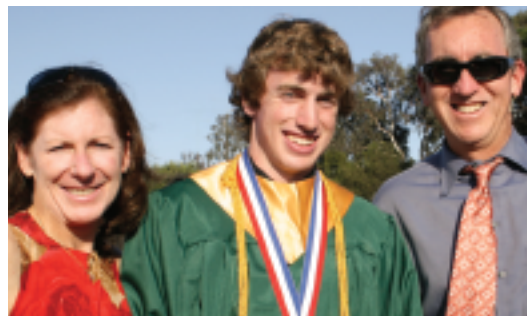


COLLEGE 101



GAIL CURREY is a Mira Costa parent who knows whereof she speaks. That's her on the left, with husband Brian on the right- and in the middle, Sean, MCHS Class of 2007, her second Mira Costa grad.



A PARENT-TO-PARENT GUIDE
TO THE INS AND OUTS OF THE COLLEGE ADMISSION PROCESS

by
GAIL CURREY

This guide was prepared with the help of Cathy Hunt, Lauren Jeffery, Anthonette Sweeney and Mike Pitts, and distributed by the Manhattan Beach Education Foundation.



1. TAKE A DEEP BREATH.

RELAX. YOU WILL GET THROUGH THIS. THE KEY: PREPARE IN ADVANCE, AND KEEP A CAREFUL EYE ON DEADLINES.



THE COLLEGE ADMISSION PROCESS can appear overwhelming when you are just beginning to consider options after high school. Here are some steps you and your child can take to keep on track.

2. HIT THE BOOKS.

The College and Career Center (CCC) distributes a Handbook to all juniors. It's filled with most of the information you will need, including sections on college

entrance exams, financial aid, public and private college requirements, and career resources. Read it carefully. Refer to it often. *This single publication can answer most of your questions.* You can get additional information and updates on the CCC website or from the CCC office in the MCHS Administration Building.

If you want to read more, there are publications by the dozen. Among the most popular: *The Fiske Guide to Colleges* (updated yearly, with detailed descriptions of hundreds of colleges) and *The Gatekeepers*, by Jacques Steinberg (an insider look at admissions at Wesleyan University).

INTERNET RESOURCES. College websites have the latest requirements and information. Many allow you to sign up for their mailing list. You can also find an on-line discussion forum for parents on College Confidential (www.collegeconfidential.com). A resource specific for Mira Costa families is Naviance (<http://connection.naviance.com/mchs>). For another interesting article with tips for parents go to http://www.nacac-net.org/MemberPortal/News/StepsNewsletter/tips_for_parents.htm.

Consider attending college fairs and individual school information sessions. Another option is hiring a private college counselor. Check with the CCC for more information. The truth of the matter is, there is more information available than you'll ever have a chance to read or explore.

STANDARDIZED TESTS. Test prep has become a small industry, and many companies offer SAT and ACT tutoring and review sessions. Practice tests are available on-line, or you can purchase review books.

3. GET ORGANIZED.

Organization is key to keeping stress levels low. As soon as your child's college list is complete, sit down with him or her and prepare *a master calendar* of all due date and deadlines. Keep in mind that due dates vary from school to school, as do deadlines for financial aid, athletic recruitment materials, and supplementary artistic submissions such as music CD's and art portfolios. Include all of them on your calendar.

Make sure your child registers for all college entrance examinations on time. Have your child establish an account for the SAT exam at www.collegeboard.com, and for the ACT exam at www.act.org and encourage him or her to take one or both of these tests. Many colleges also require separate SAT subject tests. For more information, go to www.collegeboard.com.

Encourage your child to line up teacher recommendations at the very beginning of senior year. Some teachers limit the number of recommendations they are willing to write. Of course, it also helps if your child has developed a relationship with a few teachers in advance.

KEEP COPIES OF ALL MATERIALS YOU SEND TO COLLEGES.

You'd be surprised how often schools misplace admission materials, or simply don't receive them. If you mail in admission materials, get a certificate of mailing from the post office (about 95¢). That way, if a college doesn't

receive one or more items by the deadline, you have proof of on-time mailing.

4. FOLDERS, AND MORE FOLDERS.

When your student has decided which schools to apply to, have him or her make a folder for each school. Inside, your child should keep a copy of all correspondence, outgoing and incoming, from each school.

If a college issues your child a user name, password or pin number, make sure it is written on the front of the folder. With these forms of identification, your student can check on the status of his or her application and see the admissions decision on-line (which saves waiting for up to a week longer for the mail).

Many colleges ask for a list of awards and honors. Have your child start keeping a folder of all awards your child has earned since the beginning of high school. Even small acknowledgements should go in the folder. You can decide later if they are worth mentioning.

5. START EARLY.

Fall of senior year can be busy. Set a goal for your child to complete his or her college application essays over the summer *before* senior year. If nothing else, it

will allow ample time for revision. Look at all the essay topics, including the supplemental essays that many common application schools require. Your student can reduce the number of essays he or she has to write by choosing topics that work for several schools.

The summer is also a good time to talk over college options

with your child, such as financial restrictions and geographical considerations, and to come up with a tentative list of colleges.

It's a good idea to talk with your child about college even as early as middle school. Then, every time you travel, visit local colleges and discuss the differences among them. This will help your child get a sense of the type of school he or she might be interested in. Big or small, urban or rural, and so forth.

Discussing college options early may drive home to your child the desirability of taking part in school and community extracurricular activities. It may even motivate him or her to advance to leadership positions on and off the MCHS campus.

Summer is also a prime time for your child to do things colleges may find interesting. Many college applications ask specifically how the applicant made use of summers during the high school years. For a list of summer programs, check the CCC.

6. PARENT INVOLVEMENT.

The extent you get involved in the process depends on you. Your most important role is to motivate and organize. Ultimately, the decision of which college to attend will be up to your child. But you can help keep frustration levels and setbacks to a minimum by helping your child stay on track.

College admissions have become increasingly competitive. As a result, many students are applying to more schools. Even with the common application and on-line application submission, keeping track of deadlines and requirements is no easy task. Add in test preparation, test taking, test submission to schools, application fees, and supplemental forms, and it becomes a real organizational challenge. But not an insurmountable one.

The sooner you get started, the easier it will be.

