

# What you need to know: The College Application Process (2020-21)

## From GCM Student Services:

So you're thinking about attending a 4 year college? There are various [checklists](#) you can use to make sure you're on track, but below are some basic steps that will get you on your way:

**College List:** Start by making a college list. I recommend about 5 schools separated into categories: 1 reach school, 2 target schools, and 2 safety schools. You can add more to those categories if you'd prefer to apply to more schools, but try to keep a similar balance. To generate this list, you can use the Naviance college search or any internet college search. The best searches give you a snapshot of the school, in particular the [College Board search function](#). You can also complete a [worksheet](#) about what you're looking for in a college to help guide you in the creation of your list. You can also set up a meeting with our college and career counselor to learn more about specific types of schools, scholarships, etc. by emailing [gkhumphreys@fcps.edu](mailto:gkhumphreys@fcps.edu)

**Applications:** Once you have your list, I would recommend creating a [spreadsheet](#) with each college in the first column. In each column you will collect information about that particular school's requirements. Each school will require you to complete an application- but there are 3 types of applications- [Common Application](#), [Coalition Application](#), or the individual school's application. You can figure out which schools accept which application by looking at the admissions section of a university's website. Once you know which of your schools accept which applications, you should plan to use the application that encompasses the most schools at once. For example, if you're applying to 5 schools and 3 of them take the Coalition Application *and* the Common Application, 1 takes just the Common Application, and 1 requires an individual application, you should plan to use the Common Application for 4 and the individual school application for that extra one school. Once you have figured out which application you need to use, create an account with that application and the beginning steps should be fairly straightforward. As you complete the general information in your applications there is some specific info you will need (listed below) and some general information you might need, which you can find in this [video](#) or on this [sheet](#):

**Deadlines:** If you choose to use the spreadsheet linked above to track your college list, you will see the next column asks what deadline you plan to apply for. This is the difference between Early Action, Early Decision, and Regular Decision deadlines. To learn more about these and which is right for you, see this [article](#). Once you decide how you'd like to apply, make sure you record the deadline for that school so that you can keep track, and also because you will need to let your counselor and other recommenders know.

**Essays:** Once you complete the general information in your applications, the next step will be adding your colleges and finding out what sorts of essays they require. You can find prompts ahead of time for the general Common Application/Coalition Application by googling, but each specific question is not revealed until you add that college to your application. When you're thinking about your essay, feel free to use these [resources](#), this [video](#), or make an appointment with your counselor help brainstorm or edit your essays.

**Recommendations:** While making the list of schools, you should take a look at how many and what type of recommendations you need. Most schools require at least one teacher recommendation and one counselor recommendation, but some require none at all, so it is important to check each school for their requirements. For a teacher recommendation, you should choose a teacher who genuinely knows you and has taught you in a core academic class, preferably from sophomore or junior year. If you are choosing between a teacher who knows you slightly, but taught you in a course that aligns with your intended major versus a teacher who knows you very well in a course that does not align, choose the teacher that knows you better! For a counselor recommendation, you should have completed the [Senior Information Form](#) in the spring of your junior year. For all teacher recommenders, you should request in person (or virtually!) in the spring of your junior year or as soon as possible. You should confirm by email in senior year with a list of your college deadlines. Once you begin your applications, you will add teacher and counselor emails to the application and the recommender will receive a request by email.

**Transcripts:** Most colleges require a transcript be sent by the school directly to the university. You will be required to send counselors your college list via a [transcript request form](#) and indicate which schools need transcripts and which do not. Colleges will initially only see your grades from 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades with your course schedule for 12<sup>th</sup>. Some schools require self-reporting instead and you can report your grades on your own using your course history in SIS. There is a mid-year transcript that will be sent automatically after 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter to *all schools you include in your list to your counselor*. Any schools not submitted will not receive the correct documentation.

**Test Scores:** Most schools require test scores (though that may be different this year) to be sent directly from the testing agency. *You must request and send these grades on your own through the [SAT](#) or [ACT](#) websites*. IB scores will be sent after graduation to the school you indicate.

**Financial Aid:** To be eligible for financial aid from any college in the United States, you need to complete the [FAFSA \(Free Application for Federal Student Aid\)](#). Forms can be submitted anytime after October 1<sup>st</sup> and the earlier, the better. Schools may have specific deadlines or require additional forms, such as the [CSS Profile](#), so be sure to be looking at the requirements carefully.