

COLLEGE BOUND

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

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The Biggest Mistake Students Make With College Interviews

The student interview, long a requirement at many colleges, has diminished in importance. Or has it?

Back in the day, the interview used to be an integral part of your college application. If it wasn't a strict requirement per se, it was strongly encouraged.

Today, not so much. In fact, some universities don't even offer interviews anymore. If you apply to an Ivy League institution, you will likely be interviewed, but in most cases, it's by a local alumnus. At most other schools, interviews are optional.

And because they're optional, most applicants don't bother.

This can be a big mistake.

Why? Because the interview can be a "tiebreaker" that distinguishes you in the applicant pool.

Think about it: Let's say you're applying to a mid-size university that will review

10,000 applications for 4,000 spots. You have good grades, good SAT scores and a strong resume. But many of the other 10,000 applicants will have equal grades, scores and extracurricular activities.

One tiebreaker is your essay. Another is the interview. It's very difficult to convey intangible qualities in an application. But a one-on-one conversation is a wonderful way to demonstrate what makes you tick and what makes you special.

One caveat. If you're a shy person who would prefer to look at his shoes rather than make eye contact, and the very thought of an interview makes you break out in a sweat, I'm going to recommend you NOT pursue an interview.

But if you have an engaging personality and you're comfortable *asking* questions as well as *answering* them, you MUST take advantage of every interview opportunity.

Why Interview?

The best part about interviews is that they give you the chance to:

- Demonstrate that you are seriously interested in attending.
- Convey what you can bring to a campus community.
- Ask questions and learn more about a college's programs.
- Personalize the college visit.
- Explain that 'C' in chemistry.

Here's the most important thing to remember during the interview: you're interviewing THEM as much as they're interviewing YOU. It's easy to feel intimidated and believe that *they're* the ones in the driver's seat. But it's not true. *You're* the one who has choices. *You're* the one who's doing the evaluating. *You're* the one who has dozens upon dozens of colleges who would love to have you. Make them prove and sell themselves to you.

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Spotlight On Boston College



Location: Chestnut Hill, MA

Undergraduates: 9,171

Male/Female: 47/53

Entrance Difficulty: Very difficult

Acceptance Rate:

30% of 29,290 applicants

SAT Math Avg.: 685

SAT CR Avg.: 655

SAT Writing Avg.: 675

ACT Composite: 31 avg.

First-year students returning: 95%

Grad in 4 Years: 87.6%

Cost of Attendance: \$54,724

Avg. Percent of Need Met: 100%

Most Popular Programs:

Social sciences, Business/marketing,

Psychology, Communications/journalism

Fun Facts:

- Its main campus is a historic district 6 miles west of downtown Boston and features some of the earliest examples of collegiate gothic architecture in North America.
- Included in many lists of "Most Scenic College Campuses"
- A Princeton Review survey of parents that asked "What 'dream college' would you most like to see your child attend were prospects of acceptance or cost not issues?" placed BC 6th.
- In recent years undergraduate applications have exceeded 30,000.
- 50% of BC students take part in an international experience before they graduate.
- BC has 5 bands catering to a range of musical tastes: a small wind ensemble, a symphonic band, a jazz ensemble, a pep band and a marching band.
- BC's Weston Observatory promotes earthquake hazard awareness and preparation in New England.
- Famous Graduates: Chris O'Donnell, John Kerry, Tip O'Neill, Doug Flutie, Mike Lupica, Leonard Nimoy, Bill Simon, Peter Lynch

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When you approach an interview from a position of strength, the pressure disappears. You'll coast through it.

Asking Good Questions: The Secret to Standing Out

When we conduct mock interviews with our students, one of the things we insist on is that they come to the interview prepared to ask questions. Thoughtful questions. Insightful questions.

Yes, it takes a little work and a little research. But when it comes time for the real thing, that effort pays off in spades. Only a very small percentage of students take the time to adequately research a school before visiting. Believe me, if you do it, you'll stand out and make a favorable impression on the interviewer. You will be remembered.

Asking questions shows respect; it shows that you're interested in the college and what the admission officer has to say. Asking thoughtful questions demonstrates you've investigated the college and know why you consider it a good fit for you. Asking questions can help you get at the character of a school, and go deeper than what's revealed in a college catalog.

What Kinds of Questions to Expect

Most college interviews last from 30-60 minutes. The questions can be as varied as college-essay questions. In other words, they range from the obvious to the absurd. Some reveal the personality and culture of the university. Many are open-ended, giving you a chance to reveal yourself.

A Princeton alumnus who conducts interviews for Princeton admissions was willing to share a few questions he asks prospective students. Here they are.

1. Why are you honoring Princeton with your application?

2. What books have you read lately?

These last questions are at the end of the interview:

3. If you had the power to change the world to make it a better place, what would you change?

4. When you turn 70, what would you want to look back at as your proudest accomplishment?

Helpful Tips

You can find helpful interview tips and hints on college websites. This information is usually meant for college students interviewing for a job, but many of the same rules apply. Here's a sample interview tips site, this one is from Boston College: <http://www.bc.edu/offices/careers/skills/interview/>

Proud Papa



My daughter Heather was graduated from the University of Miami in December. Here's a photo of her right before the ceremony.

The University did a wonderful job. Very impressive. The commencement speaker was Gloria Estefan.

Heather graduated a semester early – and in the process saved me thousands of dollars. This is a terrific money-saving strategy. Of course you have to have a good and dedicated student who's able to pull this off. Thanks, Heather.

Student of the Month

News You Can Use



Philip Coyle

*Student: Philip Coyle
High School: Seton Hall Prep
Class: 2011
Favorite Subject: AP Economics
Favorite Activities: Skiing, wilderness tripping, volunteering with Special Olympics
Favorite Book: The Hobbit
Colleges Interested in:
Georgetown, Boston College, American Univ., Cornell, Fordham, Holy Cross*

Q: You really grew as a student in high school, from average grades early on to A's in AP courses. How were you able to make such great strides?

A: Freshman year I was an average student giving average effort. Sophomore year I started to realize that I needed to perform better if I was going to get into my dream schools. So I started to get more serious.

Q: So it was just a question of trying harder?

A: I stopped thinking that other students were smarter than me. In junior year I took Honors English and Honors Chemistry. These courses had a reputation of being very difficult—especially the teachers. When I did well in those two courses I thought, “This isn’t so hard.” And from that point on I started to go after the toughest, most challenging courses. Even though I’ve been taking a more difficult course load, my grades have gone up every semester.

Q: And now you just got accepted into your first college. And they were so impressed by your application, they offered a very generous scholarship. How did that feel?

A: I feel good about the progress I’ve made. I was proud to get the scholarship.

Q: How involved was Complete College

Planning Solutions in your application process?

A: Kathi Love (my CCPS advisor) has been a phenomenal help. When I started the process I was clueless. Kathi helped prepare me and keep me organized and on track. She’s helped me with my essays. She’s helped boost my ACT score several percentiles. She did mock interviews with me so I was prepared for the real thing.

Q: How does this compare to what your guidance counselor does at school?

A: My guidance counselor has over 200 students and to him I’m just a number. Kathi is a person I can talk to and trust. With Kathi I’m a legitimate person. She has this nice way of encouraging you and being supportive. For example, instead of criticizing, she’ll say, “You’re getting closer.” That may not sound like much, but when you under the pressure of getting all your applications done, that makes a big difference.

Q: Your ACT scores went from 26 to 29. That’s a big jump. How did you do it?

A: I did a number of things. Kathi helped me. To me, SAT questions are very confusing, and I didn’t do very well. On the ACT, questions are asked in a straightforward manner, so I didn’t get confused. With the right prep help, I saw a dramatic improvement in my scores.

Q: I know you had to write a lot of essays. How difficult was that?

A: The writing itself was easy because I wrote about things I was passionate about. The editing process was sometimes painful, getting my thoughts fully developed while keeping it under the word limit.

Q: What were some of your topics?

A: My Common Application essay was about a wilderness trip. In another essay I talked about a problem I faced and how economic analysis could help solve it. I also wrote about my involvement with Special Olympics and special needs children.

Q: Do you have any advice for underclassmen?

A: Between applications, essays, standardized tests and regular schoolwork, it’s a very stressful time. Get as much done as possible during your junior year, and over the summer. Set a goal date so you don’t have stress hanging over you for your entire senior year. By early November I was already finished when many of my friends hadn’t even started.

More students taking the ACT exam

The number of high school students taking the ACT exam is up 30% since 2006. As a result, for the first time, the SAT is no longer king of the hill. Depending on whose numbers you believe, the ACT is either at parity with or ahead of the SAT in terms of total test takers.

It used to be that the SAT dominated both coasts, and the ACT ruled the Midwest. In recent years, the ACT has expanded in both directions, and is now accepted by every college that requires a standardized admission test, according to *Inside Higher Education*.

Kristen Campbell, executive director of college prep programs at Kaplan Test Prep and Admissions, reports that 60% of Kaplan students have either taken or are considering taking both the SAT and the ACT – and then deciding on which scores to accept. Some students – especially those who struggle with standardized tests – tend to fare better on the ACT than on the SAT.

Below is a table that translates your SAT scores to an ACT equivalent (or vice versa).

SAT CR+M (Score Range)	ACT Composite Score
1600	36
1540-1590	35
1490-1530	34
1440-1480	33
1400-1430	32
1360-1390	31
1330-1350	30
1290-1320	29
1250-1280	28
1210-1240	27
1170-1200	26
1130-1160	25
1090-1120	24
1050-1080	23
1020-1040	22
980-1010	21
940-970	20
900-930	19
860-890	18



Ask the Professor

Q: Will the financial aid package I receive as a freshman be the same for all 4 years?

A: You must reapply for financial aid every year. If your financial circumstances don't change, then it's likely you'll get the same aid award. If a parent loses her job – or gets a sizable raise or inheritance – than the award amount is likely to go up or down accordingly. We have seen instances where a school changed the award in Year 2 – or altered the package from grants to loans. Always ask the college: "If my family's financial circumstances remain the same, will my aid package be consistent for all 4 years?"

Did You Know?



- ✓ Last year, the college with the highest paid graduates was Harvey Mudd College, a math, science & engineering school in Southern Calif.
- ✓ The average starting salary of a Harvey Mudd graduate was over \$54,000.
- ✓ Next on the list of graduates taking home the biggest paychecks were Dartmouth and Princeton grads.

College Match Game



Which college did Taylor Swift attend?

- A.) Penn State
- B.) Gonzaga University
- C.) University of Texas
- D.) Bloomsburg Univ.
- E.) None of the above

Answer: E.) Trick question. Taylor Swift graduated high school in 2008, but has not yet made the decision to attend college.



Upcoming FREE workshops

January 20 – 7:30 pm Berkeley Heights (Berkeley Heights YMCA)

February 2 – 7:30 pm Edison Public Library

There are 2 ways to reserve a seat:
Online: www.myacfa.com
Call: 1-908-857-4200



"YOU'RE A GOOD WORKER AND TRY HARD, BUT SOME OF YOUR IDEAS ARE A LITTLE BEHIND THE TIMES."

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