

Putnam Valley Guidance Department

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The College Search

Before you begin the search for a college, you have to look at yourself. It's time for some self-evaluation before you try to narrow down the list of colleges. As you look at colleges, you want to create your own list that reflects your interests, likes and dislikes, and strengths.

Here are some issues and questions to consider.

Location

1. Do you intend to live at home and commute from Putnam Valley? What is a reasonable commute for you on a daily basis? Do you want to take the train or will you be driving to campus? Which schools are located in that distance range?

2. If you intend to live away from home, what geographic regions would you consider? You might want to think about how far a drive from home you'd want the school to be. If the colleges you are considering are far away, ask yourself if you would be willing to take a plane every time you plan to come home. If you have a distance in mind, you might draw a circle from Putnam Valley and look at schools within that distance.

Setting

Do you want your college to be located in an urban environment or within easy access to a city? Would you prefer the school to be in a small town or in a suburban area? What about a school in a rural area?

School size

The size of a college can play a role in selecting a school. Some students want to attend a large university with well over ten thousand students, with the great array of opportunities that such an institution can offer. Others prefer a small college where they may have more individualized attention. Still others find schools between these two ranges.

If you are not certain about the size of the school you want to attend, you might want to visit some colleges in our area. These visits might help you determine your own preferences.

Academic programs and majors

1. Not all students know what they want to major in at college. Some students decide on a major and change it while they are in college. Others go to college “undeclared” and choose their major during the first two years at school; still others are certain of their major and pursue it in college. Knowing some of your interests and your strengths can help as you conduct your college search.

If you are certain about your interests, look at schools that offer that major. Examine the course catalog to see what courses are offered in your field. If you are not certain, you would look at schools that offer a variety of programs that might interest you.

If you think that you might be interested in a dual major (two major areas of study) or a major and minor (a lesser concentration in one area), you should make certain that the schools on your list can accommodate your interests.

2. If you think that you might be interested in other academic programs, such as cooperative education or studying abroad, explore what the colleges on your list offer their students. Some colleges have slightly different school year calendars (such as the January Term) to allow students to explore specific interests or internships.

3. Some colleges offer honors programs to selected qualified students. Each school sets its own criteria for acceptance to these programs. Generally, students with strong academic records and test scores are considered for such programs. At some colleges, there are scholarships associated with admittance to these programs.

4. Students with learning disabilities can find varying levels of services at different colleges and universities. If you will need support services at college, you should examine the options available at the schools on your list. Often colleges have support services (such as a writing center) that are open to all students on campus.

Campus Life and Athletics

1. If you are planning on living on campus, you may have questions about residence life. How many students live on campus? Are students guaranteed four years of housing? Are students required to live on campus for all four years? What dining hall meal plans are offered? Do students stay on campus on the weekends or do they go home? What activities are there in the residence halls and on campus? If you have a car, do they allow freshmen to bring cars to campus?

2. There may be an activity that is of particular interest to you – or a sport you want to play on an intercollegiate, club, or intramural level. These may be a consideration as you look at colleges and begin to narrow down the list.

Selectivity

Each college and university has its own admission criteria and standards. You need to look at your high school record – courses and grades – and your test scores to see if they match with the students who are accepted at that particular school. Information about the college's acceptance rate, the grades and test scores of their admitted classes are published in college guides such as The College Handbook or the Peterson's Guides.

Colleges may consider a variety of factors including academic record (courses and grades), cumulative high school average, test scores, extra-curricular activities, special talents, teacher and counselor recommendations and your college essay as they make admissions decisions.

Once you've thought about your own interests and preferences, where do you start?

1. Your school counselor can help you explore your options and start your search. Throughout the search and application process, he/she can help you examine some of the choices available to you. Your counselor can help you organize the process of looking for colleges that suit your needs and applying to them.
2. Putnam Valley High School has access to the DISCOVER program, which allows students to search careers and colleges. Your counselor can give you a password that allows you to access the program from school and your home computer.
3. College Guides and Handbooks. The Guidance Office has a number of general and specific guides that you can use during your search. The Guidance library also has viewbooks, catalogs, and some videos from a large number of colleges.
4. College websites – As your search continues, you can check college and university websites that will provide additional information about the campuses.
5. College Conferences and Fairs – PVHS participates in the regional Northern Westchester/Putnam College Conference in May. Hundreds of

colleges set up booths to give students information about their schools. The same evening, the program provides the same service for parents. An evening college fair is held in October for seniors and parents.

The dates of college programs are listed in the quarterly PVHS GUIDANCE NOTES that are mailed home to students and families.

6. Open Houses – Some colleges set aside a day to invite interested students to campus. These open houses are intended to provide students with academic, financial aid, and admissions information. Open House information will be posted on the bulletin boards outside the Guidance Office. You may receive information from the colleges by mail. If you are interested in a specific college, you might want to contact them and see if they have a program planned.

The College Visit

Visiting a college gives you a firsthand opportunity to see if the college is right for YOU. You will have a chance to see the facilities and meet students and staff. It's preferable if you can visit colleges when classes are in session so you can get a sense of the students and the activities on campus.

To set up a college visit, contact the admissions office and sign up for one of the tours. Ask if you can speak with one of the admissions officers before or after the tour. Not all colleges will offer the opportunity for an interview. Some have group information sessions and/or group interviews.

Before you visit a college, review its materials and prepare some questions you might have. If you have questions about financial aid, you might call the Financial Aid office to schedule an appointment.

Arrive on time for the tour. It will take you to academic buildings, residence halls, and recreational areas of the campus. Ask your student guide any questions you may have about campus life. You might ask

- if the college has separate dormitories for freshmen and where they are located?
- about computer facilities on campus
- about study areas and library hours
- are there sororities and fraternities on campus and how many students are a part of the Greek system?
- about activities on campus, especially on weekends
- what is the average class size for freshmen classes?

-ask about any specific programs or activities that you might have an interest in.

After the tour, you might want to spend some time on campus. Visit the student center and look at the activities that are posted. Visit areas of interest to you. Pick up a college newspaper and see what issues are important on campus. Do the students you meet seem positive about the college? Is this a place where you can picture yourself studying and living for two or four years?

After the official tour and your own tour of campus, make some notes about your reaction and feeling about the college. Also, write down some of the things you want to remember about this college. The notes will be helpful when you are deciding where to apply and where to attend.

The College Interview

Some colleges will allow you to arrange an interview on campus or off-campus with an alumnus. Not all colleges offer interview opportunities. The interview is an opportunity for you to ask your questions about the college and for the college admissions staff to get to know you. Take an unofficial copy of your transcript with you.

Read the college's materials before your interview. Knowing some things about the school may make you feel more confident. It also shows the admissions officer that you are serious and prepared for the interview. Ask questions that you still have after reading the material. Don't ask questions that are clear in the viewbook, just for the sake of having questions to ask. Be ready to talk about yourself—your academic work at Putnam Valley, your interests, your goals and aspirations. Admissions counselors might ask you some questions such as:

- Describe yourself to me.
- What contribution have you made to your high school that you are proud of?
- What do you see yourself doing in 5 or 10 years?
- What are your most important characteristics? Why?
- Why do you want to study your intended major?
- Tell me about a book or movie you have read or seen recently.
- Who is your favorite faculty member and why?
- What do you do with your time outside the classroom?

The purpose of these questions and many others is to help the admissions officer get to know you. Are your goals, interests, and accomplishments a "fit" for their college?

The questions that you ask will help you to decide if this college is a “fit” for you. You may want to ask about the typical freshman year program, about your intended majors or specific programs that interest you (internships, study abroad programs, etc.). Ask about activities that you might be interested in participating in. If you are interested in a pre-professional program (law, medicine), ask about placement into graduate or professional programs.

After your interview, write down your impressions and add them to your notes from the tour. Remember that your notes should reflect what you have learned about the college, not just your impression of your tour guide or interviewer. Send a thank-you note to the admissions officer who met with you.

Testing

While you are looking at colleges, you also have to make sure you are preparing to apply.

Most colleges require standardized testing as part of the admissions process. As you review college materials, you should make note of their testing requirements. Generally colleges require the SAT or ACT. Some colleges (a smaller number) require the SAT Subject Tests.

Students often take the SAT twice, once in the spring of their junior year and again in the fall of senior year. The ACT is usually taken once.

SAT Subject Tests might be taken in junior or early in senior year, or when you complete the specific subject. You should check the admissions materials from the colleges you are interested in to see if they require SAT Subject Tests. If SAT Subject Tests are required, check to see how many subject tests the college requires and if they specify what subject area tests you must take.

You must register to take standardized tests by mail or on-line. The test dates and registration deadlines are listed in the back of this booklet.

You must make arrangements to send your SAT scores directly from the College Board or your ACT scores from the American College Testing Service. You can either make your request on the registration form of the last test that you take or send a request to send scores. Make sure that you make the request early enough to meet college deadlines.

The College Application Process

When working with a paper application:

- Obtain applications early so you won't have to rush through them.
- Photocopy the application and use it as a draft.
- Read the application carefully and fill out the draft.
- Short essay questions should be planned, written and edited. Give yourself enough time to be able to write and revise your work.
- Proofread your entire application before you transfer it to the final copy.

When working with an on-line application:

- Read the application carefully and fill out each section
- Short essay questions should be planned, written, and edited. Give yourself enough time to write and revise your work.
- As you are working on the application, save it but don't submit it until you have had the chance to proofread the entire application. Once you are satisfied that it is complete and has no errors, hit the submit button.

Some colleges invite you to tell them something about yourself. You get to choose the topic and it might take time before you decide what to write about. Talk to your counselor, family members, or friends about possible topics for you. Other colleges will give you a more specific topic for the essay. In all cases, the purpose is to give the college some insights into who you are.

As you know from English class, writing an essay is a process. Don't sit down the night before your application is due and write your essay. Start with a first draft, put it aside, and read it a few days later. You may make changes – in organization, style, grammar – and even in the topic. You might want to ask your English teacher or counselor to read it. While the essay is your work, you might want some reactions to it. You should allow ample time to craft the essay so it is your best work and remember to proofread the final copy to avoid grammatical errors or spelling mistakes. Remember, the essay will allow the college to know you better. You want to show them that you take your work seriously.

A resume is another way to help the colleges to know you better. It will tell them about your activities (both in school and outside of it), honors and awards you've earned, community service, and any jobs you have held. If you have done any academic programs during the summer or school year, include that on your resume.

Colleges want to know what you have done in high school or in the community. They know that students who have been involved in high school are likely to become involved on the college campus. They are not looking for someone who has signed up for every club the high school offers. They are looking for commitment, interest, responsibility, and leadership.

Start with a worksheet that lists your activities (grades 9 – 12), honors and work experiences and the years you did them. Ask someone close to you to read it to make sure you've included everything.

Your resume should be easy-to-read and concise. Put your name and address on the top. You can do your resume by category: academic honors, athletics, clubs, community service, work experience or you can do a chronological resume with the categories for each grade level (9 –12)

While you are beginning to work on your applications and essays, it is time to take care of one other part of your application – letters of recommendation from teachers. Some colleges specify how many letters should accompany an application. Generally, students have one or two letters from teachers. The teacher's letter give colleges more specific information about your performance in class, your strengths, and your potential. Together with your counselor's letter, these letters personalize your application, letting colleges know you better than just a list of numbers.

Think about which of your teachers you might ask. Generally students ask tenth or eleventh grade teachers. It doesn't have to be the teacher of the class where you received your highest grade, but it should be a teacher who knows you and has seen the quality of your work and your effort. You can ask a club advisor or a coach, but balance that with a letter from a teacher who can speak about classroom performance. When you have decided whom to ask, ask the teacher for some time to speak with them. You can then make your request politely and give them some information about the colleges and your intended major. Give teachers plenty of time to complete the letters. Remember there are lots of other seniors making the same requests. Both you and the teachers want the letters to be thoughtful and useful and you don't want to hurry them

You've finished your application – what's next?

The Putnam Valley High School Guidance Office will put the other pieces together with your application and mail it. You should bring your application to your counselor. If you are doing an on-line application, bring the secondary form to your counselor. If there are no school forms,

make sure to meet with your counselor to let him/her know that you have submitted your application. You must have a *Transcript Release Form* on file. You and your parent or guardian must sign it. It gives us permission to send your transcript to colleges. Your transcript is your official record of your course work and grades. It also includes your class rank in deciles and your cumulative average.

Your transcript, a list of the classes you are taking in the 12th grade, your letters of recommendation and a High School Profile (which describes the programs at Putnam Valley High School) are sent to colleges.

The Guidance Office will be processing hundreds of applications during the fall and early winter. Therefore, we ask that you give us your application or make a request to send materials at least two weeks before the college's deadlines.

For applications with deadlines of January 1st to 10th, 2010, you must submit your application or make a request to send your materials by *December 15, 2009*

Some variations on the application process

1. Pre-applications - There are some schools that have a short pre-application form. Once you mail this form with your check, you will receive the application. You should mail the pre-application as soon as possible. The application itself should follow the process outlined above.

2. The SUNY Application – You can apply to up to six SUNY colleges on a single application. There is a fee per college. Many SUNY colleges will have a supplemental application, requesting additional information about you. You should see your counselor once you receive the supplemental forms. Information about which schools have supplements is on the SUNY website. The SUNY online application is at :www.suny.edu/student

3. The Common Application – This is an application that is accepted by a number of private colleges. The colleges that will accept the common application are listed on the cover sheet of that application. The common application allows you to fill out the form once and send it to a number of schools. You must pay separate application fees for each of the colleges to which you are applying. Some colleges will want additional information (supplements) besides the common application and its essays.

4. Mid-year reports – Many colleges ask you to send your first semester senior year grades. If the college provides a form, turn it in with your application. At the start of the second semester, the Guidance staff will send it with your mid-year grades. If colleges require the information, you must send it as a part of the application process. If you want to send your first semester grades to a college, you must complete a Mid-year Grade Request Form in the Guidance Office and then those grades will be sent.

Financial Aid

Financial Aid is assistance – grants, scholarships, loans, or employment – that students receive to help pay for their college education. It can come from a number of sources – federal or state agencies, the colleges, foundations, or corporations.

There are two categories of aid – need based and merit. Some colleges set criteria based on academic and/or co-curricular achievements and offer a student merit-based aid. Need-based aid relies on information that a family provides about their income, assets, and particular circumstances.

It's important to read the information that comes from the colleges you are applying to since procedures, forms, and deadlines may vary.

The federal government uses a formula to determine your estimated family contribution (EFC). This information is derived from the information you provide on the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). The FAFSA is a form that must be filed with the federal government so that you can receive aid. At many colleges, students who are applying for merit-based aid still must complete the FAFSA. On the form you indicate which colleges should receive your information. You can get the FAFSA from the Guidance Office in December or you can complete it on-line at www.fafsa.ed.gov. **The FAFSA cannot be transmitted prior to January 1st of your senior year.** Before you start the FAFSA online you must get a PIN # at www.pin.ed.gov.

There are some websites with an aid calculator that will help you estimate your Expected Family Contribution. You can find calculators at www.finaid.org or www.hesc.com or www.wiredscholar.com. These sites will also give you additional information about aid and provide scholarship searches. They are sponsored by the National Financial Aid Officers organization, the Higher Education Corporation of the State of New York, and the Sallie Mae loan program, respectively.

Some private colleges will ask for additional information about your family's finances. They may use the College Scholarship Service Profile, which will ask for additional information. There is a charge for using the Profile. The Profile can be obtained at www.collegeboard.com/profile. Some colleges may send you their own financial aid forms, requesting more information that is provided from the FAFSA.

It is important that you keep track of the financial aid forms. Some colleges will let you know when they need to have all of your financial information. They will allow you to estimate 2008 information if your family hasn't completed its taxes yet. Then your parent/guardian will have to go back and revise the information once the taxes are done. You want the college to have your family's information when they begin to allocate their aid funds.

The Financial Aid Offices at the colleges are helpful in providing information or answering questions. Putnam Valley High School will sponsor a financial aid information night in December for families of seniors.

If you are applying for a scholarship sponsored by a corporation or civic group, read the application carefully and provide all the necessary information. Again, make sure to follow their deadlines. You should not be paying to apply for any scholarships. If you have any questions about a scholarship program, speak with your counselor.

Scholarship opportunities that are sent to the Guidance Office will be posted on the Guidance bulletin boards. They are also listed in the "Guidance Notes" that will be mailed home to all seniors several times in the fall and winter.

Appendix A

Glossary of terms

ACT	Standardized testing used for college admissions. Sponsored by the American College Testing Program
Associate Degree	A degree granted upon completion of a two-year course of study.
Award letter	A letter sent by a college's financial aid office indicating the amount and kind(s) of aid a student qualifies to receive at their college.
Bachelor Degree	A degree granted upon completion of a four-year course of study.
College Work-Study	A financial aid program where a student may work part-time on campus (need-based aid)
Common Application	An application accepted by a number of colleges. Students complete one copy of the application and submit it to a number of colleges. There are application fees for each college applied to.
Cooperative Work-Study Programs	College programs where students alternate between full-time college study and paid employment in a related field.
CSS Profile	A financial aid form from the College Scholarship Service that may be required by some colleges.
Early Action (EA)	An admissions plan, offered by some colleges, that allows students to receive admissions decisions earlier than the regular admissions date. There are deadlines for EA applications. Students are not required to commit to attending this college but they can wait until they receive other colleges' decisions.

Early Decision (ED)	An admissions plan, offered by some colleges, that allows students to receive an admissions decision to their first choice college before the regular notification date. There are early deadlines for ED. Students agree that they will attend this college if accepted and withdraw their applications for all other colleges. Colleges may accept, deny, or defer (hold over to the regular applicant group) a student in Early Decision.
Expected Family Contribution (EFC)	The amount of money that a family is expected to contribute toward the cost of a college education.
Financial Aid “Package”	The combination of loans, grants, and scholarships offered to a student by a college.
Free Application For Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)	The federal financial aid form that assesses a family’s contribution to the cost of education.
Grant	Money given to a student to help meet the costs of college. Does not have to be repaid.
High School Profile	A description of Putnam Valley High School and its programs, which is mailed with each college application.
Honors program	College programs that allow students to participate in enriched courses. Students are accepted to these programs at individual colleges.
In-state tuition	The tuition charged at public colleges and universities to residents of the particular state.
Internship	Short-term experience where students work in an area related to their field of study. May be on-campus or off-campus.
Major	The area of study that a student chooses to specialize in.

Mid-year report	First semester senior grades are sent to colleges upon request.
Open Admissions	Policy where almost all high school graduates are admitted to a college, irrespective of their academic record.
Parent Loan for Undergraduate Students (PLUS)	Loan program available to parents to help finance college expenses.
Pell Grant	Grant money awarded by the federal government Based on financial need.
Rolling Admissions	Admissions policy of processing applications and making admissions decisions as soon as they are received rather than waiting for a deadline date.
SAT	Standardized test measuring verbal and mathematical reasoning abilities, used for college admissions.
SAT Subject Tests	Subject area tests required by some colleges for admissions or for placement after admissions.
Stafford Student Loan	Money loaned to students for college expenses. May have the interest subsidized or unsubsidized depending on family finances. There are limits on the amount loaned depending on the year of college study.
Study Abroad	Programs where students study in another country for a semester or a year.
SUNY	The State University of New York. A system of University Centers, Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Health Science Centers, Specialized Colleges, Agricultural and Technical Colleges, and Community Colleges.
Transcript	A record of a student's high school courses and the final grades and Regents exam grades (if applicable). Notes a student's cumulative average as of 6 semesters and decile rank in class.

Tuition Assistance
Program (TAP)

A New York State grant program based on family need. Students must attend a public or private college in New York State.

Wait List

Students are not accepted or denied at notification date. They are placed on a waiting list and may be offered admission if a space opens up in the late spring.

Standardized Testing

Putnam Valley High School CEEB Code: 334651

Students must register for the ACT or SAT on-line or by mail. Registration materials are available in the Guidance office. The fees for taking these test are included in the registration materials. Putnam Valley High School is not a testing center for the SAT or ACT.

SAT Information

<i>Test Date</i>	<i>Registration Deadline</i>
May 2, 2009	March 31, 2009
June 6, 2009	May 5, 2009
Oct. 10, 2009	TBA*
Nov. 7, 2009	TBA*
Dec. 5, 2009	TBA*
Jan. 23, 2010	TBA*

* Registration deadlines as well as late registration dates will be available at: collegeboard.com

ACT Information

<i>Test Date</i>	<i>Registration Deadline</i>
April 4, 2009	Feb. 27, 2009
June 13, 2009	May 8, 2009
Sept. 12, 2009	TBA*
Oct. 24, 2009	TBA*
Dec. 12, 2009	TBA*

* Registration deadlines as well as late registration dates will be available at: www.actstudent.org

Websites

Most colleges have websites that describe their campuses and programs.

College Search

www.collegeboard.com
www.collegenet.com
www.gocollege.com
www.petersons.com
www.princetonreview.com
www.nymentor.com

Financial Aid and Scholarships

www.fafsa.ed.gov
www.scholarships.com
www.finaid.org
www.wiredscholar.com
www.hesc.com
www.collegeboard.com
www.fastweb.com

Test information and preparation

www.collegeboard.com
www.act.org
www.kaplan.com
www.princetonreview.com

If you took the PSAT, you have access to the College Board's Quick Start. The site and your personal access code is printed on your PSAT score report.

Dates to Remember

April 15, 2009
7:00 PM

College Planning Night
Putnam Valley High School PAC

May 5, 2009
During school day

College Conference for Juniors
BOCES Tech Center-for students only

May 5, 2009
6:30 PM

College Night for Parents and Students
Fox Lane High School, Bedford
(Nearly 300 college representatives will
be in attendance)