

# COLLEGE BOUND

Helpful tips for getting into college and the smartest ways to pay for it.

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## The 7 Deadliest Crimes Against Yourself

*Are you guilty of any of them?*

**I**s your family looking for financial aid? If so, here are seven ways parents shoot themselves in the foot – and lose out on thousands of dollars of financial aid. Whatever you do, you want to avoid these costly mistakes. Let me show you how.

**1. Assuming you're not eligible.** Many parents – especially middle-class parents – automatically assume that if they make over \$100,000 a year they won't qualify for financial aid. Others feel that if their home is paid for, or if they have a second home, there's no hope for them.

Not true. There are lots of parents who make a good income and still qualify for need-based aid. Especially if you have two kids in college at the same time, you can make upwards of \$200,000 and still receive assistance, depending on which college your children attend.

So regardless of what Aunt Harriet read in the newspaper or what Suzie Knowitall said at the parent-teachers conference, don't

assume financial aid is out of the question for you. EVERYONE should apply.

And let's not forget merit aid (which comes from the admissions department, not the financial aid department). Funded by endowments, merit aid is "income agnostic," meaning you can be Warren Buffet's grandson and still get merit aid. Merit aid comes from matching the student's abilities with the school's mission. The average merit aid award is in the tens of thousands of dollars. Per year.

**2. Making incorrect assumptions about who gets aid.** A lot of people think they need to have some sort of special status – that only American Indian students or Latino students or disadvantaged students get aid.

It's not your bloodlines that determine your eligibility for aid. It's more about your finances, how you hold your money, and what the governmental rules say you qualify for.

**3. Not taking into account the makeup of the student body.** When you shop for schools, many parents could save \$10,000 or more simply by better positioning their student within the incoming freshmen class – and understanding how colleges award extra money.

For example, if your student is in the top 20-25% of the entering freshmen class, your chances for receiving money go up dramatically. Say your student has a 3.75 GPA and the average freshman at that university has a 3.5 GPA. Your student is probably in the top 25%. And that school will likely give you more money.

Take the same student at a different school where the average incoming GPA is 3.95. Your student is no longer in the "money tier" (the top 25%). She's not likely to get aid.

**4. Not taking into account the attributes a school values.** The six most important college qualifiers are as follows:

# Spotlight On Tufts University



Location: Medford, MA

Undergraduates: 5,025

Male/Female: 49/51

Entrance Difficulty: Most difficult

Acceptance Rate:

26% of 15,619 applicants

Avg. GPA: 3.73 (unweighted)

SAT Math Range: 670-740

SAT CR Range: 670-740

First-year students returning: 95%

Grad in 4 Years: 85.7%

Cost of Attendance: \$53,200

Avg. Percent of Need Met: 100%

Strongest Programs:

Mechanical Engineering, Environmental Management, Biology, English, History

Fun Facts:

- Each year the students have a Naked Quad Run just before finals.
- Right before Halloween, the Tufts Mountain Club places pumpkins in absurd places.
- The school's mascot, Jumbo, is named for P.T. Barnum's favorite elephant, which was donated to the school after Barnum's death.
- Tufts was named one of the top 10 environmentally responsible schools by Sierra Magazine, and one of the nation's top 25 environmentally responsible schools in the Kaplan College Guide.
- Aside from 31 varsity sports, many students form intramural teams each season. Men's ultimate Frisbee is often ranked among the top club Frisbee teams in the nation.
- Some other popular activities are the dance teams at Tufts. Tufts ballroom, the two Tufts Indian dance teams, Bhangra and Garba are particularly notable.
- Famous alums: Jessica Biel, Jamie Dimon, Hank Azaria

- difficulty of high school class schedule
- GPA/class rank
- college essay
- extracurricular activities
- standardized test scores
- recommendations

The interesting thing is, not all colleges rank these variables in the same order. Some schools rank GPA/class rank most important and recommendations as last. Other schools consider SAT/ACT scores number one, and rank GPA last.

Very few students are aces at all six attributes. They may be in all honors courses yet don't do so well on standardized tests. Or they may achieve a high SAT score but don't stand out on their essays.

The way to more aid is to sync up your student's strengths to what the college values most. If your child has a list of impressive extracurricular activities, don't expect that to wow the admissions department at Wesleyan, for example. Wesleyan doesn't consider extracurricular activities nearly as high as they do SAT scores, for example. You need to match your student's best attributes with schools that value those same attributes.

**5. Assuming all schools will give the same amount of money.** All schools are NOT created equal. The financial aid formula (Cost of Attendance – Expected Family Contribution) determines need. However, not all schools will meet 100% of that need.

Some schools such as Princeton and Colgate historically meet close to 100% of demonstrated need. Other schools such as Maryland and Penn State historically meet about 60% of need, while Rutgers meets 50%. Wouldn't you like to know

these facts BEFORE you visit a school and BEFORE you apply?

## 6. Relying on CPAs or tax preparers.

Unfortunately, accountants are experts at tax planning and preparation – *not* financial aid planning. For example, a CPA or tax preparer might suggest that you put some or all of your assets in your child's name to save money on taxes. While this advice is well meaning, it will usually kill most or all of your chances of getting financial aid.

## 7. Going through the financial aid process by yourself because it's "cheaper."

If this describes you, the colleges and Federal Governments are going to love you! This allows them to keep control over the process instead of you, the parent, understanding how the process works and taking back control from them.

I find it curious how the same people who use a doctor when they get sick and a lawyer when they get sued, suddenly decide to be their own expert when it comes time to send their children to college – all to save a few hundred dollars.

Is this wise? For many families, the total cost of sending their children to college will top \$500,000 and be the first or second biggest expenditure of their lives. At the same time, over 90% of NJ families unknowingly overpay for college.

Unless you spent the last 5-10 years studying and understanding the financial aid process, you cannot possibly know how to get the maximum amount of money from each college or university. Consider using an expert who can help you through this process and make sure you get everything you're entitled to.

# Student of the Month

## News You Can Use



**Chelsea Reimer**

*Student: Chelsea Reimer*  
*High School: Bridgewater-Raritan*  
*Class: 2010*  
*GPA: 2.9*  
*SAT: 1770*

*Favorite Activities:*  
*theatre, ceramics, reading*  
*College acceptances: Lycoming College*  
*Colleges awaiting:*  
*American Univ., BU, Dickinson, GWU,*  
*Northeastern, UMass-Amherst*

**Q: Was there anything about the college application process that caught you off guard?**

**A:** The essay deadlines creep up on you. You think you have plenty of time and then the next thing you know you're freaking out, wondering, "What am I going to write about?" You go into a negative spiral.

**Q: How do you escape?**

**A:** [My CCPS Student Services Counselor] Kathi Love helped me out a lot. She was a saint.

**Q: How so?**

**A:** I was so annoying. I would not have put up with me. I was texting and calling her at all hours, totally panicked. "Is this OK? Is that OK? I'm not sure, I don't know—help!" Kathi would tell me to calm down and not to worry, we were going to get through it.

**Q: What did you end up writing your essay about?**

**A:** I was in a stage production that was coming to an end, and I was experiencing some strong emotions. I invented an ailment called 'Theatre Depression' – the funk you get into when the play is over—and wrote about that.

**Q: That's interesting.**

**A:** Except in my early drafts, I was getting sidetracked telling unrelated side stories and going into too much detail. Kathi advised me to cut it down and make it more concise.

**Q: Did you accept her feedback willingly?**

**A:** No, I wasn't happy about it at all. She told me what I needed to hear, not what I wanted to hear.

**Q: Which was what?**

**A:** Good writing is about *showing*, not *telling*. Without Kathi's help, I couldn't see where I was showing and where I was telling. I was too close to it. Having a second pair of eyes made all the difference.

**Q: I guess it did. Because you earned a very rare honor – a personal note from the Dean of Admissions.**

**A:** Yes, the Dean wrote a handwritten "Congratulations, Chelsea!" note on my acceptance letter.

**Q: What did it say?**

**A:** He wrote, "I don't usually read the essays top to bottom. Yours caught my eye. One of the more original writings I've seen in awhile. You get an A."

**Q: That's outstanding. What essay advice can you share with other students?**

**A:** You don't have to be super-far-out creative and come up with something never seen before. Just remember: you don't have to shed *new* light on a subject—just shed *your* light on it. That's enough. And *show*, don't *tell*.

## High School Students Taking AP Courses in Record Numbers

It wasn't that long ago when hearing about a high school student taking an Advanced Placement test was a relatively rare event. Only the most exceptional students (it seemed) took advanced placement courses. And then, only one, maybe two AP courses at most. And only during senior year.

These days, if it seems like every student you know is taking AP courses—and lots of them (starting as early as sophomore year)—you're not alone. According to USA Today enrollment in high school AP courses has exploded from 704,000 students in 1999 to 1.7 million in 2009—a 140% increase in 10 short years.

Last year, these ambitious students took a record 2.9 million AP exams.

Not surprisingly, as more students take the AP exams, the average scores are decreasing. To wit, 41.5% of last year's students earned a failing score of 1 or 2 versus 36.5% in 1999. (In New Jersey, over two-thirds of high school students who take an AP test earn a passing score of 3 or higher.) Interestingly, scores on AP Physics tests are up, while English Literature scores are down.

## Savings Update

Here's where we've conducted workshops lately and how much money we're saving families from those towns.

Clark - \$18,741 per student per year  
Edison - \$17,339 per student per year

## Upcoming FREE Workshops

March 18 – 7:00 pm Piscataway Library  
April 7 – 7:30 pm Union Library

**There are 2 ways to reserve a seat:**

**Online: [www.myacfa.com](http://www.myacfa.com)**

**Call: 1-908-857-4200**



## Ask the Professor

Q: My daughter wants to visit colleges with her best friend in tow. Is this a good idea?

A: I know lots of kids do this, but I don't think it's a good idea. Your daughter should make up her own mind, without the influence of her friend's opinions and prejudices. It's common for friends to try to keep their buddies at a nearby school, or encourage them to attend a "party" school that makes for fun weekend visits – not the criterion you want. Worse, your daughter's friend might talk her into a school *the friend* can get into. The friend might inadvertently hold your daughter back.

## Did You Know?



✓ Enrollment in high school AP courses has more than doubled in the last 10 years – from 704,000 students in 1999 to 1.7 million last year

✓ 41.5% of last year's students earned a failing score of 1 or 2 versus 36.5% in 1999

✓ Scores on AP Physics tests are up; English Literature is down (source: USA Today 2/4/10)

## College Match Game



Mary Higgins Clark attended which of the following colleges?

- A.) Fordham University
- B.) Amherst College
- C.) Williams College
- D.) Columbia University
- E.) None of the above

Answers: A.) The celebrated suspense novel author was graduated from Fordham University in 1979.

## Win a \$500 to \$5,000 Scholarship



Refer a friend or family member to join our College Dream Builder™ program. Your friend or family member gets an instant \$300 discount by knowing you. And when they enroll, your student receives \$500.00 per referral. Refer 2 families, earn \$1,000.00. Refer 10 families, earn \$5,000.00!

College Dream Builder™ provides students the personal attention and help they need to find the perfect-fit school and make college the wonderful experience it should be.

For details, call 908.857.4200 or email [info@CompleteCollegePlanningSolutions.com](mailto:info@CompleteCollegePlanningSolutions.com)



**"IF YOU THINK EDUCATION IS EXPENSIVE, TRY FAILURE."**

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