining factor for admission to that college.

## ***Transcript***

The high school record carries a great deal of weight. The transcript will not only contain a list of semester grades for every subject taken since ninth grade, but also TAKS scores, SAT/ACT scores, class rank, and cumulative grade point average. To obtain a transcript, simply fill out a form at the registrar's window. Be aware that the address of the admissions office is required on the form. The cost is \$2.00 per transcript, and students must provide the registrars office with an addressed envelope for each school. The college must receive the transcript by the application deadline.

## ***Interview***

If the college encourages interviews, be sure to take advantage of the opportunity. Take time to prepare for the interview. Have good questions and be able to explain the personal appeal of the college. The student "Off to College" booklet has additional suggestions.

## ***Athletic Recruiting/NCAA***

If a student hopes to participate in college athletics, the athlete must be aware of certain things. NCAA regulations prohibit college coaches from making an initial contact with students until after the end of a student's junior year. However, a student may send a letter to coaches inquiring about their programs, asking for pertinent information, and requesting to be placed on the mailing list. A resume which shows athletic achievements (stats, times, summer camps, leagues outside of school), should be included with the letter which give coaches a sense of a student's commitment and talent. If a college visit is planned, try to set up a meeting with the coach.

Any student planning to pursue athletics of any type in college is required to register with the NCAA Clearinghouse. This should be completed as early in the senior year as possible. Register on the website [www.ncaa.com](http://www.ncaa.com) and turn in the downloaded request for a transcript to the registrars office. *The Winning Edge* is also a valuable resource.

## *Learning Differences*

Students with learning differences should begin college planning early to allow adequate time to evaluate necessary accommodations provided by various institutions. A careful examination of the programs and services available at specific colleges will help to identify colleges that will meet individual needs. Students should apply to several desirable colleges after researching carefully.

General tips for a student with a learning disability:

- Set up an appointment with the Director of the L.D. Program or Special Services before visiting a school.
- Determine which colleges offer support systems similar to the support systems that were available in high school for optimal success.
- Talk with several students with learning disabilities who are in the program when visiting each campus.
- Complete application requirements for a formal Support Program which typically includes the following:
  - A recent report from a qualified psychoeducational diagnostician which gives the results of a WAIS-III and an achievement battery.
  - High school transcript.
  - Letters from teachers of academic subjects describing the level of the courses being taken as well as the performance and use of accommodations.
  - SAT or ACT scores.
  - Campus interview.

Some questions, which may provide helpful information when communicating with colleges, are:

- What academic support services are available?
- What is the average class size?
- What is the general climate toward students with learning and attention disorders?
- Are special courses required of LD students? Do they carry college credit?
- What is the graduation rate of LD students?
- What kind of tutoring is available?
- Will it be necessary to update LD testing?
- What are the high school course requirements? Are any of the requirements waived for students with learning disabilities?
- Are additional fees assessed for student support series?

A good resource to explore is [The K & W Guide to Colleges for the Learning Disabled](#) (Harper).

**MILITARY ACADEMIES**

*The United States Military Academies include West Point, Annapolis, Air Force Academy, United States Coast Guard Academy, and Merchant Marine Academy. The application process for these schools is more complex than other colleges. It is very important to begin this process in the spring of the junior year to increase chances for acceptance. Be sure to include your counselor in this process.*

***Service Academies and ROTC Scholarship Programs***

While all juniors should begin exploring possible educational programs following graduation, it is imperative to begin as soon as possible if interested in the service academies and ROTC scholarship programs in order to receive full consideration. Plano West ROTC instructor, Major John Napoli, is a good source of information regarding this educational path.

The **first step** in securing an appointment to one of the academies is to write or email and ask for a pre-candidate questionnaire. Do this during the junior year. Addresses follow:

Admissions Office  
U.S. Military Academy  
West Point, NY 10996

Admissions Office  
U.S. Air Force Academy  
U.S.A.F. Academy, CO 80840

**Admission Office**  
U.S. Coast Guard Academy  
MarineAcademy  
New London, CT 06320

**Admissions Office**  
U.S. Naval Academy  
Annapolis, MD 21402

**Admissions Office**  
Merchant  
Kings Point, NY 10024

The **second step** is to request a recommendation from one of your senators or congressmen. US Congressman Sam Johnson is available to answer questions. He may be contacted through his website: [www.samjohnson.house.gov/](http://www.samjohnson.house.gov/) or by calling 972-470-0892. The person providing the nomination will need the following information about the candidate:

- Name, address, and telephone number
- Date of birth
- Social Security number
- High school name and year of graduation
- Names of parents

The student may indicate first, second, third, and fourth choices for Academies.



## *Financing Your Student's Education*

Financial aid and scholarships are important to explore. Many scholarships go untapped due to a lack of applicants. The college admissions counselor as well as the financial aid office on the college campus may provide valuable information in your search. Following a step-by-step process can make the application for assistance much easier.

### **I. FAFSA**

For federal financial aid, you must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). It can be downloaded from the Department of Education website at [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov). The FAFSA is due anytime after January 1 of the year your child plans to attend college. Submit the form electronically as soon as possible, but never before the first of the year. If you need to estimate income tax information, the form is easily amended later in the year.

### **II. CSS Profile**

Some institutions, typically private ones, will also require a completed CSS/Financial Aid Profile, which is produced by the College Board. The first part of this two-step process should be completed in October of your student's senior year.

### **III. Merit Scholarships**

Students who plan to apply for college-specific merit based scholarships should carefully read each college's information. Some will require additional applications with separate deadlines, while others will consider the admissions application sufficient. The colleges' financial aid office, as well as the admissions office, are the best source for accurate information.

Corporate, foundation, or other independent scholarship programs often send information to the counseling office. The majority arrive in the spring. The Counseling Center receptionist compiles a spreadsheet with the various opportunities available. This will be available on the counselor section of the Plano West Website. Separate applications are available in the Counseling Center. Some scholarships have specific criteria for applying (Tall Texans!), while others may be specific to a particular college.

Remember to avoid any scholarship search companies that charge a fee for their service, regardless of what they promise to do. The Federal Trade Commission, whose website is provided below, provides assistance on avoiding these scams.

# FAFSA

***Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or the FAFSA, is a very important document to be completed for federal and state student grants, work-study, and loans. Your application needs to be submitted as early as possible but no earlier than January 1<sup>st</sup> of the student's senior year, as the financial information is based on your earnings the full year prior to starting college.***

## FAFSA: Step by Step

### Basic FAFSA Facts:

#### What is it?

The federal government uses this form to determine your eligibility for financial aid, which includes: grants, work-study, scholarships and loans.

#### Why fill it out?

The FAFSA is used to determine how much aid you will receive. It may also be prerequisite for other scholarship monies.

#### What type of aid can I expect to receive?

Your prospective college will try to meet your financial need through federal, state, school and private sources, as well as loans, grants and student employment.

#### May I complete FAFSA on the Web?

Yes, visit [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov) and click "Before Beginning a FAFSA" to get started. The Web provides "edit check" and is a quicker process.

### FAFSA Tips:

- Fill out the form as soon as possible after January 1.
- Do not leave any fields blank. Enter "0" if a question does not apply.
- List your information accurately.
- Take your time and follow the instructions. For assistance call 1-800-4-FED-AID.
- Sign the applications. If you are a dependent, have your parents sign too.
- Report ALL required sources of untaxed income (e.g., Social Security/child support).
- Fill out the FAFSA every year, even if you don't think you will qualify for aid. It may be a prerequisite for scholarships.

### Fill Out the FAFSA:

Keep a completed copy for your records. You'll need the following to fill out the form:

- Social Security number
- 2010 W2 and /or tax return
- Driver's license (if any)
- 2010 federal income tax return
- Parent's 2006 income tax return (if a dependent)
- 2010 untaxed income records (if any)
- Current bank statements
- Current mortgage and investment records (if any)
- Alien registration card (if not U.S. citizen)

### Signing the FAFSA (required on WEB or paper filing):

- Use your 4-digit PIN. Parents will also need their own PINs to electronically sign the FAFSA.
- Print the signature page, get the required signatures and mail the form to the address listed on the signature page.
- Wait until you receive your SAR (Student Aid Report), get the required signatures and return it through the U.S. Postal Service via certified mail.

### **Review the Student Aid Report (SAR)—receive within 5 weeks of filing:**

- Review immediately and carefully.
- Report errors to the FAFSA Help Desk and ask how to make corrections
- Call 1-800-433-3243 if you do not receive the SAR within 5 weeks.
- An asterisk after the EFC means your SAR has been selected for verification and you may be asked for more information which will go to the prospective college.

## *TEXAS GRANT*

### *Program Purpose*

The Texas Legislature established the TEXAS (Towards Excellence. Access and Success) Grant to make sure that well-prepared high school graduates with financial need could go to college.

#### **Who can apply? Students who...**

For an initial award

- Are Texas residents
- Have not been convicted of a felony or crime involving a controlled substance
- Show financial need
- Have an EFC less than or equal to 4000
- Register for the Selective Service or are exempt from this requirement

#### **AND**

- Be a graduate of an accredited high school in Texas not earlier than the 1998-99 school year
- Complete the Recommended High School Program or Distinguished Achievement Program in high school.
- Enroll in a non-profit public college or university in Texas within 16 months of graduation from a public or accredited private high school in Texas and
- Have accumulated no more than 30 semester credit hours, excluding those earned for dual or concurrent courses or awarded for credit by examination (AP, IB or CLEP).

#### **OR**

- Have earned an associate degree from a public technical, state or community college in Texas and
- Enroll in any public university in Texas no more than 12 months after receiving their associate's degree.

Students entering the program from high school who continue in college and who meet program academic standards can receive awards for up to 150 semester credit hours, until they receive a bachelor's degree, or for five years if enrolled in a 4-year degree plan or six years if enrolled in a 5-year degree plan, whichever comes first.

#### **Where may awards be used?**

A TEXAS Grant may be used to attend any public institutions of higher education in Texas.

How much can be awarded?

The award amount (including state and institutional funds) is equal to the student's tuition and required fees.

For 2009-2010, the state amount is approximately:

- \$6,080 per year for public universities and state college students
- \$1,780 per year for public community college students
- \$2,680 per year for public technical college students

#### **How can you apply?**

You apply for the TEXAS Grant when you complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or other application as required by your college's financial aid office. Funding is limited, so you need to submit your application as soon as possible after January 1 of your senior year. The financial aid office at each college and university will determine if TEXAS Grant is part of the aid package that is offered to you.

#### **Additional Information**

Your eligibility for this program is determined by the financial aid office at your college. Contact your college financial aid office for additional information on eligibility or availability of funds. To read more about this program check out: Texas Education Code, 56.301 and Coordinating Board rules, Chapter 22 L.

# **THE PLANO WEST SR. HIGH GUIDE TO SCHOLARSHIPS 2010/2011**

## **SIMPLE STEPS TO FINDING OUT ABOUT SCHOLARSHIPS:**

1. Applications are available in a file cabinet located in the Counseling Center.  
Qualifying information is included with each application.
2. Scholarships are updated daily so it is a good idea to stop by once a week to see what is available.
3. All new scholarships are announced in the Wolf Call (daily announcements), and online on the counseling website (starting in October).
4. Please read requirements for scholarships carefully. If you don't qualify for a scholarship, please don't waste your time completing the application.
5. Please do not take the last copy of the application in the file – notify the Counseling Department receptionist, and she will make you a copy.
6. Follow directions carefully – they will let you know deadlines and where you should return the application.
7. Local scholarships are available during the second semester – listen to the daily announcements for details.

# HELPFUL WEBSITES

## FINANCIAL AID/SCHOLARSHIPS

Free Application for Federal Student Aid

[www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov)

Required step in the college financial aid process.

Think Ahead, Inc.

[www.collegeaidcalculator.com](http://www.collegeaidcalculator.com)

Private company that sells software to assist in the college financial planning process.

FinAid

[www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)

Free resource for scholarships, information about loans and general college financial planning.

Sallie Mae: College Answer

[www.collegeanswer.com](http://www.collegeanswer.com)

Free internet scholarship database. Includes information concerning careers, colleges, financial aid process and an organizational checklist. Planning for College Destination.

Fast Web

[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)

Free internet scholarship database. Complete (and update if necessary) a personal profile.

City College Dreams

[www.cityofcollegedreams.org](http://www.cityofcollegedreams.org)

Fun graphics and funky text appeal to students while explaining tuition reduction options, financial aid packages and scholarships.

Jackie Robinson Foundation

[www.jackierobinson.org](http://www.jackierobinson.org)

Scholarships for minority youths.

Hispanic Scholarship Fund

[www.hsf.net](http://www.hsf.net)

Source for many scholarships for Hispanic youth planning to attend 2 or 4-year universities.

CollegeNet

[www.collegenet.com](http://www.collegenet.com)

Over 1500 colleges linked. Narrow searches by region, tuition, major, private/public, etc... Applications are linked and transfers common data from one form to another.

Hobson's College View

[www.collegeview.com](http://www.collegeview.com)

One of the most detailed search engines on the Net. Excellent FAQ section under the college search section. Sections for career and Financial Aid available as well.

Peterson's Education & Career Center

[www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)

Campus news, college search engine, test prep, financial aid. Identify college by location, major, tuition, size average GPA and sports.

The Princeton Review

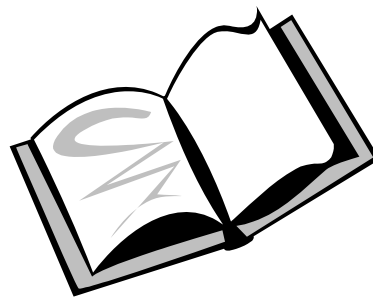
[www.princetonreview.com](http://www.princetonreview.com)

Under the heading of "research", explore majors, complete a unique college search, and read the latest "best" colleges as determined the Princeton Review.

Common Black College Application

[www.eduinonline.com](http://www.eduinonline.com)

Apply to 34 Historically Black Colleges for a one time application fee.



### ***Recommended Reading***

Letting Go...A Parent's Guide to understanding the College Years.

Karen Levin Coburn & Madge Lawrence Treeger

Almost Grown...Launching Your Child from High School to College

Patricia Pasick

For Parents Only... Tips for Surviving the Journey from Homeroom to Dorm Room

Julia Johnston and Mary Kay Shanley

