

PARENT INSIDER

Roadmap to College Success

CREATING A COLLEGE LIST



TIPS FOR VISITING CAMPUS



GETTING THE MOST OUT OF COLLEGE FAIRS



ACING THE COLLEGE INTERVIEW



BUILDING A RESUME



PREPARING FOR STANDARDIZED TESTS



WRITING A COLLEGE ESSAY



APPLYING



Roadmap to College Success

The college selection process is unlike any other journey that your family will take together. You will discover new places, meet interesting people and have fun along the way, and at the conclusion of this adventure, your student will have a much better idea of where they want to spend the next four years and what their future might hold. To help you make this important decision, we asked the experts in Bentley's office of Undergraduate Admission for their best tips and advice. We hope this insightful, easy-to-understand content will help make the process a little smoother.

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CREATING A COLLEGE LIST



The best part about the college search process is starting the conversation with your student about their future goals and aspirations. With so many college options, we recommend starting early, during their junior year of high school, in order to take the time your student needs to make an informed and smart decision about where to apply. Here are some things to consider:

LOCATION AND SIZE

Does your student prefer the hustle and bustle of the city or are they looking for a more traditional campus with lots of green space? With regard to the size of the school, consider not only the campus but also faculty to student ratio per class.

MAJORS/MINORS

Does the college have the areas of study that interest your student? What about other available majors in case they change their mind about their course of study?

CAMPUS LIFE AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Consider must-haves for campus life — such as Greek Life, clubs, service opportunities, study abroad options, diversity and inclusion resources — then explore college websites and social media channels like Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn to find out more from current students and alumni.

ATHLETICS

Whether your student plans to play a sport or not, athletics is a big part of school spirit. Consider intramurals and club sport options available as well.

HOUSING AND DINING

Does your student plan to live on campus? Is housing guaranteed? What kind of meal plans are available?

COST

Affording college may be a concern for your family. Compare the tuition and fees for state versus private institutions — and remember that financial aid will offset some of the cost. Don't base your list solely on sticker price - most students qualify for some amount of need-based aid and/or merit scholarships.

REFINE YOUR GOALS

It's a good idea to balance the list with a mix of "safety/back up," "likely/target" and "reach/dream" schools.

BUILDING A RESUME



Building a resume in high school will help your student get a leg up when it comes time to apply to college. The application process can be competitive, and a resume is a great way for them to showcase their experience and achievements. It also makes filling out the Common Application easier as it becomes a useful reference tool.

START EARLY

Have your student keep a running list of their accomplishments and experiences, starting with the first year of high school, including: academic and nonscholastic achievements, sports and extracurricular activities, leadership positions, impactful courses and projects, community service and work experience.

USE CLEAN, CONSISTENT DESIGN

Choose a modern, easy-to-read font (like Calibri, Arial, or Helvetica) and keep sizing consistent—typically 10–12 point for body text, with your name slightly larger for emphasis. Use spacing, subtle bolding, and clear section headers to guide the reader’s eye, and incorporate simple bullets to keep information organized and scannable.

BROADEN AND TAILOR EXPERIENCE

Include a mix of academic, professional, extracurricular, work and community-based experience.

SHOWCASE STRENGTHS WITH IMPACT

Have your student connect key strengths—like teamwork, communication and organization—to real experiences. Include relevant technical skills and focus on how they’ve applied them in meaningful ways.

BE A THOUGHTFUL SECOND SET OF EYES

Offer to review your student’s work—or help them find a trusted friend, teacher or mentor who can. A fresh perspective can catch grammar issues, unclear phrasing and small mistakes they may overlook, while helping them present their ideas clearly and confidently.

TIPS FOR VISITING CAMPUS



You wouldn't buy a car without driving it first, so we recommend taking an up-close look at schools that interest your student to see which ones feel right. A visit to a college campus will provide your family with the opportunity to discover if the vibe and location are going to match what you're looking for in a campus community. Bentley admission counselors offer the following tips to make the most of your college visit:

PLAN EARLY

Begin visiting colleges at the start of your student's junior year in high school.

CHECK THINGS OUT

See what each school has to offer, and sign up for one or more opportunities such as campus tours, information sessions and signature events like Open Houses. Can't make it campus right away? Start with virtual tours, info sessions and interviews.

VISIT DIFFERENT COLLEGE ENVIRONMENTS

Narrow down choices of where your student feels most comfortable: big versus small, urban versus suburban, for example.

SPEAK UP

Don't be shy about asking questions of the admission staff and tour guides.

MEET THE FACULTY

Explore academic websites and participate in virtual or in-person events where faculty are presenting.

GRAB SOME GRUB

Have lunch on campus — your tour guide can even share their favorite spots for you to check out!

SEE THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Take a walk off campus to learn more about the surrounding area.

TAKE NOTES

Take lots of notes and photos and keep a record of each visit for later review.

PREPARING FOR STANDARDIZED TESTS



College entrance exams — also known as standardized testing — help schools evaluate how ready students are to study at the college level. Although many schools continue to have test-optional policies like Bentley, some still require submission of the most common exams, typically the SAT (administered by the College Board) or ACT. Here are tips to help navigate standardized testing:

TRY OUT BOTH TESTS

Your student can take a practice test for each and compare scores and comfort level. Find free practice tests on the ACT and SAT websites (act.org and collegeboard.org) or ask a high school counselor for direction. Some students take both tests. Fee waivers are available for eligible students.

EXPLORE TEST PREP SERVICES

Need extra help? In addition to paid test prep services you can get free test prep materials and practice tests on the College Board website.

CONSIDER TAKING THE TEST MORE THAN ONE TIME

The ACT and SAT exams can be taken several times during the spring of junior year and fall of senior year, so there are opportunities to improve a score if need be. Remember there is a fee to take the tests.

EXPLORE WHETHER A COLLEGE IS TEST-OPTIONAL OR TEST-FLEXIBLE

Some schools are test-optional or test-flexible, so be sure to carefully read each school's policy and requirements.

NOT SURE IF YOU SHOULD STILL TAKE THE TEST IF COLLEGES ARE TEST-OPTIONAL?

Reach out to an admission counselor to get advice about how they use the scores if they are submitted.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF COLLEGE FAIRS



Attending a college fair is a terrific opportunity to learn about the admission process and meet representatives from colleges and universities across the country. Your student may even discover schools that weren't originally on their radar. Here are tips for your student on what to do before, during and after a college fair:

BEFORE GOING:

- Find out which schools will be there and create a list of the ones that are of interest.
- Make a list of questions for the college representatives.

DURING THE COLLEGE FAIR:

- Visit top-choice schools first and make sure to introduce yourself.
- Ask questions and take notes.
- Get representatives' contact information.
- Indicate your interest in an institution by leaving your contact information with the college rep.

AFTERWARDS:

- Learn more about your favorite school via their websites to determine if you would like to continue to move forward with them.
- Follow up by emailing college representatives to thank them and ask additional questions.
- Read through any printed material you picked up at the tables to get a better sense of each college's offerings.

WRITING A COLLEGE ESSAY



College admission officers read thousands of essays from prospective students, so it's important to write something that stands out from the crowd. This is your student's chance to share something interesting about themselves beyond what's listed in their application.

START EARLY

The Common Application typically releases essay prompts in February, so applicants can start brainstorming by the end of junior year and during the summer before the application is due.

ANSWER THE QUESTION THAT IS ASKED AND BE ORIGINAL

There are a limited number of words that can answer a single question. It's important to stay on topic. Try to be original. Some of the best essays are about mundane topics which are presented in interesting and meaningful ways.

KEEP THE READER ENGAGED

English teachers are right about the importance of a strong story hook. Your student should be creative and grab the reader's attention in the first sentence. Make them want to read more!

DON'T PLAGIARIZE

If the essay is not in your student's voice, the reader will know. Admission counselors can tell when the voice changes and have tools that can identify plagiarized segments of sentences.

USE THE CORRECT NAME OF THE COLLEGE

If your student is writing an essay that mentions the name of a school, make sure it is correct. When students reuse an essay for multiple institutions, a common mistake is forgetting to change the school name.

PROOFREAD

Use correct spelling and grammar. Spell check doesn't catch everything, so your student should enlist friends, family members or teachers to proofread.

ACING THE COLLEGE INTERVIEW



A college interview is a great opportunity for your student to share more about themselves – beyond academics and test scores – and also helps an admission counselor determine if their college or university is a good fit. Here are some tips to help you prepare:



RESEARCH THE INSTITUTION

Know which programs are of interest and how your student's goals tie to the school's mission. There is a lot to learn from the school's social media accounts, which provide up-to-date news that may spark conversation.



PREPARE FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT CHARACTER AND SKILLS

What are your student's strengths and weaknesses? Can they describe a leadership position they've had at school? What's something they've struggled with, and how did they overcome it?



ALWAYS BE YOURSELF

Interviewers can often tell when candidates are not being genuine or have memorized answers, so encourage your student to relax and just be themselves.



UPDATE THE RESUME

Plan to have your student bring an up-to-date copy of their resume for the interview.



PREPARE A LIST OF QUESTIONS

Asking thoughtful, composed questions specific to the institution shows interest and demonstrates involvement with the process.



DRESS APPROPRIATELY

A good rule of thumb is to dress in a "business casual" style. Some schools provide a dress code, so check the website or call if you have questions.



TURN OFF THE CELL PHONE

It's imperative that your student doesn't text, take a call or check social media during the interview!



FOLLOW UP

A thoughtful, handwritten thank you note or email can go a long way. Encourage your student to ask for the interviewer's business card so that they can follow up later.

APPLYING



Now that your student has narrowed down their top schools, the next step is to address how and when to apply. Many colleges offer various application deadlines — Early Decision, Early Action, Regular Decision and more — and it is important to know the details of each before you decide which one is right for you. Here are some highlights of various application options – be sure to check with each specific school, as not all institutions offer the same options:

EARLY DECISION (ED) I AND II

If your student feels absolutely certain about attending a particular school, EDI may be a good option. It's important to note that ED is a binding contract, meaning that if admitted, they're committed to enrolling at that school. If they're not admitted through EDI, there may be an option to apply EDII to another school. A student can only apply to one school EDI and one school EDII. ED I and II vary only in terms of the deadline to apply.

EARLY ACTION (EA)

Early Action is a good option for students who want to apply to more than one school and compare financial aid packages. It is non-binding; your student can apply to other schools and are not obligated to attend the school if admitted.

RESTRICTED EARLY ACTION/SINGLE-CHOICE EARLY ACTION

Restricted Early Action is similar to Early Action except your student may not apply ED or EA to other private schools. In some cases, applicants can apply EA to a public college whose admission is non-binding. The deadline for Early Decision and Early Action applications is typically in November, with acceptance notifications sent in December.

REGULAR DECISION

If your student doesn't have a clear first choice school, applying Regular Decision may be best. It is non-binding; and there is no limit on the number of schools to which a student can apply. The deadline for Regular Decision is typically in January/February, with acceptance notifications sent in the spring.

ROLLING ADMISSION

Some schools review and decide upon applications as they are received. Technically there are no submission deadlines or decision dates, but it's always good to apply early before space is full.



CHECKLIST

Keep track of your student's college application requirements:

- Create a list of schools
- Compile details and create a resume
- Plan campus visits starting junior year
- Register for the ACT, SAT or both
- Register for a college fair
- Decide on a personal essay prompt via the Common Application
- Write and proofread personal essay
- Create a chart of submission deadlines for each school (ED/EA/Regular)
- Schedule college interviews

Learn more about the admission process and join our mailing list:
[bentley.edu/parent-insider-ebook](https://www.bentley.edu/parent-insider-ebook)

If you have any questions, our admission counselors are here to help.
Email us at ugadmission@bentley.edu.
