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Advice from a pro

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Advice from a pro

Inside tips on the college admissions process from Jim Ruoti.

By Nancy Steele Brokaw '71

Photo by Marc Featherly

Start early

- Give yourself at least 18 to 24 months to work through the college selection process.

Go to a “College Night” or “College Fair”

- Use such events as a time to explore the whole process and learn as much as you can.

Take advantage of your high school’s counseling center

- Talk to representatives from a variety of types and sizes of colleges and universities when they come to visit.
- Gather information about scholarships and financial aid.

Research your colleges and universities prior to arranging your visit

- An abundance of information can be found on most college and university web sites. Additional information is available in the typical high school’s counseling center.
- Get out and visit campuses. Visit during your junior year or, at the latest, the summer before senior year (school won’t be in session during the summer but at least you can get a feel for the campus).

Interviews are important

- It’s important to be yourself and to ask questions.
- Is the student there only because Mom or Dad insisted they come? (That’s okay; students have been known to warm up to a place as the admission process moves further down the line.)
- A student may meet the academic credentials for admission to a school, but it still may not be a good match. That is one of the primary purposes of the college interview.



In his Holmes Hall office, Ruoti burns the midnight oil poring over applications. A well-written essay always gets his attention, he says.

Application essays are important, too

- In a competitive environment, a well-written essay can make a difference.
- Be certain that you answer the questions that are asked rather than write the same essay for every question.
- Choose subjects about which you are passionate — whether it's horses, your siblings, or politics.
- Don't be afraid to express opinions that might be different from those of the person reading the essay. Remember, most colleges are looking for diversity.
- If you are applying to selective schools, try to make each essay school-specific.
- Check your essay over carefully. This is no place for spelling or punctuation errors.

Apply to at least four schools

- One or two “stretch” schools (colleges you would like to attend but to which you may not be admitted).
- One or two schools where you are likely to be admitted.
- One or two “safety” schools where you are almost certain to be admitted.
- Remember: Five is the average number of colleges to which students apply. An exception is in the fine arts, where auditioning is part of the process.

Don't panic if you aren't certain about a major

- “Undecided” is an increasingly popular option.
- Even if you think you know what your major will be, you may very likely change your mind.

Especially for parents

- Be realistic — and informed — about your child's academic record and potential. Most guidance counselors and advisers will provide a realistic appraisal of whether your son or daughter is right for a particular school.
- If you sit in on the interview, let your child do most of the talking. Remember that he/she may have different ideas than yours. Be supportive, but take a backseat.

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