COLLEGE COUNSELING HANDBOOK

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Welcome and Introduction .......................................................... 3
- Responsibilities of Students, Parents, and the College Counselor .......... 4
- Application Timeline .................................................................... 5
- Naviance: Database/Resource for College Counseling ....................... 8
  - How to access your Family Connection Naviance Account ................. 9
- Standardized Testing ................................................................. 10
  - PSAT, SAT, ACT, TOEFL ......................................................... 10
  - SAT vs. ACT: Which Should You Take ....................................... 11
  - Registration, Security Measures, and Transportation ..................... 12
  - Preparation Options .................................................................. 13
- The College Search: Where Do You Begin ..................................... 14
  - Building a Balanced College List ............................................... 15
  - Determining Chances of Admission .......................................... 16
  - Researching Colleges and College Rep Visits ............................... 17
- Campus Visits ........................................................................... 18
  - When and why should you visit? ............................................... 18
  - How to schedule a visit ........................................................... 18
  - Interviews .............................................................................. 18
  - Policy about Missing Classes .................................................... 18
- The Application Process .............................................................. 19
  - What are colleges looking for? .................................................. 19
  - Types of Applications: Early Decision, Priority, and Early Action .... 20
  - The Common Application ....................................................... 22
  - School Forms ........................................................................ 22
  - FERPA Waiver ....................................................................... 22
  - Letters of Recommendation ................................................... 23
  - Writing Effective essays ......................................................... 24
  - Additional Information for special admissions categories .............. 25
    - Collegiate Athletics and the NCAA ......................................... 25
    - Visual and Performing Arts ................................................... 25
    - Military Academies and ROTC ............................................. 25
  - Notification of Disciplinary Infractions ....................................... 26
  - Depositing and the National Candidates’ Reply Date ..................... 26
- Financial Aid and Scholarships ..................................................... 27
  - Need-Based Aid (FAFSA and CSS Profile) .................................. 27
  - Scholarships ......................................................................... 28
- What to do once admissions decisions come back .......................... 29
  - Making a final decision ........................................................... 29
    - Problems with “Double Depositing” ........................................ 29
  - What to do if placed on a waitlist .............................................. 30
  - Gap Years ............................................................................ 30
- Resources .................................................................................. 31
  - Useful Websites ...................................................................... 31
  - Books available in the College Counseling Office ......................... 32
  - NACAC Statement of Principles of Good Practice ....................... 34
WELCOME

Greetings from the College Counseling Office at the American Hebrew Academy! This process can be both exciting and daunting, but we are here to help. The College Counselor is trained, affiliated with pertinent professional associations and in command of current, worldwide information relevant to university-level study. Our goal is to partner with the students and the parents in the process, to present opportunities, to guide students as they organize their application portfolio, to minimize stress and anxiety, and to help students have numerous options regarding financial aid as they review their final choices.

Our mission is to help students gain access to a higher-education opportunity at an appropriate institution where they will flourish, receive a quality education, and succeed in their goals. The College Counseling office seeks to guide the student in their research as they determine the institutions that will best suit their needs and then to help them with admission process to those schools.

We can’t get students into college. What we can do is help them put themselves into the best possible position to earn an acceptance into colleges they hope to attend.

Recognizing the diversity of student interests and family expectations, we give individual guidance in helping students find and apply to colleges that are the right fit. What fits one student does not necessarily fit the next; we get to know the students and families and will recommend colleges based on appropriateness for the student and the family.

It can be easy to get tangled up in rankings, rumors, and misconceptions when looking for colleges. Rather than simply “believing the hype,” it is more important to critically analyze the programs, professors, internship opportunities, location and scholarship opportunities that the college has to offer. The “best” college in the nation according to US News may be the worst ‘fit’ for a particular student. The school might not offer the preferred major nor be able to support the student with their future goals.

We believe that College Counseling should be a four-year process. Therefore, we begin working with students during their first year at AHA by teaching the necessary skills needed to be academically successful, by encouraging them to get involved in activities, and by helping them develop strengths and passions. We work to educate students and parents in determining college choices, the college admissions process, and trends through:

- Individual and group meetings.
- Seminars for students in all grades.
- Meetings, phone calls, and skype sessions with parents during the year.
- Hosting a variety of college admission representatives every year.

Our goals include:

- Educating students and parents about the college application process.
- Helping students and parents identify colleges that are appropriate fits for the student’s and family’s academic, social, religious, financial, and other needs.
- Helping students present themselves in their best light through applications, resumes, and interviews.
- Advocating for students and teaching them how to advocate for themselves.
- Providing information in the College Counseling office, on Naviance, and in Academy Departments regarding summer programs, gap year programs, and scholarships.
- Keeping current on college admissions trends through attending conferences and workshops, participating in webinars, and visiting college campuses.

The purpose of this handbook is to explain the admission process, to answer frequently asked questions that families and students have, and to provide a guide for support as you navigate through the process. There is a great deal of information in here, so please read it carefully. The more familiar you are with it, the more you can help yourself make appropriate decisions.

Ultimately, it is the sole responsibility of the students and parents to obtain relevant information, become familiar with and follow through with application procedures, know and meet established deadlines and make decisions about university selections and programs of study. A successful outcome is dependent upon students carrying out their responsibilities.

Of course you’ll have more questions and concerns, and our door is always open to you.
RESPONSIBILITIES OF STUDENTS, PARENTS, AND THE COLLEGE COUNSELORS

Successfully navigating the college search and application process requires the work and commitment of the student, the parents, and the College Counseling Office at the American Hebrew Academy. The student plays the central role and is the “lead” in the process. Parents and the staff at the Academy support the students as they make decisions about where and how to apply. Below is an outline of the responsibilities of Students, Parents, and the College Counselor.

Responsibilities of Students
- Complete the Senior Questionnaire.
- Complete the Interest Assessment and Career Interest Profiler as mentioned in the Quick Guide folder.
- Complete a resume either in Naviance or in a ‘word’ document.
- Attend announced group meetings.
- Meet registration deadlines for standardized university entrance exams: SAT I, SAT II, ACT, TOEFL, etc. You are responsible for the sending the results to the universities of your choice.
- Research the colleges in which you are interested; take advantage of materials in the College Counseling office; plan college visits; meet with visiting college reps; create the final list in your Naviance account and keep it updated.
- Research scholarship opportunities on the individual university web sites as well as general scholarship web sites.
- Access applications through the Common App or through individual college websites, complete the applications, meet deadlines, and make follow-up calls to colleges as necessary.
- Meet regularly with the College Counselor to discuss your goals and interests, what colleges fit your needs, testing options, application procedures, AHA’s letter of recommendation, teacher recommendations, essays, application issues, and other questions particular to your needs.
- Ask teachers if they are willing and able to write letters of recommendations at least one month in advance of the first deadline.

Responsibilities of Parents
- Complete the Parent Questionnaire.
- Talk to your child about his or her college search process.
- Be upfront with your child and the counselor about any geographic, financial, or other limitations you have for your child’s college search.
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), CSS Profile, International Student Certification of Finances form and/or any additional financial aid documents as requested by colleges.

Responsibilities of the College Counseling Office
- Provide a timetable and a method to guide students through the college admissions process.
- Advise students and parents; provide on-going guidance to meet evolving needs regarding admissions, scholarships, and financial aid.
- Inform students and parents of planned College Counseling events.
- Assist students with registration and testing information; along with the registration process if needed.
- Provide access to current electronic and hard copy college counseling materials pertaining to college search and college admissions; testing reference materials; scholarship opportunities, summer programs, and gap year information.
- Assist students with the creation of their initial university list and as they refine the list for fall applications.
- Write the official school letter of recommendation.
- Assist students as they select teachers for their recommendation letters.
- Submit all supporting documentation; including transcripts, the school profile, recommendation letters, etc., to colleges as required.
- Outreach to the university admissions office in support of the AHA applicant.
COLLEGE PREP AND APPLICATION TIMELINE

Freshman and Sophomore years
- Do well in classes. Freshman and sophomore year grades count!
- Get involved in clubs and activities that interest you. Freshman year is a time to sample activities and decide upon the ones in which you’ll make more of a commitment as you move through high school.
- Freshmen meet with the College Counselor during Success 101: Time Management.
- Sophomores: meet with the College Counselor for Goal Setting.
- Set up your Naviance Account. Keep track of all awards and activities in the resume feature. Complete the Interest Inventory and Career Profile by the end of your freshman year and once again by the end of your sophomore year.
- Sophomores: at the end of the year, if possible, visit a variety of college campuses during breaks or over the summer, not during the school year.
- Do something during the summer that interests you: go to camp, get a job, volunteer, interview professionals in your field of interest, or write the next great American novel.
- Get to know the College Counselor. We are here for you! You’re always welcome to come in and chat, ask questions, and learn what information is available in the office.

Junior Year

September – November
- Enjoy Israel and do well in classes: AMHSI grades DO get sent to colleges!

December-January
- Begin optional Princeton Review SAT or ACT Prep Class at AHA.
- Plan visits to college campuses if you haven’t done so already, do not miss class. Your grade 11th grades are the most important as you apply to university in the fall of your senior year.
- Attend all group sessions with the College Counselor. Then schedule individual meetings.
- Complete the Interest and Career Profile again.

January-February
- Register for your first SAT or ACT.
- Meet individually with the College Counselor to review college process.
- Build a preliminary college list in Naviance and research those schools: make a list of what you do and don’t like about the schools to share with the College Counselor.

March/April
- Set up online College Board Account after receiving your SAT Ticket.
- Attend panel discussions and workshops offered at AHA.
- Take your first SAT in March or ACT in April. OR make sure you’re registered for the May/June test.
- Meet with your counselor regularly as you are making college plans.
- Register for May and/or June SAT, SAT II, or ACT, if appropriate.
- Visit a variety of schools during spring break if possible.

May
- Make summer plans: community service, a job, and/or academics.
- Review your revised college list in Naviance with the College Counselor.
- Take SAT or SAT II, if appropriate.

June
- Parents and students should complete their College Counseling Questionnaire; submit by fall.
- Take the June SAT, SAT II, or ACT, if appropriate.
- International Students: register for a July or August TOEFL test in your home country, or in September in Greensboro.
- International students: fill out the Certification of Finances with parents. A copy is needed for any application to a U.S. college.
Summer

- Complete your resume in Naviance.
- Visit as many colleges on your list as possible.
- The Common Application (www.commonapp.org) goes live in August for the coming academic year. Don’t start before August: it’ll wipe out your account during the system upgrades in July!
- Most college applications are ready online for you to begin applying.
- Start working on college essays, especially those on the Common App.
- Check the Scholarship/Financial Aid pages for your colleges for additional requirements or applications.
- Search for outside scholarships (those not offered by the college). Make a list of deadlines and requirements.
- Ask the admissions departments of the colleges if an interview is required; if it is, make an appointment to do that.
- Register online for the SAT or ACT in the fall.

August/September

- Finish Questionnaire/Brag Sheets and submit to the College Counselor.
- Work hard in classes. First term grades are automatically sent to colleges. Admissions Officers also want to see you doing well the rest of the year.
- Ask or confirm with two teachers if they would be willing to write your letters of recommendation. Add these teachers to your Naviance account.
- Finalize your college list in the “Colleges to Which I am Applying” section of Naviance.
- Make decisions about which colleges you are applying to Early Action, Early Decision, or Regular Decision. Check dates. Be sure this information is correct in Naviance.
- Begin any scholarship applications that may be necessary for your colleges.
- International students: give the Certification of Finances form (Signed by Parents) to the College Counselor.
- Continue working on applications.
- Register online for November SATs, SAT IIs, or ACTs.

October

- Work on any required additional scholarship applications.
- Send SAT and/or ACT scores to any of your Early Action or Early Decision colleges. Students are responsible for having all test scores sent directly to colleges.
- Take October SAT, SAT IIs, or ACT, if appropriate. You should plan on testing this month if you’re applying Early Action or Early Decision.
- Visit with College Representatives coming to AHA.
- Make plans to visit colleges during the fall and finalize interview appointments.

November

- Complete applications for Early Action and Early Decision deadlines.
- Take November SAT, SAT IIs, or ACT, if appropriate. This is the last possible test to send in Early Action or Early Decision!
- Continue to research and apply for outside scholarships, and make sure to apply by the deadlines.

December

- Your college applications should be completed before break if your deadlines fall in the early part of January.
- Send SAT and/or ACT scores to any remaining colleges.
- ED and most EA decisions are made by colleges this month.
January – March

- The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) becomes available on January 1. Fill this out ASAP if you are applying for need-based financial aid.
- Follow all the college instructions and deadlines for applications for financial aid including the FAFSA, the CSS (profile found on the College Board – required by some universities), and/or any required university-specific documents.
- Follow up with your colleges to confirm that required forms have been received.
- Continue working hard in classes. Final grades DO get sent to the college of your choice. If you’re taking an AP class, study hard: good test scores can save you tuition dollars and/or give you more flexibility in college to double major/choose electives/study abroad.
- Continue to apply for outside scholarships.
- Plan your final visits to colleges; take advantage of accepted student weekends.
- Update acceptance decisions in Naviance as you learn them from colleges.
- Talk to the College Counselor if you are waitlisted at a school so you know what your options are.

April

- Decision month! Visit colleges one last time if you need to do so. Discuss choices with your family.
- Finish the school year strongly. No offer of admission is final until the college receives your final transcript with the graduation date on it. Colleges can and do withdraw admission offers if there is a significant decline in grades or if major classes have been dropped!

May

- May 1: Deadline to submit your deposit at the ONE institution of choice. Make sure to update Naviance with this choice and/or tell the College Counselor.
- Fill out any required paperwork for your college (housing, health documents, etc.)
- Happy Graduation!

June

- Your final transcript will automatically be sent to the college at which you have matriculated. These get sent as soon as the business office tells us that your accounts have cleared.
NAVIANCE/FAMILY CONNECTION

Naviance/Family Connection is a web-based college tool for organizing the entire college search and application process that students, parents, and College Counselors will all share. However, there’s a lot more to Naviance than just the college search, and we start working with students in Naviance as early as the freshman year.

As the College Counselor, I use it to:

- Post updates regarding College Rep visits, scholarship and summer enrichment opportunities, SAT and ACT dates and registration deadlines, and other pertinent information.
- Track student’s GPA and standardized test scores.
- Track the colleges that each student is considering and make suggestions based on individual interests, GPA, and scores.
- Track college applications and which teachers will be writing recommendations.
- Upload all supporting documents (transcripts, recommendations, school reports, and the school profile), and electronically submit these documents to the universities to which students apply when this option is available (about 95% of schools accept electronic submissions); when schools don’t accept electronic submissions, I print the documents from the student’s account and mail them.

Students have access to the program to:

- Keep journal notes, create and utilize to-do lists, and put together a resume with their awards, community service, work experience, athletic experiences, and more.
- Explore careers and what jobs people get with particular majors.
- Take career and personality assessments.
- See announcements regarding College Rep Visits, SAT and ACT test dates and registration deadlines, and look at scholarship and summer opportunities.
- Look for colleges, access college websites, and compare their grades and test scores to previous AHA applicants to particular colleges (students can see the schools and the other students’ approximate GPAs and SAT scores, but not names).
- Keep track of application deadlines, which applications have been sent, admissions decisions, scholarships awarded, etc.

Parents have access to their child’s Naviance account to:

- See announcements regarding College Rep Visits, SAT and ACT test dates and registration deadlines, look at scholarship and summer opportunities, etc.
- Research colleges, look at admissions criteria, find ones that you believe fit your child’s profile, and see where other AHA students have applied and been accepted (parents can see the schools and the students’ approximate GPAs and SAT scores, but not names).
- See the list of colleges that your child and/or the College Counselors have added to his or her file, and add colleges that you would like your child to consider.
- Access each college’s website and find contact information for the admissions departments.
- Access popularly used websites, such as the College Board and Common Application (students will learn more about these later), financial aid and scholarship websites, and more.
HOW PARENTS CAN ACCESS THEIR
NAVIANE/ FAMILY CONNECTION ACCOUNT

Logging in for the first time:

1. Email the College Counseling office to get your username and password. When the Counselor registers you through the website, you will get an email with your user name and a temporary password.
2. Go to http://connection.naviance.com/americanhebrew (worth bookmarking)
3. You will be asked to create a permanent password. If you ever forget this, contact the College Counselor to reset it.

Once you have set up your account in Naviance:

- **Please check your child’s profile** (click About Me → Official Things → Profile) and see if the data (phone number, email address, date of birth, etc.) is correct. If anything is incorrect, the information can be edited.
- To see **test scores**, click About Me → Official Things → Test Scores.
- To look for **colleges**, click on the Colleges tab at the top. From here, you can pick any school you’d like to look at. (If you just want to play around a bit and see how some of the comparisons work, click on American or Brandeis; we’ve had many students apply there).
  - From the college page, you will see a lot of information, as well as hyperlinks to other pages. For example, you will see your child’s GPA and test scores in relation to the average GPA and test scores for previous AHA students who were accepted at Brandeis. (New students will not have scores or GPAs entered yet. This will be updated when information is available.)
- **Directly under the contact information for the school**, you see a series of links (View Website, Overlaps, School Stats, etc). One of the Hyperlinks says **Graph**. Your child is represented by the red circle. The green boxes represent accepted students; the red Xs are students who were NOT accepted. You can compare your child’s current GPA and test scores to those who have been accepted or denied. This works particularly well for schools where several AHA students have applied. For students who have yet to take the SAT, their PSAT score is converted to the SAT score for comparison. SAT scores will be entered into Naviance when available.
- **At the top of the page**, click on “Back to College Profile.” In the middle of the page, there is a series of boxes that say General Info, Admissions, Financial Aid, Majors And Degrees, Student Life. Click on the Admissions tab; that will provide data about which tests are required for the college, what percentage of students are accepted, average SAT score, and other good information.
- There are several ways to search for colleges listed on the Welcome page and under the **Colleges** tab. From there, you can also add colleges to the “Colleges I’m Thinking About” tab (and also see what has been added by the student or the College Counselor).
- To review the testing and application checklist, click About Me → Checklist. There are steps that most students will need to do in the college search and application process.
- To look for scholarships, click Colleges → Scholarship Match (at the bottom).
- To see which college admissions representatives are visiting AHA in the fall, take a look on the right side of the home page under “Updates.” This will be updated frequently as new information comes in.

There is quite a bit more you can do in Naviance, and we encourage to play around on it. It is an excellent source of information!
STANDARDIZED TESTING: PSAT, SAT, ACT, and TOEFL

Although not the most important component of a student’s application, the SAT or ACT scores do play an important part of admissions decisions by allowing universities to compare students from across the country. Most students will take the SAT or the ACT in the spring of junior year and once again in the fall of senior year, but when and how many times a student takes it is an individual choice. Consult with the College Counselor to determine what is best for you.

NOTE: Students are responsible for registering for the SAT or ACT!
The counseling office prominently posts test dates and registration deadlines and sends this information in newsletters and emails, but it is the student and family’s responsibility to register and pay for the exams.

PSAT/NMSQT:
The PSAT is administered on a Wednesday morning in mid-October. The test serves two purposes: first as a practice test used to prepare students for the SAT, and second as a diagnostic tool. All freshman, sophomores, and juniors are expected to take the exam with the exception of students in ESOL classes who will not be attending university in the United States. We register the students automatically. Juniors in Israel will take the PSAT at AMHSI. For juniors, the PSAT also serves as the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMSQT). The National Merit Foundation uses this exam as the initial criteria in its scholarship competition. Students with sufficiently high scores may be named as National Merit Commended Students, as Semi-Finalists, or as Merit Scholars. PSAT results are mailed to the school in early December; we will distribute score reports and the test booklet to the students, and one copy will be kept in the students’ files in the College Counseling office. These scores are never sent to colleges. More information can be found at www.collegeboard.com and at www.nationalmerit.org.

SAT:
The SAT tests students in three areas: Critical Reading, Math, and Writing, and is offered seven times throughout the school year (usually October, November, December, January, March, May, and June). More information and registration can be found at www.collegeboard.com.

SAT II/Subject Tests:
These are one-hour, subject-specific exams offered in different disciplines. Highly selective schools usually require two Subject Tests; each school sets its own requirements, so students need to check each school’s requirements. Some schools simply ask for two tests; others may specify particular areas (one in math/science and one in humanities, for example). Subject tests are administered on the same day as the SAT, so students can either take the SAT or the Subject Tests during any given administration, and students can take up to three subject tests on a single day. Subject tests are usually NOT given on the March administration date, and not all subject tests are given on all dates. Hebrew, for example, is only available on the May or June test date.

ACT:
The ACT tests students in English, Math, Social Studies, and Science, and is offered six times throughout the year (usually September, October, December, February, April, and June). This also has an optional writing section which we highly recommend that the students complete. Some universities that require SAT IIs will waive that requirement if the student takes the ACT with writing. More information and registration can be found at www.actstudent.org.

TOEFL:
The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is required only for non-native English speakers. Many universities require this in addition to either the SAT or the ACT, and many will use this score in place of the verbal portion of the other standardized test. The computer-based exam is given on multiple Fridays and Saturdays throughout the year in Greensboro, and is also offered in locations around the world. Registration is done online at http://www.ets.org/toefl/ibt/register/.
**SAT vs. ACT: WHICH SHOULD YOU TAKE?**

Students often find that they do better on one test than the other; they are very different types of tests, and students should carefully explore which is better for them.

Here are some differences between the two exams:

**SAT:**
- Lasts almost 4 hours.
- Tests Critical Reading, Math, and Writing. There will be 2-3 sections each of Critical Reading and Math, and 1 section of Writing.
  - There will not be any trig or more advanced math, but there are free-response questions in the math section.
  - Vocabulary is tested out-of-context (do you know the word or not?)
- This is a reasoning exam. Some people think that the questions on the exam are trickier than on the ACT; many are designed to see if students are able to interpret the question rather than testing the student’s ability to answer it.
- ¼ point is deducted from the final score for incorrect answers.
- Non-native English speakers often find the SAT more challenging than the ACT because of the emphasis on testing vocabulary out-of-context; however, the ACT will test more grammar points (which may or may not be easier for English Language Learners).

*The SAT might be the test for you if you:* have a great vocabulary and really understand grammar, did well on the PSAT and are comfortable with that test, do better with a lot of shorter tests (there are nine 20- or 25-minute sections on the SAT), or consider yourself “test savvy” and can figure out what the questions are asking.

**ACT:**
- Lasts about 3.5 hours.
- Tests Reading, Math, Science, and Social and is considered to be more knowledge-based (i.e., what have you learned?) than the SAT.
  - There are charts and graphs that require interpretation.  
  - Up to 10% of the math questions will be trigonometry.  
  - More of the vocabulary and grammar is in context.
  - There is a lot of biology in the science section, so students should take this in June rather than April to make sure they finish the biology curriculum.
- The writing section on the ACT is optional, but there are several schools that will waive the SAT II (subject test) requirement if the ACT writing section is completed. More and more schools are asking for the writing section, so it’s a good idea to take it.
- Incorrect answers are not penalized (nothing is deducted).
- There are more total questions on the ACT than on the SAT, but all ACT questions are multiple-choice.

*The ACT might be the test for you if you:* have great reading comprehension, had a bit of trig, like writing persuasion essays, have retained what you’ve learned in classes, like straight-forward questions that test what you know rather than if you can figure out what’s being asked, or if you like having a bit longer to finish a test section without being interrupted.
STANDARDIZED TESTING:
Registration, Security Measures, and Transportation

SUNDAY REGISTRATION FOR TESTS: Both the SAT and the ACT are normally given on Saturdays. However, Sunday testing is available for students with religious restrictions preventing them from testing on Saturdays, and we encourage all AHA students to test on Sunday. In almost every case, the Sunday test date will fall on the day immediately following the Saturday administration of the exam. The registration procedures for the two different exams are as follows:

- **SAT:** In order to be entered into the system as a Sunday test-taker, students must first fill out a paper registration form, available from the College Counselor. Students need to enter code 01000 for the test location and use their AHA address on the form. This will be mailed to the College Board in the envelope provided, along with a letter from a rabbi confirming religious restrictions on Saturday testing. The College Counselor will prepare these letters and have one of the campus rabbis sign them. Once the student has completed this initial registration, he or she will be coded in the College Board system as a Sunday test-taker; all future registrations should be completed online through the student’s College Board account.

- **ACT:** The ACT does not require paper registration to test on a Sunday so students will register online. Students taking the ACT in Greensboro should enter code 234791 for their test location. This allows them to test on Sunday at The Academy at Smith, the closest location to AHA. If they use the proper code, it will register them as Sunday test takers and will print properly on the ticket, but will show up as Saturday during the registration process. Students will need to bring a rabbi letter with them to the exam. These need to be picked up from the College Counselor in advance of the test day.

- **TOEFL:** In Greensboro, the TOEFL is only offered on Fridays and Saturdays. Students who are Shomer Shabbat should register for the Friday administration of the exam. They will be excused from their morning classes for this.

TESTING SECURITY:
Both the ACT and the SAT have implemented new security procedures:

- Students must upload or send in a photo during the registration process. This photo must:
  - Resemble the student (don’t drastically change hairstyles, etc., before the test)
  - Be clear (no blurry or dark pictures)
  - Only have the student in the picture (no group shots)
  - Be similar to a passport picture (head and shoulders type of shot)

- Students must present BOTH an admission ticket and photo ID (school ID is fine) on the morning of the exam. NO TICKET and/or NO ID = NO ADMISSION!
  - Students should print their admission ticket BEFORE the day of the exam since the system often does not allow tickets to be printed on the morning of the test.

- Standby admission will no longer be allowed. Wait-listing is an option, and students may register for waitlist status until about 5 days before the exam.

- Changes to the test center, test date, or test type will not be permitted on test day. The only exception to this is if a student decides to reduce the number of subject tests taken that day.

TRANSPORTATION TO TESTS:
Transportation is usually available to standardized testing for boarding students (and for day students, space allowing). This is provided as a courtesy, and we make every effort to have a staff member drive the students, but we do not guarantee it. Very occasionally, if there is not a staff member available, students will need to arrange for a cab; the College Counselor will help students arrange for this if necessary.
PREPARATION OPTIONS

There are many ways to prepare for standardized tests. One of the best ways is to work hard in classes, to look over your PSAT results to see which areas need additional study, and to review vocabulary and math concepts before the test. However, some students want more formal preparation, and there are many options available to them.

1) Book Options: There is a myriad of books to choose from available at libraries, bookstores, and online. This is a sampling of options, and does not indicate a specific endorsement.
   - The College Board’s Official SAT Study Guide. Available on Amazon; Cost: about $14
   - The Real ACT (CD) 3rd Edition. Available on Amazon; Cost: about $20
   - A fun book to read, written by college students who aced the SAT, is called Up Your Score. Available on Amazon, new and used; Cost: about $10-$15
   - There are several books in the College Counseling Office available to loan to students. (See the list of resources in the Appendix.)

2) Online Options: (there are many choices found if you Google “SAT or ACT Practice/Prep”)
   - http://www.number2.com/
   - One of the best websites I have found for straight-forward tips and advice about the SAT is SPARKNOTES – simple, clear strategies for each section of the SAT, and advice on many of the SAT II exams as well. It’s FREE: http://www.sparknotes.com/testprep/

3) Classes (including e-prep and in-person)
   - On-campus Princeton Review classes: AHA has partnered with Princeton Review for many years to offer prep classes on campus. The SAT class occurs during the winter term, and we have started offering an ACT class in the spring term. Juniors can take either or both classes after returning from Israel. Sophomores are welcome to register, space permitting. The current cost for the class is $399.
   - Other classes: Princeton Review, Kaplan, and other national companies, as well as many local companies and colleges, offer test-prep classes throughout the year, including the summer. Doing a Google search will help you find local options. Some national options include:
     o http://www.kaptest.com/College/SAT/index.html
     o http://www.kaptest.com/College/ACT/act-prep-courses.html
   - There are several e-prep options, as well, which can be found on Google.

4) Tutors in the local area, many of whom can come to campus; contact directly to hire:
   - Sabrina Hinson (Critical Reading Only): sheriffbob@bellsouth.net or 336-508-9920
   - Elizabeth Joyce (Math Only): Elizard62@yahoo.com or 336-707-3383
   - Angie Kratzer (Critical Reading Only) **Available only during the summer angiekratzer@hotmail.com or 336-540-9675 (home) 336-337-1181 (Cell)
   - Jonathan Miller (Math: Algebra through Calculus) ** Fluent Spanish Speaker millerpoma@gmail.com or 336-454-2411
   - Mary Nance, Academic Development Services: ads@triad.rr.com or 336-288-3098
   - Elizabeth Owen (Princeton Review Tutor: get 10% off if you take the PR class) elizabethowens15@gmail.com or 336-202-0563
   - Kally Webster (Math Only): Kally.webster@gmail.com
THE COLLEGE SEARCH: WHERE DO YOU BEGIN?

The U.S. has over 2,000 not-for-profit four-year colleges and universities. This number is overwhelming, and most people only know a tiny percentage of the options out there. As students start researching schools, some will be easy to knock off the list: they don’t have a particular major, are too big or small, are too close or too far from home, or are too religious or not religious enough -- but even after narrowing down the list, there still will be lots of schools that are just right!

Students: in order to start deciding where you want to go, there are a lot of things to consider. Don’t discard a college because you haven’t yet heard of it or you have heard rumors about it. Take the media hype, the gossip, and the random information floating around the internet with a grain of salt, and remember that colleges, just like people, change over time. What might have been true when your parents (and sometimes even older siblings) were in school is not necessarily still true. Talk to people who have recently gone to that college, talk to the College Counselors, and look at Naviance and other recommended websites to get the real scoop.

The first thing you need to do is be honest with yourself, your parents, and the College Counselor about what you want. Think about your skills, interests, and learning style; being able to express what you do and don’t want for academics, social offerings, campus feel, and religious life will go a long way in helping you decide on the colleges to which you’ll ultimately apply. Remember that only YOU can determine where you’ll be happy and successful for the next four years of your life.

Here are things to consider:

- **Academic Programs**: What general areas might you be interested in studying? Be honest about your interests and strengths: do you love the sciences? Sports management? History? This doesn’t mean that you have to pick a major, but if you think you might want to explore Criminal Justice or Robotics or Neuroscience, pick schools with those options so you can decide when you get there. If you’re really undecided, look for schools with a range of options so you can explore what is available to you and decide after you get to college.

- **Learning Style**: Are you an auditory learner? Do you like to discuss things with your peers? Do you want to ask questions in class? The answers to these are important. Auditory learners thrive in lecture halls; kinesthetic learners do not! Knowing what type of learning works for you can help you decide now big or small a school is appropriate.

- **Your academic profile**: How strong is your GPA? Your standardized test scores? It’s good to have a couple of “reach” schools, but those can’t be the only schools on your list. If you have a strong academic record, do you want an Honors Program?

- **Geographic Region**: How close to home would you like to be? Someplace where you can ski, go hiking, or go to the beach? A big city, a town, or way out in the fields?

- **Extra-Curriculars**: You’re going to be spending a lot of time outside of the classroom. In addition to getting a challenging, engaging education, you should strive to be somewhere that will allow you to take part in activities that are important to you. Do you want to join a fraternity or sorority? Be part of Hillel or Chabad? Play a sport? Join a particular club? Make sure the school has the activities that will make your experience meaningful.

- **All the extras**: Does the school have all the other services that you want or need? Does it offer a kosher or vegetarian or gluten-free meal plan? Are tutoring or career services free and easy to access? Can you participate in study abroad without taking extra time to graduate? Can you live on campus all four years if you want or move off after freshman year? Do you want specialized housing options (Green dorms, honors housing, special interest housing)?
THE COLLEGE SEARCH: BUILDING A COLLEGE LIST

Sometimes it can be difficult to find schools that fit the student’s and family’s criteria AND are appropriate admissions matches. The College Counselors are here to help by making suggestions that fit the student on all levels. As we develop your list, we will look at your academic, social, financial, and religious criteria for a school and then compare your grades, test scores, the rigor of your classes, and your leadership and extra-curricular involvement to the schools that fit your needs. We will discuss the likelihood of admission to each school so you can appropriately balance your list.

The number of colleges to which each student applies will depend on a number of factors, but applying to 6-8 colleges is plenty if the student has done his or her homework. Students should develop a realistic list of college choices based on difficulty of admission to the schools. Naviance uses the following terms, so we’ll use those for consistency: Far Reach, Reach, Possible, Likely, Safety. Sometimes different terms are used, but the concept remains the same: they describe the difficulty of gaining admission by comparing the university’s admissions records and freshman profile to a student’s academic credentials.

- **Far Reach**: A college to which far fewer students with similar profiles have been admitted. This school is so competitive that it is a reach for almost every applicant, even those with top grades, test scores, and extra-curriculars. Many well-qualified students are denied admission.
- **Reach**: A college to which fewer students with similar profiles have been admitted than have not. Often these colleges accept less than 30% of applicants.
- **Possible**: A competitive college where the majority of applicants have credentials like yours; some are admitted and some are not. Your grades and scores tend to fall within the middle 50% of applicants of the freshman profile. There is no guarantee of admission but your academic credentials will make you a competitive candidate.
- **Likely**: A college with an application pool that makes you a good candidate, and one that admits a large portion of applicants. Your grades and scores generally are at the top end of (or above) the middle-50% of reported scores. While there are no guarantees of acceptance, it is likely that you will be admitted.
- **Target**: A college with an application pool that falls well below your academic profile, or a school that accepts most applicants. Your grades and scores are well above the middle 50% of reported scores. While high GPAs and test scores alone don’t guarantee admission, there is nothing to indicate that you would not be admitted to this school.

We recommend 1 to 2 Reach or Far Reach schools and 1 to 2 Likely or Safety schools, with the majority of choices falling in the Possible range. It’s important to build a balanced list of schools; doing so will enable the student to have several choices in the spring!

Remember that there are more students applying to colleges now than even ten years ago. This has increased the competitiveness of the best-known schools, which in turn has affected other schools. Lesser-known schools, or institutions that previously had reputation as “safety” or “bad” schools, now are more demanding and more competitive. Students who would have gone to a “Brand-Name” school 10 or 20 years ago are no longer being offered admission to those schools and have chosen other schools, which raises standards. Before you decide against a school because you have not heard of it – or because it had a bad reputation 20 years ago – research it. Take a look at the typical GPA and test scores of students being admitted. You may be surprised at the high caliber of the students there!
HOW DO YOU DETERMINE YOUR CHANCES OF ADMISSION?

There are several ways to compare yourself to students being offered admission to a particular school:

- In Naviance, click on the “College” tab. On the left side, you’ll see a menu under “College Research.”
  - College Compare lets you choose up to 10 colleges at a time and will show you a chart comparing your GPA and test scores to other AHA students who have been accepted into that school.
  - Scattergrams show you a graph comparing your GPA and SAT scores to all AHA students who have applied to (not just gotten into) the school and the results of those applications.
  - Click on the name of a college that you’re interested in and then click the “Admissions” tab about halfway down. Take a look at the SAT and ACT ranges as well as the average GPA. If your numbers fall within the middle 50%, that institution would be considered a good “Possible” school. The higher your numbers are in relation to the school’s average, the more of a “Likely” this school becomes, and vice versa: if your numbers are lower than the averages, this is a “Reach” school for you.

- Using https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search, do a search for colleges. Make sure you click on the “Applying” tab and enter your SAT or ACT scores. This will help filter schools that accept students with your academic criteria.

- Using the books or the admissions brochures in the College Counseling office, take a look at schools’ mid-50% range for grades and SAT or ACT scores. Often, these materials will also indicate if you’d be eligible for merit scholarships.

- Talk to the College Counselor. Often, we have information about colleges that might not be apparent from the promotional material. For example, we may know if a state university is looking to increase its out-of-state population or is trying to grow a particular program; this may increase a student’s chances of acceptance at a particular school.

- Remember that numbers are not the end-all and be-all! Numbers alone will not get you into the schools. First, the numbers are averages, so the same numbers of people fall above as below; second, if you look at the scattergrams on Naviance, you’ll notice the “outliers” – students with grades and standardized test scores above the average who were not admitted to a school, and students with grades and standardized test scores below the average who were admitted. Most schools will use a holistic evaluation, so they will take extenuating circumstances, special talents, and other criteria into account when making admissions decisions.
WHERE CAN YOU SEARCH FOR COLLEGES?

You will meet with the College Counselor starting in the second trimester of junior year to talk through your interests and needs as they relate to the college search. There are also several ways to do a college search on your own:

- In Naviance, click on the College tab. Under College Research, click on SuperMatch. Use any or all of the categories to narrow your choices. This is also the same search as you’ll find on:
  - www.collegeconfidential.com: If you don’t want to go through Naviance, bookmark this site. In addition to the search feature, this gives other types of information about college and financial aid.
  - www.insidecollege.com: Want to know where you can study forensics? Where the hidden gems are (the best schools you’ve never heard of)? Where to go if you’re on the shy side? This site has great lists (including good schools for B students, specific majors, schools in particular regions). Make sure to check out the “Where Movies Were Filmed” list!
  - www.collegeexpress.com: Another site with good search features.
  - www.collegeboard.com: Good search features – and where you’ll need to go to register for the SATs and eventually request that scores get sent to schools.
  - www.careersandcolleges.com: This covers everything from majors to schools to scholarships.
  - www.zinch.com: Set up a bit like Facebook, you set up an account, search for colleges, and chat (video and/or typing) with current students and admissions people, etc. Admissions people can also see your profile, and they may send messages. There are some scholarship opportunities on here, as well.

- Most importantly: TALK TO VISITING COLLEGE REPRESENTATIVES: Throughout the fall (and occasionally in the spring), representatives from College Admissions offices travel to visit high schools. Short of visiting a college campus, talking to these reps is one of the best things a student can do to help determine if that particular school might be a fit and worth considering!

These visiting representatives will almost always be the first person to read the applications coming from the American Hebrew Academy. Taking time to talk to the rep could make a difference in your application! This is your chance to show the rep the real you beyond the application. Have a conversation and show the rep that you’re interested in the school! Some reps have said that they’re more likely to accept people that they have a connection with or who have demonstrated interest in the school through these high school visits.

However, these visits are NOT just for seniors! All students are encouraged to visit reps, even as early as freshman year (especially since juniors will miss most of the rep visits that occur while they’re in Israel). Many students avoid the reps because they haven’t heard of a college or they don’t know what to say. It’s easy to start up a conversation with general questions like:

- “Hi. I’m a freshman/sophomore and I’m just starting to look at colleges. I don’t know anything about your school. Can you tell me a little bit about it?”
- “Hi. I think I may be interested in history/psychology/pre-med/whatever. Can you tell me about your program?”
- “Hi. I love acting/playing soccer/being in student government. Can you tell me about possibilities for continuing that on your campus?”
- “I’m interested in scholarships. What do you offer, and how can I earn one?”
**CAMPUS VISITS**

**When and why you should visit campuses:** Visiting campuses is one of the best ways to determine what type of college is right for you. The “gut feeling” that people talk about is real; trust it! You’ll know when you get on campus if it feels right or not. If you don’t like it now, it’s probably not going to get better. If you love it even if you visit on a dreary winter or rainy day, you’ll love it more when it’s beautiful! Sometimes you’ll feel “neutral” or that a campus is “ok.” This might be a good backup school for you – it’s not your first choice, but you’ll do fine if you go there.

We recommend that students start visiting colleges even as early as freshman or sophomore year. That early in the process, it’s not important to find a specific college that you think you’ll want to apply to. Instead, find representative samples of two or three different types of schools such as a small liberal arts school, a medium research university, and a larger state school. What feels right? This can help quite a bit later as you determine which specific schools you’ll want to concentrate on.

From junior year into the beginning of senior year, visits should be targeted at the schools to which you think you’ll be applying. Go to the admissions information sessions, take a tour, eat in the dining hall, sit in on a class, see the typical freshmen dorms, etc. Ask a lot of questions! The tour guides love talking about their school – it’s why they’re tour guides. They are the ones who will give you the honest answers about everything from academics to food to the social scene to the dorms.

**Scheduling Visits:** Go to the Admissions page of the college you’d like to visit. There will be a link that says “Visit” or something similar. Click on this to learn about available information sessions and tour times. Many colleges offer these at set times. Some colleges (particularly the smaller ones) may be flexible and will work around your schedule; these schools will give you a number to call so they can arrange your visit.

**Interviews:** Many schools will offer applicants the opportunity to interview with an admissions representative; a few schools (such as Wake Forest) require one. Please check admissions criteria carefully, so you can schedule an interview when you visit if it is required.

**AHA’s Policy about Missing Classes and Shabbat:** If you plan on missing classes and/or any weekend commitments, you can be excused if you follow the guidelines spelled out in the *HaMadrich*:

“Class absences due to approved college visits will be counted as excused for seniors or juniors, providing that a minimum of one-week notice is provided by parents to the College Counseling Office. Students must adhere to the school attendance policy, which allows no more than five absences per term in a course; thus, they should plan college trips carefully to stay within the approved limit. Students must inform the College Counselor of their plans and pick up the College Visit form from the College Office at least a week in advance, submit the completed form at least two school days before their anticipated absence, and provide parent documentation of their travel plans. These approved absence forms will be kept on file in the Academic Office.”
THE APPLICATION PROCESS

What are colleges looking for?

Just like you select colleges based on what they offer and how they fit your personality, colleges want students who fit their institution and will bring desired qualities to campus. Yes, they want students who will be successful academically (they want to make sure you graduate!) but they don’t just want students who study; they want students who will get engaged on campus. Sometimes, they’re looking for students who can fill a particular niche; for example, if they want to strengthen their performing arts, they’ll look for potential actors. Or maybe their soccer goalie is graduating, and they need a new one. More often, though, they’re looking for students who will join clubs and student government, play sports, or DJ for the radio station. Do what you love in high school and show that you’re willing and able to continue doing those things when you arrive on their doorstep.

Many universities make their decisions utilizing a holistic review:

1. Academic Information: This is the MOST important aspect of any application!
   a. School transcript, including GPA and rigor of curriculum chosen
   b. Standardized Test Scores (unless they’re a Test Optional School)
   c. Teacher recommendations

2) Personal Information: This area distinguishes yourself from other applicants as a real person beyond the numbers!
   a. Extracurricular activities: Clubs, activities, sports, volunteer work, summer programs, jobs, etc. They look for demonstrated leadership and initiative in these areas.
   b. Essay: what does this say about who you are? How does it separate you from the pack?
   c. Counselor Recommendation
   d. Interviews, if offered

**Remember: Academics will ensure that you are a competitive applicant, but your achievements outside the classroom and letters of recommendation often make the difference in whether you get accepted over applicants with similar academic records.**

Here are some things to remember:

- Higher grades show that you’re a hard worker and are motivated but maybe don’t test well. High test scores and low grades are usually interpreted as you being smart but uninterested, unmotivated, and/or disorganized.
- If you don’t test well, take a look at Test Optional Schools [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org).
- Test scores are important, but your classroom record is more important. Admission Reps look for a strong performance throughout high school or an upward trend if you started out slow.
- Colleges want to see that you challenge yourself and aren’t coasting. Take the most challenging schedule you can handle without getting a C. It’s better to take an AP class and get a B than to take an easier class just because you can get that A. (Of course, an A in an AP is even better!)
- Your class selections should demonstrate what you’re interested in (especially later in high school). If you’re thinking about Business, take Economics. If you are going into a field that requires artistic talent (architecture, fine arts, fashion design, etc.), take AP Art. If you’re going to pursue a pre-health program, double up in the sciences as a senior, with at least one AP. Show colleges what your interests and passions are through your actions. Colleges are more interested in students who have shown a sincere, active involvement in a few activities, rather than those who are superficially involved in lots of activities. More isn’t better! Try out several activities early in high school, then get more selectively involved in activities that mean something to you and take on leadership roles in those activities.
**DEADLINES and TYPES OF COLLEGE ADMISSION**

Each college sets its own application deadlines, and usually has several deadlines from which to choose. There are pros and cons of each; these should be considered carefully by the student. The College Counselor will discuss these options with students to help them make appropriate decisions, but we encourage parents to also discuss the options as a family.

- **Early Decision:**
  ED is a binding agreement offered by some colleges for students to indicate that the school is their first choice institution. Students may only apply to ONE school under ED.
  - **Deadlines:** Usually 11/1; some are as early as 10/15, some as late as 11/15.
  - **Benefits:** most colleges will admit a higher percentage of ED applicants, and students have an answer by winter break.
  - **Drawbacks:** this is binding; if offered admission, the student must withdraw all other pending applications and acceptances from other colleges and make a deposit at this institution. This happens before Financial Aid is decided, so the family needs to have a candid discussion about whether this is feasible. The student also needs to be completely sure about the choice of school since all other applications will have been withdrawn.
  - **Student Profile:** Students who know beyond a doubt that this is THE school, and the family knows that they can make the financing work.
  - **Results:** Schools have the option to accept, deny, or defer into the Regular pool.
    - If deferred, the agreement is no longer binding. Students may apply to as many institutions as they wish, and may choose to attend any school offering admission.

- **Early Action:**
  EA is a non-binding program which allows students to submit applications in the fall and receive an answer usually by winter break (but sometimes as late as mid-January).
  - **Deadlines:** Anywhere from 10/15 to 12/1.
  - **Benefits:** Although there is no statistical advantage in terms of getting in, students do receive an answer earlier in the year, relieving stress. This is not a binding agreement, so students may apply to as many schools as they wish under the EA plan, and they have until May 1 to make a decision about which school they would like to attend.
  - **Drawbacks:** Students need to have completed their standardized testing by the beginning of November.
  - **Student Profile:** Students who have developed a solid list of colleges that they’re happy with, and whose GPA and standardized tests scores by October or November of their senior year are stronger than the middle 50% of the accepted student profile of the university to which they are applying.
  - **Results:** Schools have the option to accept, deny, or defer into the Regular pool.

- **Regular Decision:**
  This is the common practice deadline.
  - **Deadlines:** Usually somewhere between 12/15 – 2/15.
  - **Benefits:** Students will have additional time to strengthen their academic profile with strong senior year grades, retake standardized exams and to complete their list university application list.
  - **Drawbacks:** Decisions often don’t come out until mid- or late March (by national agreement, universities have to release decisions by April 1 at the latest).
  - **Student Profile:** Students who need extra time to build a list, to retake tests, or to earn high trimester grades to show growth to the colleges.
  - **Results:** Schools will accept, deny, or waitlist students from this applicant pool.
- **Rolling:**
  These universities make admission decisions once the student’s file is complete, meaning that the application and fee, the essays, the test scores, and all required supplemental materials (transcripts, recommendations, etc.) are received by the admissions office. Decisions are usually communicated between four to six weeks depending on the school and the time of year. Qualified students are admitted until the freshman class is full.
  
  - **Benefits:** Students get an answer quickly, relieving some stress.
  - **Drawbacks:** There really aren’t any; students can apply when they’re ready and are happy with their scores and grades. However, if they wait too long (i.e., springtime), the spots may be full or merit scholarships may already be dispersed.
  - **Student Profile:** Students who are looking at certain public/state universities. Students who want to add a college later in the application process.
  - **Results:** Schools will admit or deny from this pool; if the application comes in early enough in the year and the school isn’t sure, they will ask the student for more information (midyear grades, an additional recommendation or test scores) prior to making a decision.

**Deadlines:**
The application deadlines set by colleges are almost always set in stone. Colleges will rarely accept late applications; those that extend the deadlines do so because of natural disaster or an extraordinary event. *Do NOT take these deadlines lightly!*

Students: know your deadlines and plan ahead! Applications must be submitted on or before the deadline set by each school. Most schools now accept applications electronically; if so, you technically have until 11:59 pm on the stated deadline to click submit. However, if you run into any technical problems or other issues (payment problems, for example), you run the risk of missing the deadline and not having your application considered. If you need to mail anything, most schools will accept the application if it is postmarked by the deadline.

Almost all schools will take supporting documents (teacher recommendations, transcripts, official score reports) after the stated deadline. If you have submitted everything that you have direct control over (your application, the payment, any supplements or additional portfolios), you have met the deadline and the school will consider your application. **However, please be aware that there are some schools (University of Texas at Austin, for example) that require that all materials to be IN their office by the deadline.** In these cases, it’s not enough to have your application postmarked by the deadline.

Both Naviance and Common App can help students and parents keep track of deadlines, but the individual university web site is the best resource for the deadline. Keep in mind that applications take time to complete and essays require time to brainstorm, write, and edit. *Do not wait to the last minute! It is the student’s responsibility to meet each university deadline.*
THE COMMON APPLICATION

The Common Application (CA) is a free online application accepted by almost 500 colleges and universities across the country; more colleges use the Common App every year.

Students can access the Common App at https://www.commonapp.org/CommonApp/default.aspx. The Common App goes live on AUGUST 1 of each year. Do NOT start before then; the site is shut down to complete maintenance and upgrades in July, and all accounts will be deleted during this process.

Several schools have supplements in addition to the basic application; some are very short and quick, with basic questions such as “Do you intend to live on campus?” and “What is your intended major?” Other supplements are much lengthier and could involve one or more essays or short-answer questions. The application is not complete until ALL parts of the application are submitted – the Common App basic application, any supplement, and the payment! The student’s college list on the student’s Common Application home page clearly states whether each part has not been started, is in progress, or has been submitted. It is the student’s responsibility to make sure that the entire application is complete and submitted!

State University Applications

Many states have their own university application. Students may apply to numerous state university campuses through this one application. Supporting documentation will be sent by the College Counselor either through their preferred electronic system or by mail.

School Forms

Because the American Hebrew Academy utilizes Naviance, students do not need to submit a separate request for any of the School Forms on Common App. Transcripts, the School Profile, and teacher recommendations are all uploaded into Naviance and will be transmitted electronically to all schools that accept forms in this manner. For the schools that require hard copies of school forms, the College Counselor will print and mail them in one packet to the college admissions office.

FERPA Waiver

When students apply to colleges, they have to sign the FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) waiver on their Naviance accounts. At this point, they have the option to waive or not waive their rights to see their recommendations.

- If a student waives his or her right, the letters and other documents submitted on his or her behalf will never be released to the student. Most students will opt to waive their rights; it sends a positive message to the recommenders and the colleges that the students believe that the letters will be positive.
- If a student does NOT waive his or her right, the student may request to see his or her file from the admissions office only after matriculating at the institution. However, not all admissions offices will keep the files and not all recommenders will be willing to write letters.
LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

The College Counselor writes a comprehensive letter of recommendation for each senior, advocating for the student by talking about strengths, growth, activities, and any other pertinent information about the student. Additionally, students need to ask two teachers for recommendations. A few schools will specify that they want recommendations from particular subject areas (more common if a student applies to a specific program; for example, an engineering program may want math and science teachers to write the recommendations.) Because requirements vary from one institution to the next, read the application instructions carefully to determine how many and of what sort the college requires.

The best recommendations come from teachers who can speak to the student’s academic work and personal qualities such as persistence, resilience, and dedication. The teachers asked to write recommendations should have taught the student in 11th or 12th grade. Remember, recommendations should come from someone who knows the student and his or her work well, but do not need to come from classes in which the student earned the highest grades!

Don’t go overboard with recommendations! Provide the number and type requested by the college; additional recommendations may be helpful, but are not always considered as part of the admissions file. If a student feels strongly about requesting an additional recommendation from an employer, another teacher, or another adult who knows him or her well in some capacity, this letter needs to add information that would not otherwise been gleaned from the counselor or teacher recommendations.

Additional recommendations written by family friends, alumni, or prominent people are only helpful if the person actually knows the student. Specific, first-hand knowledge about the student’s work is more compelling than generalities, regardless of who signs the bottom of the page (and, in fact, if it’s too general, it can hurt the application: colleges will see that as showing off, grasping at straws, or relying on a big name to impress them rather than relying on personal strengths). If the person writing the additional recommendation is an AHA employee, the letter will be uploaded directly to Naviance and will be submitted with all the student’s other materials. Otherwise, please contact the College Counselor to discuss the best way to submit the additional letter of recommendation to the colleges.

Students should complete the ‘Recommendation Request Form’ and ask teachers for recommendations as early as possible in the senior year. Keep in mind that teachers are under no obligation to write recommendations. They often have several letters to write in the fall, and may decline the request to write the letter if not asked with enough lead time. Additionally, if they do not feel that they know the student well enough or otherwise feel that they cannot do the student justice in the letter, teachers can and will say no to a request for a recommendation. If they say yes, rest assured that they will write a strong, positive letter for the student.

Under ordinary circumstances, students do not need to provide forms to the teacher, nor do teachers complete online forms directly from the colleges. Everything will be taken care of through Naviance. It is very important to thank your teacher!

Please be advised that under no circumstances will the College Counseling office release letters of recommendation to the students or families either during the application process or after graduation. Occasionally, teachers may decide to release a copy of a letter directly to the student but are under no obligation to do so. This is an individual decision and should not be expected nor asked of teachers.
WRITING EFFECTIVE ESSAYS

The essay is one of the few opportunities students have to make themselves stand out and become a “real person” beyond the numbers and other facts on the application. The admissions reps want to get to know who the students are and how they think. Be authentic; pick a topic that demonstrates what you’re passionate about. There is no magic essay topic that will get you in (and very few that will keep you out); it’s how they’re written that counts!

The essay is read in the context of the rest of the application; admissions reps use this as one way to “triangulate” the information in file. If the essay talks about how much you love community service, but you’ve done a total of six hours over the course of high school, yet you play baseball all year round and have done so since you were seven, something will seem off to them . . . the facts don’t add up.

Here are some tips to help you present the best essay you can:

- Essays take time; start early and plan on several drafts. Brainstorm ideas with a friend, the College Counselor, a teacher, or a parent.
- Focus on one thing; these essays are relatively short.
- Do NOT use the thesaurus. Use YOUR language and phrasing; it’s painfully obvious to readers when students try to “smarten up” their essay.
- Answer the question they ask – and answer ALL parts of the questions if there are multiple parts.
- Respect the length limits. Do not significantly go over or under the stated length.
- Find at least one other person whose opinion you trust to read your drafts. Ask that person to tell you if it sounds like you . . . if not, rework it!
- Avoid the following:
  - Reiterating your resume/activity list (this doesn’t add anything)
  - Profanity
  - Discussions of drugs or alcohol, inappropriate behavior, relationship issues with your boyfriend/girlfriend, etc.
  - Something written for the shock or sympathy value
- The “Why” Question: Many schools will ask you to write an essay or a short-answer question explaining why you are applying to that school, program, or major. When answering, BE SPECIFIC! They are looking to see how well you know the institution, if you are a ‘good fit’ for the college and if you can articulate your reasoning.
  - Explain how you can benefit from their programs – and what you will bring to their campus! Tell them how you’re excited to study marine biology with X professor and study sea turtles in the Galapagos with their school-specific summer study program, AND how much you want to join their a cappella group that only sings Disney Songs. Do your research; show them that you’re applying for a reason.
  - Do NOT use this as a time to flatter the school by telling them how good they are or by telling them what they already know. They know they have study abroad or a strong business program or nice dorms.
  - Test your answer by putting another college’s name in the essay. If everything you said can be applied to the other school, it’s too general.
**ADDITIONAL INFO FOR SPECIAL ADMISSIONS CATEGORIES**

**Collegiate Athletes:**

Students interested in playing for a Division I or Division II intercollegiate team in college need to be in contact with college coaches by their junior year. Talk to the AHA Athletic Director and the College Counselors about this process if interested so they can offer advice and guidance during the process. Coaches and the Athletic Director can help players determine potential and appropriate level of collegiate play and which colleges to target, and can help students contact college coaches.

Players should communicate early with coaches about their interest in playing collegiate-level sports and discuss the level of collegiate play best suited to their abilities. Get exposure by playing in travel or summer leagues. Coordinate with coaches for the best way to do this. Make sure to register with the NCAA clearinghouse at www.NCAA.org and keep grades up throughout high school in order to remain eligible to play at the university level.

**Theater, Arts, Music, or other areas requiring auditions and portfolios:**

For students who are considering applying for a theater, art, music, architecture, fashion design, or other program requiring a portfolio or audition, plan ahead since there are extra steps in the process.

First, ascertain if these steps are required as part of the application; some schools will not admit students into a particular without completing this part of the application. Others will let students apply after arriving on campus or will allow students to declare the major without a portfolio or audition.

Second, work with the art, music, or theater teachers or others in the field to get their guidance on preparing for auditions, putting together a portfolio, or presenting any other work needed during the application process.

**Applying to the Military Academies or ROTC:**

Applying to any of the Military Academies (West Point, the Air Force Academy, the Naval Academy, the Coast Guard Academy, or the Merchant Marine Academy) takes extra time and several extra steps, necessitating beginning in the junior year. Students should discuss this option as early as possible to make sure that all the steps can be completed in a timely fashion. For more information, visit any of the academy websites or www.whitehouse.gov/administration/vice-president-biden/academy-nominations/steps.

ROTC applications can be completed in the senior year. Students interested in this option should also inform the College Counselors as early as possible so we can help formulate an appropriate list of colleges that will offer this opportunity. More information can be found at: www.todaysmilitary.com/before-serving-in-the-military/rotc-programs?campaign_id=SEM2012:on:google:ROTC-apply_for_rotc_scholarship:broad
NOTIFICATION OF DISCIPLINARY INFRACTIONS

As reported in HaMadrich, students are expected to be truthful about any in- or out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and other similar disciplinary actions:

“As a nationally accredited educational institution, the American Hebrew Academy conforms to policies and best practices adopted by the Association of Professional College Counselors. It is therefore the policy of the American Hebrew Academy to automatically notify colleges of serious disciplinary infractions (that is, those that have resulted in out-of-school suspension, for scholastic violations such as cheating or plagiarism, for theft, or for actions deemed to be threatening to the health and safety of self, other individuals, or the community at large). The Academy will also notify colleges if such infractions result in suspension or dismissal from the Alexander Muss program in Israel. Please note the special stipulations of the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drug policy noted elsewhere in this document.”

The College Counselors will inform colleges of the student’s disciplinary record. If a student has been subject to serious disciplinary action while a student at the American Hebrew Academy, he or she should speak with the College Counselor to discuss how best to address this in the college application. In the event that a serious disciplinary matter resulting in suspension or expulsion arises after the application has been sent, a representative of the American Hebrew Academy (College Counselor, Dean of Students, or Dean of Academics) will send a letter to each of the colleges to which the student has applied, informing the Admissions Office that the discipline has occurred and conveying the facts and disposition of the incident. It is the student’s responsibility to provide the colleges with a personal statement regarding the incident.

Students are advised that college applications will ask about any suspension (whether it is in-school or out-of-school). Students are expected to answer these questions honestly. The College Counselor and student will then discuss the student’s explanation of the event and what will be included in the Counselor’s letter to support the student’s application statement.

If a situation has reached the level of the Va’ad HaKavod and the decision of the Va’ad is to suspend the student, the college counselor will answer the disciplinary question with a “Yes” and will give an explanation of the event in the counselor letter. If there is a disciplinary issue that result in an in-school suspension, but has NOT reached the level of the Va’ad, the College Counselor will omit answering the disciplinary question with a “Yes” or “No” and simply leave the statement on the form.

In those cases where a student HAS had an in-school suspension that has not gone to the Va’ad, the College Counselor will instruct the student that s/he needs to answer this question honestly on the application and will ask the student if s/he is going to do that. The College Counselor and the student will discuss the student’s explanation of the event, and what the College Counselor will include in the counselor letter to support that statement. The parent will also be notified about these conversations.

If the student does not answer truthfully, and the Academy ascertains that the student has been dishonest in the answering of such questions, the student is advised that the Academy is then obligated to notify the college or university that false information may have been entered on the student application.
FINANCIAL AID

NEED BASED FINANCIAL AID:

**FAFSA:** On January 1 of every year, the U. S. Government opens access to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for the upcoming school year. The proper website is [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov). There are many websites out there that will try to charge you money; *if you are ever asked for money to fill out the FAFSA, you are on the wrong site!* It is, as the name says, a free application!

If filing the FAFSA, both the parent/guardian and the child can get the federal PIN at any time by going to [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov). Both a parent/guardian and the student need to apply for separate PINs which will be used to sign the FAFSA.

The FAFSA should be completed as soon as possible after the first of the year. The form requires tax information from the year immediately preceding filing of the FAFS (a 2013 tax return for a 2014 FAFSA), although families may initially estimate based on the tax information from a year before (2012) and update/verify as necessary. Most people, however, will do their taxes first to save the step and avoid potential problems; the FAFSA center processes hundreds of thousands of applications each year, so the less paperwork they have, the less likely it is that a mistake will be made.

By filling out the FAFSA, students become eligible for federal student aid programs such as subsidized loans, work-study positions, and grants. Some colleges also use the FAFSA to determine if a student is eligible for a school-sponsored need-based scholarship or other school-sponsored financial aid packages or programs.

Please make sure to carefully read the instructions from each college in order to meet deadlines (this is critical!) and to know which forms need to be submitted. Many colleges only require the FAFSA, but some also need the College Board PROFILE form and some have their own institutional forms. In addition, some colleges may request a copy of the parents’ current tax returns.

**CSS/PROFILE:**

This is a supplemental financial aid form required by about 300 colleges (mostly smaller private schools) that use it to make decisions in distributing financial aid. The form is found at: [https://profileonline.collegeboard.com/prf/index.jsp](https://profileonline.collegeboard.com/prf/index.jsp). First register by entering the names of the colleges that require the form. The Profile is then customized with the questions needed by each college. The Profile does cost money, with a flat registration fee and an amount for each college that receives the information; however, schools will provide more aid if this form is filled out.

MERIT BASED AID:
SCHOLARSHIPS:

School Specific Scholarships:
Please make sure to look at the scholarship information on each college’s website. Most colleges automatically award merit aid based on the admissions application with no further action needed from the student. However, some scholarships require a separate application and/or interview. Pay attention to deadlines! Don’t miss out on free money because something wasn’t submitted on time.

Outside Scholarships:
There are thousands of scholarships available to college students. In the College Counseling office there are several books available for students to use as well as files with information sent by a variety of agencies that offer scholarships. The College Counselors also add information into Naviance under the Scholarship tab as it is available to us. Finally, there are several websites that list scholarships; these are a great resource. It’s worth a bit of research.

Deadlines will vary according to the agency; many fall in the late winter and spring, but some happen as early as the autumn. Applications require anything from a simple one-page form up to a lengthy process which could involve essays, interviews, or other time-consuming work. The amounts also vary from a couple hundred dollars to several thousand. Even though a scholarship may not seem “worth it” if it is for a smaller amount, they do add up.

Here are some websites that are worth checking out:

- [www.Fastweb.com](http://www.Fastweb.com)
- [www.Scholarships.com](http://www.Scholarships.com)
- [www.moolahspot.com](http://www.moolahspot.com)
- [www.meritaid.com](http://www.meritaid.com)
- [www.Finaid.org](http://www.Finaid.org)
- [www.studentscholarshipsearch.com](http://www.studentscholarshipsearch.com)

Many of these websites make it easy to search for scholarships based on particular criteria, and many will ask questions to help guide students and families towards appropriate scholarships. Take some time to look at the variety of options: scholarships are offered not just for academic or athletic merit! They’re given for a variety of reasons: religious affiliation, ethnic/racial background, state or county of residence, participation in Scouting or other groups, parents’ jobs, and even for such things as being left-handed, red-haired, or a twin.

We encourage the seniors and families to come in and work with us to help search for scholarships. We’re happy to help.
WHAT DO I DO NOW THAT UNIVERSITIES HAVE RESPONDED?

We always hope for be best possible news when decisions come back; if you’ve researched schools well and created a well-thought-out and balanced list, you’ll have several options to choose from in the spring. However, there are always colleges that will give you an answer you’re not happy with – but try to remember that it’s not personal! Colleges are reporting record numbers of applications, and many students very much like you got the same answers. Getting an answer you’re not happy with is not the end of the road!

Making your final college decision and placing a deposit:

Colleges and universities give students until May 1 to deposit at one school of their choice. Early Decision acceptances are the exception to this; as per the agreement signed at the time of application, once accepted, the student has agreed to attend that school. Deposits can be made before May 1 if you know where you want to go. If this is the case, please send an email to the other schools (including those to which you got waitlisted) to let them know that you will not be attending/do not wish to remain on the waitlist. This is a courtesy to them and might help students on the waitlist hear more quickly. This can just be a couple sentences that say something like, “Thank you so much for the offer of acceptance, but I have placed a deposit at another school.”

If you’re having trouble deciding between your options, come talk to us; we can help you think through what matters most to you, which schools might fit your criteria most closely, etc. Talk to your family about which school is financially the most feasible (or if any are NOT feasible so you can take them off your list). We also encourage you to take advantage of any “admitted student day/weekend” options. Although it’s not possible to get to all of them, it could help if you’re debating between a couple schools.

Please note that you may only deposit at one school! “Double Depositing” is considered unethical by colleges and College Counselors, and it hurts you, students on waiting lists, and the colleges themselves. Deposits are seen as a confirmation of attendance, and colleges plan out housing, budgets, and other factors based on the number of students placing deposits. There are also students on waiting lists who very much want to attend that school who are left waiting rather than being offered a spot. Finally, at best, you will lose your deposit (which could be as much as $1,000) at the second school. At worst, the offer of admission could be rescinded. In order to help prevent Double Depositing as much as possible, many colleges check enrollment lists at other institutions – and are well within their rights to withdraw their offer of admission if they find that you have double-deposited! If this happens, you will have NO college to attend rather than having your choice of two.

If you didn’t get into your first choice:

Yes, this means that you can’t go there . . . next year – but it does not need to be a dead-end! Pick from your other options, go there, do well, and reapply to your first-choice school as a transfer student. Unless you find that you are very happy at the school you have chosen to attend. However, transferring is a common occurrence; people transfer after freshman or sophomore year all the time.
If you are waitlisted:

If you got waitlisted at your first choice school, write a well-crafted email or letter explaining that you are still interested in the school and that you would accept a spot if offered one off the waitlist (but only if you are serious about that!). Schools want to offer spots to people who want to be there and who are good matches, so in your letter, reiterate why you believe this school is a good match for you AND why you are a good match for them - what would you bring to the school? Ask if they would like any additional information (2nd trimester grades, an additional letter of recommendation, etc.). We can help you write the letter and will advocate for you as much as possible; just make sure to keep in contact with us about what’s going on.

You probably won’t hear if you’ve gotten a space from the waitlist until after May 1 when deposits are due. Rarely will a school offer you a spot before then (although it happens). If you are hoping to get offered a spot at a school, you still need to deposit at another school by May 1! Getting a spot off a waitlist is far from guaranteed – it’s great when it happens, but don’t count on it. Make your decision based on the acceptances in front of you NOW. If you do not deposit at a school by May 1, they will assume that you don’t want that spot and will start making offers to people on their waitlist.

If you DO get an offer off the waitlist at a school you’d rather attend, here’s how you deal with deposits without falling into the “Double Depositing” problem: accept the spot at the new school by submitting your deposit. As soon as you know that your spot is secured there, immediately contact the school at which you previously deposited to tell them you are withdrawing. You will most likely NOT get your deposit back from that school, but that will be the worst of it. I recommend contacting the school in writing so you and they have a record of this.

Gap Years:

This is a great option for people who would like to travel, learn new things, and/or explore. If you’re interested in a gap-year program, information and brochures are available in the College Counseling office that can help you narrow down what you want to do.

HOWEVER:

- You still need to deposit at a school to hold your spot.
- You may not deposit at two schools.
- You need to contact the school(s) you are considering to ask if they allow a deferral and if they place any restrictions on deferring. (Do you have to be enrolled in a formal gap-year program? Can you enroll in classes at another institution? Are you restricted from reapplying or reactivating an application to another college?)
- Once you’ve decided to defer your start date at the one college of your choice, make sure you have put in your deposit and have filed the required paperwork for the deferral.
RESOURCES and FURTHER INFORMATION

USEFUL WEBSITES:

College Searches and General Information:
- http://www.unigo.com/
- www.collegeboard.com
- http://www.ctcl.org/
- http://www.campustours.com/
- http://www.collegenet.com/elect/app/app

Jewish Life on Campuses
- www.hillel.org
- www.chabad.edu
- www.uscj.org/koach/choosing.htm

Standardized Test Registration, Information, and Online Preparation:
- http://www.actstudent.org/regist/
- http://sat.collegeboard.org/register
- http://teachers.sduhsd.k12.ca.us/lccounseling/sat-act_conversion_chart.htm
- http://www.eprep.com/
- http://www.fairtest.org/

The Common Application and the Common Application Essays
- www.commonapp.org/CommonApp/default.aspx
- collegeadmissionbook.com/blog/advice-students-topics-new-common-app-essays

Financial Aid and Scholarships
- www.fafsa.ed.gov/
- www.finaid.org/
- www.scholarshipexperts.com/
- www.Fastweb.com
- www.Scholarships.com
- www.meritaid.com

Summer and Gap Year Programs
- http://enrichmentalley.com/programs/search

College Athletics
- http://www.ncaa.org/
COLLEGE GUIDES:


COLLEGE SEARCH:


JEWISH LIFE ON CAMPUS:


COLLEGE ADMISSIONS:

FINANCIAL AID and SCHOLARSHIPS:


TEST PREP:


MISCELLANEOUS:

National Association of College Admissions Counselors
Statement of Principles of Good Practice

NACAC requires its members to adhere to certain principles of good practice, and AHA, as a member of this organization, is ethically and legally obligated to support these principles. Therefore we are bound to the best of our ability to:

• Ensure that all applications are made in good faith.
• Provide colleges with accurate transcripts, school profiles, and counselor recommendations to accompany each application.
• Report any significant changes in a candidate’s academic status or qualifications between the time of recommendation and graduation.
• Counsel college-bound families to notify the other colleges with whom they have filed applications when the student has accepted an offer of admission, and to deposit at only one school.
• Counsel students to be the sole authors of their applications and essays, and to counsel against inappropriate assistance on the part of others.
• Help applicants to understand and discharge their responsibilities in the college admission process.