SENIOR INFORMATIONAL SESSION

IS COLLEGE RIGHT FOR ME?

- College is **not** your only option; you can also pursue:
  - Trade School
  - Apprenticeships
  - Working out of High School
  - Military Service
- Trade school is becoming increasingly attractive and viable.
- Don't go to college just because you *feel like you have to.* Instead, do what you enjoy. College is not for everyone, and that's okay!

However, if you **do** decide to go to college, here is some advice:

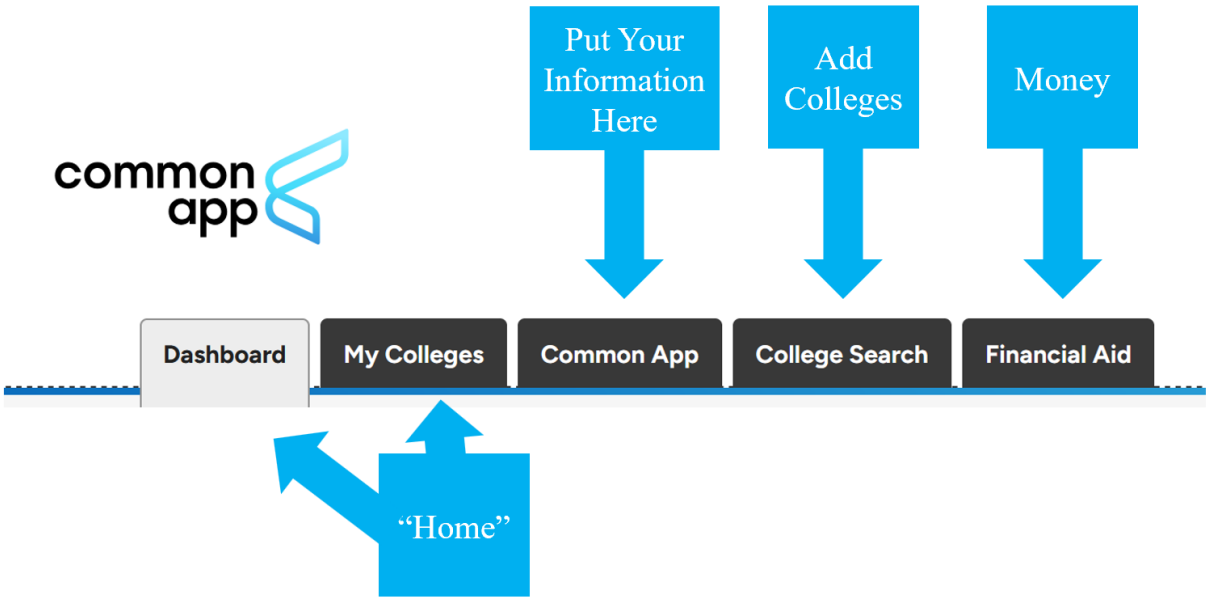
APPLYING TO COLLEGE

COMMON APP

Your best friend when applying to college is **Common App**, especially if you want to apply to multiple colleges.

Common App: https://www.commonapp.org/

Common App is helpful because it organizes everything required for applications in one place.



There are tabs for every part of the application. Before applying to specific schools, click on "Common App" and fill out your information. This will take a while, but it's better than filling out the information *every time* you apply to a different college. After completing this, you will want to search for and "add" the colleges you wish to apply to.

You can then navigate to "My Colleges" to see each application, where you will then have to complete college-specific questions and essays and finally submit the application.

OTHER APPLICATION INFORMATION

- If your school district participates in the federal free lunch program, you may be able to obtain a **waiver on application fees**. These fees are quite expensive otherwise, so it is a good idea to look into this.

  From Common App:

  > You are eligible for application fee waivers if you meet one or more of the following criteria:
  >
  > - You are enrolled in or eligible to participate in the federal free or reduced price lunch program.
  > - You have received or are eligible to receive an SAT or ACT fee waiver.
  > - Your annual family income falls within the income eligibility guidelines set by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service.
  > - Your family receives public assistance.
  > - You are enrolled in a federal, state, or local program that aids students from low-income families (e.g., GEAR UP, TRIO such as Upward Bound or others).
  > - You live in a federally subsidized public housing, a foster home or are homeless.
  > - You are a ward of the state or an orphan.
  > - You have received or are eligible to receive a Pell Grant.
  > - You can provide a supporting statement from a school official, college access counselor, financial aid officer, or community leader.

  - Of course, there are other ways to obtain fee waivers (as listed), but the federal free lunch program is probably the least-known yet most applicable method.
- Be intentional with the schools that you apply to. Applying to colleges *takes time* and you don't want to overload yourself with this while also being in the busiest year of school.

CHOOSING A COLLEGE

SHOULD I GO TO A PRESTIGIOUS UNIVERSITY?

Is it worth it to go to an Ivy League or a world-renowned Technology School? Many students make up their minds and decide they will do all they can to get into one of these schools… and ultimately end up disappointed. Unfortunately, there are significant factors that are out of your control influencing the college's decision to accept you. These factors include geographic area, the person reviewing applications, and even a decent amount of *luck*. We suggest not basing your success off of the prestige of the college you attend, but we instead encourage you to change your fundamental understanding of success.

There is nothing wrong with going to your local in-state college or university. There is also nothing wrong with attending community college. These are not *downgrades* from prestigious schools, but instead they exist to **meet different needs**; needs that are likely closer to your own. What do we mean by this?

- Local colleges are much more affordable than prestigious institutions
- Local colleges typically offer more academic-based scholarships than prestigious universities
- You are much more likely to already have friends at a local college

Let's address another misconception. By going to a prestigious institution, you are **not necessarily** paying for a "better education". Many programs are held to rigorous standards regardless of the university in which they exist. For example, the Mechanical Engineering program from MIT and the Mechanical Engineering program from Marshall University are *both* ABET accredited, meaning they are *both* held to high standards and educational goals. What you are instead paying for with prestigious institutions are professional connections and name recognition. These are often not worth the financial burden of the higher cost of attendance and can be easily sidestepped by pursuing education beyond a bachelor's degree.

IN-STATE VS. OUT-OF-STATE

Students often wonder if the increased financial burden of going out-of-state is worth it. The answer: **it depends**. If your family can handle the financial stress of an out-of-state college, then it may be worth it. Oftentimes, out-of-state schools offer scholarships and ways to mitigate financial stress, but almost never to the extent of being cheaper than in-state schools.

Some students wish to pursue programs that are not found in-state. If this is a sentiment that you share, then it may be wise to consider an out-of-state school. Aside from specific exclusive programs, going to an out-of-state school likely offers no inherent extra benefits. This decision is more of a matter of personal preference.

SCHOLARSHIPS

LOCAL SCHOLARSHIPS

Many students overlook the value of local scholarships. While they are typically relatively small, some scholarships go *completely unclaimed!* Make sure to look out for local organizations and businesses offering scholarships and apply to as many as you can. Good places to look include rotary clubs, local committees, and small businesses.

NATIONAL

National scholarships are usually tricky to get, but many of them are worth looking into! If you are involved in a specific activity or organization, chances are they have a scholarship. For example, if you enjoy rock climbing, USA Climbing has a yearly $1,000 scholarship. Of course, there are also well-known scholarships like the National Merit Scholarship and others.

Large scholarship databases (websites that compile loads of national scholarships and incentivize applying through their website) are *likely a waste of time*. Your time will be much better spent pursuing scholarships that are suited towards YOU. If you are highly involved in your community, your time will be better utilized applying to a local rotary club scholarship rather than a national scholarship.

UNIVERSITY BASED

Many universities have scholarships that are only offered to attending students. These scholarships can be merit-based and automatically given to you, or they could require an application. For example, Marshall University's John Marshall Scholarship is automatically awarded based on GPA and test scores, but Marshall University's Yeager Scholarship is only awarded to selected applicants.

These scholarships typically offer quite a bit of money, so do not overlook them! Apply to *every* scholarship at the university that you could qualify for. Many students make the mistake of putting all of their eggs into one basket and pursuing a specific scholarship and are then devastated if they are not selected. Instead, **be heavy-handed yet intentional when selecting which scholarships you apply to**. If you are planning on majoring in engineering, you should apply to all of the engineering school scholarships through your college, but it would probably not be worth your time to apply for a business school scholarship.

FAFSA

Students are often left confused about *what* the FAFSA is. The FAFSA is the Federal Application for Federal Student Aid. Despite the name saying *application*, many institutions require you to fill out the FAFSA to receive any scholarships, even completely academic-based scholarships. If you believe you will not get any money from the FAFSA, still fill it out. It does not take too long, but you will need a parent's help and input to complete it.

Oftentimes the FAFSA **can** give you some need-based scholarship money, so that is extra incentive towards filling it out! Be careful to discern what parts of their offer are *loans*, and what parts are *grants*. Almost everybody will get a loan offer, but not everybody will get a grant offer.

ESSAYS

No matter what you plan on doing in college, chances are you will have to write an essay at some point in the application process. These essays are **crucial** for success, but finding guidance on them is oftentimes difficult, if not impossible. Here are some tips for crafting successful application essays!

WHAT DO COLLEGES LOOK FOR?

It is difficult to pinpoint one "thing" that colleges are looking for in an essay; if they did, everyone would just include that! Instead, keep these guidelines in mind when constructing your essays:

- *Always* write professionally. Imagine you are writing to someone that controls your future (because you are!). Essays should be well-written and sophisticated: do not include idioms, colloquialisms, or contractions (instead of "I'm", write "I am").

- Be yourself! Colleges want someone that is going to **stand out**. If you try to emulate what you think colleges *might* look for, chances are that thousands of other students are doing the same thing. You have much better odds writing as yourself.

- Be intentional with **every single word**. These essays always have a word limit, so getting your whole point across in the most elegant way possible is important. Do not write "fluff" to meet the word count, and do not mistake this tip as "cram as much information into the essay as possible". Refrain from being *too* specific about yourself but also provide context about what you are discussing. The person reading your essay likely has access to the additional information you have filled out, but they probably will not read it before the essay.

- Stay out of politics the best you can unless the prompt demands it. Colleges usually have their own, well-known political biases, but you **never** know what the individual reading your essay might personally believe. Shifting into politics from an unrelated discussion can also be seen as aggressive or strange. It is generally better to avoid politics altogether if possible.

- Write about something unique if you have the chance. Colleges are looking for passion and genuine interest, so write about your unique interests. For example, if you are a supporter of nuclear energy, write about that interest. Be prepared to answer questions about this, because interviewers will latch on to these unique parts of your essays.

- Remember: you are marketing yourself in these essays. Don't overly exaggerate your accomplishments, but don't be afraid to take credit for your achievements. Find the right balance between humility and showcasing that presents itself as humble yet highly qualified confidence. Colleges don't want someone timid with no accolades, but at the same time, they don't want a braggart. There exists a perfect balance between the two, and that is where your essay should be living.

BEYOND UNDERGRADUATE

MASTER'S

Many students wish to pursue more education after achieving an undergraduate degree. The most common program is a master's degree program, which is typically two extra years of schooling. These degrees not only look great on resumes, but they also provide deeper understanding of topics that you will be working with in your career, and they can help you specialize in a specific part of your field.

Most universities offer master's programs, but it is not uncommon for a student to attend a different (and oftentimes more prestigious) university for their master's degree. Some universities offer programs to get a jump-start on a master's degree while still working on an undergraduate degree.

Master's degrees can be a good investment depending on your field. Companies are almost always more willing to hire someone with a master's degree over a fresh undergraduate earner, and those with master's degrees are often paid more. Research the field of study that you are interested in and determine whether pursuing a master's degree would be a wise investment!

DOCTORATE

Beyond a master's degree is a doctorate degree (often called a Ph. D). Doctorate degrees take a significant amount of time to complete, and by the time you complete one you will be a master of your field. Oftentimes students pursue doctorates for the sake of specialization or interest rather than a financial incentive. The benefits and drawbacks of doctorate programs vary depending on the program, so research your options.

MEDICAL SCHOOL

Medical school is a serious commitment – typically 4 extra years of schooling followed by 3-7 years of residency. Many students are attracted to medical school simply because of the pay. **Do not let this be the case for you**. Only pursue medical school if it is something that you are genuinely interested in.

Medical school is difficult and requires some sacrifices: money and time. After you complete it, the money will come back, but your time likely will not. If you are passionate about becoming a doctor, then medical school might be right for you, but acknowledge that it is a serious and significant decision.

The specific medical school you attend does not matter too much. While going to one of the most prestigious medical schools will likely result in a slightly better job market for you, all medical schools are held to extremely high standards; earning a degree from ANY medical school will be sufficient for a great career.

If you are interested in medical school, check if the university you plan on attending has an "early assurance" program. These programs will help ensure your spot in medical school and oftentimes let you start some classes early! Be careful to not lock yourself into a program that you are uninterested in, however.

CAREER

Most students choose to start their career after obtaining an undergraduate degree. This is never a bad option! Starting your career is a requirement for financial stability. Depending on the area in which you plan to work, a career with only a bachelor's degree can be more financially sound than pursuing more education. Building a positive reputation with an employer takes time, and starting early is never a bad idea. Remember, the ultimate goal of education is to pursue a career, so if you get a good offer, consider taking it!

GRADUATION

WHAT WILL IT LOOK LIKE?

Graduation will last a few hours. Unless you are giving a speech or participating in some other item on the agenda, you will likely have to sit there for most of the time. Expect a few student speeches (usually four: Valedictorian, Salutatorian, Senior Class President, and Student Body President), speeches from school administration, and performances from your school's musical groups.

WHAT DO I NEED TO BE READY?

- Cap
- Gown
- Ensure with your counselor you meet the criteria for graduation
- Cords (optional)
- Other awards such as stoles (optional)

TIPS

- If you can borrow someone else's graduation supplies, do so! You will not be using them more than once, and many people have their graduation equipment tucked away in their closets. This is a great way to save some money and it's ecologically friendly!

- Go to graduation practice! It will not take very long, and it is helpful to get used to the order that you will be seated.

- Show up early!

- Plan to have everything you need for graduation at least a week or two in advance. The last thing you would want is to have an order delayed and miss out on an important item for graduation.