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APPLYING TO COLLEGE

Local student offers tips to simplify the admissions process

By Dana Mathews
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The college application process is one of the most stressful, time-consuming and fun times in a person's life. Trust me, I know. I am a senior at Norfolk Collegiate School. I sent my first two applications in July. When I started the process, I wish I had known what I am about to tell you. Applying to college is easy; it's the preparation that is difficult.

Upcoming holiday breaks are an ideal time to spend collecting your thoughts and devising an action plan.

Here are eight steps to simplify the process:

1. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Find a college counselor or career coach.

2. Take a rigorous class schedule.

Challenging yourself is the most important thing you can do early in high school, experts say.

"Having a 3.5 in band, basket weaving and chorus isn't going to impress an admissions office," said Angela Boyd, Hampton University's dean of admissions.

3. Put together a list of colleges that interest you.

After you have about 15-20 schools, research them. If you are 100 percent sure you want to major in biochemistry and the school you want to go to doesn't have a biochemistry major, you have to go elsewhere.

4. Check out the schools' admissions policies.

Make sure you meet all the requirements. If a school requires four lab-based sciences – and you only have three – talk to your counselor and make sure you can take that credit before graduation.

Eliminate about half of the schools you research, and then move on to the next step.

5. Visit the schools that interest you.

"Visiting campuses early and narrowing down your choices is very important," said Sara Gastler, admissions director at Virginia Wesleyan College.

Before visiting, know the questions you want to ask.

The most important things to find out are the college's student-to-teacher ratio, whether the college has career services to help you find internships and jobs, and what kind of extra-curricular activities the college offers, said Nicole Walker, a Tidewater Community College career coach. The most important thing is being able to see yourself living on campus.

Keep in mind you will be spending four years of your

life there. If you don't love it, keep looking.

6. Don't over-apply, don't under-apply.

Applying to 20 schools is a waste of time. The reason some students over-apply is because of fear of not getting in anywhere, said Sabena Morteza, associate director of admissions at University of Richmond. Make sure you have a safety school in your mix. You don't need eight safety schools. Also, don't put all your eggs in one basket.

7. Apply! Apply! Apply!

First, go to your school and request a transcript. Ask the counselor if you need to send your standardized test scores yourself or if they are included in the transcript your school sends. If SAT and ACT scores are not included in the transcript, send them yourself. Do not send incomplete applications. They will meet their fate with the shredder.

8. Don't get senioritis.

The last high school year is important. "Don't take a fluff schedule," said Michael Walsh, admissions director at James Madison University. "Only take classes you can see through to the end and stay committed to." Colleges do see your senior grades and will revoke your admission if you let your GPA slip drastically. Work hard through graduation.

Postscript: Dana decided to attend The University of Mississippi, also known as "Ole Miss."



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Dana Mathews is a senior at Norfolk Collegiate School. She sent her first two applications in July.