

## **Getting Into College: A Guide to the Application Process**

### **A. Prerequisites**

Colleges and universities require applicants to have a high school diploma, or its equivalent (i.e. a G.E.D.), to be admitted. High school diplomas are granted by the high school that the student attended, so long as all of the high school's requirements for graduation are met.

In New York, a high school can grant either a Regents or a Local diploma.

The Regents Diploma has stricter requirements, and therefore most colleges give it additional weight in their admissions decisions.

The Local Diploma will not be available to anyone in New York who has entered the 9<sup>th</sup> Grade in September 2008 or later. This makes it harder to obtain a high school diploma in New York, but is intended to make New York students more competitive in the college admissions process.

Most colleges and universities in the United States have policies allowing applicants with G.E.D.s to be admitted. The G.E.D. applicant must demonstrate that he or she has equivalent qualifications to a student who obtained a High School Diploma. The scores that the applicant receives on the G.E.D. examination can help colleges determine the applicant's qualifications. The higher an applicant scores on the G.E.D. exam, the greater the chance that applicant has to be accepted.

Some colleges and universities require candidates to be a certain rank within their high school class. The New York State Department of Education has published a conversion chart from G.E.D. score to equivalent class rank.

### **B. The College Application**

#### *1. The Application:*

Applications to colleges and universities are usually available in multiple forms. Applications are often available in paper form or submitted electronically. Colleges and universities may have digital applications that are accessible for people who use screen readers or other adaptive technologies. However, if the application process or forms are not fully accessible, the appropriate step is to contact the university or college office of admissions, in writing or by phone, and communicate that you need an alternative in order to complete the application. When doing so, it is helpful to be as specific as

possible in explaining what you need - for example a copy of the application form in enlarged print, or as a Word document - and to specify that you are seeking this alternative as an accommodation for a disability.

## *2. Application Fees:*

Many colleges and universities require a non-refundable application fee. The fee usually ranges from \$35-\$60, but may be higher or lower depending on the school.

Fee waivers are sometimes available for low-income families. Students generally need to contact the admissions office of individual schools regarding fee waivers.

## *3. High School Transcript:*

The transcript is generally submitted to the college or university by the student's high school.

Colleges may include information about submitting a transcript with the application sent to the student (in this case the student should give the forms to their guidance counselor as soon as possible), or the College may send the request directly to the school listed on the student's submitted application.

## *4. Admissions Test Scores:*

Most colleges require that students take the SAT, SAT Subject Test, or ACT to be admitted into the college. Colleges may require a specific test; this information can be found on the college's application, or at the college's website.

## *5. Letters of Recommendation:*

Some colleges may require one or more letters of recommendation. The letter usually can be from a teacher, counselor, or someone who knows the student well (but typically not someone who is related to the applicant; for example a mother, sister, aunt, grandparent).

A student should give an individual preparing a letter of recommendation at least two weeks to write and send the letter to the school.

## *6. Essay:*

Many colleges require an essay to be submitted with an application. The essay may be in the form of a personal statement or a response to a given question or set of questions.

The form of the essay depends on what is required in the specific college's application.

## *7. Interviews:*

Some colleges may require or recommend that the individual participate in an interview during the application process. This is an opportunity for the applicant to make a personal connection with a person who will have a say in deciding the applicant's admission to the school. For in-person interviews, it is important to communicate ahead

of time if you have any disabilities that may affect your access to rooms or buildings, or that affect speech or communication, particularly if you will need an accommodation in order to participate.

#### *8. Audition/Portfolio:*

Applicants for a program such as music, art, or design, may have to document prior work by auditioning on campus or submitting an audiotape, slides, or some other sample of work to demonstrate ability.

#### *9. The Sum of the Parts:*

The entire application should create a consistent portrait of who you are and what you'll bring to the college. If all the parts of your application are filled out honestly and carefully, with an attention to your conviction that each school is a good match for you, you will come across in the best light possible.

The sections applications are divided into vary from college to college but many have a similar format. For more information on the different parts of the college application, visit: <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/apply/the-application/115.html>

### **C. College Admissions Exams: The SAT and ACT**

#### **1. The SAT:**

##### *a. General Information about the SAT*

The SAT is a widely used college admission test; almost every college and university in the United States accepts SAT scores to help determine admission. The SAT tests the reading, writing, and mathematical skills taught to all students throughout the high school experience.

Most students take the SAT in the spring of their junior year in high school. However, the SAT is offered multiple times throughout any given year. Individuals can take the SAT at times other than the spring of their junior year, and can re-take the test if desired. Colleges have access to all SAT scores not only the ones from the last test taken. Schools differ in how they approach evaluating your score if you re-take the exam. Some will use results from your most recent SAT test, while others will use an average score obtained from the multiple tests taken.

Individuals can register online to take the SAT exam.

The following website provides links to register for the SAT, find test dates and locations, preparation tools, etc:

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/index.html?student>.

*b. Requesting Accommodations for the SAT Exam*

An individual must be approved for accommodations by the College Board's Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to receive accommodations for the SAT. To be approved for accommodations, a student must:

- Have a disability that requires testing accommodations
- Submit a complete request for accommodations before the stated deadline
- If required, submit complete documentation of a disability describing the need for the requested accommodations

*Submitting a Complete Request:*

Every student requesting accommodations must submit a request to the College Board with detailed information regarding the student's name and address, disability, past testing, and accommodations received in school. Generally, students work with their school to request testing accommodations. Typically a student and/or parent completes a consent form for the release of confidential information and gives it to the SSD coordinator at their high school. The SSD coordinator then makes the accommodations request online for the College Board exam. Students and/or parents can also request accommodations directly by submitting a Student Eligibility Form to the College.

Instructions for filling out and submitting this form can be found under "Initial Requests for Accommodations" at:

<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/testing/ssd/application/apply>

*Documentation:*

In some instances, documentation is required for the College Board's review. Along with showing the student has a disability, the documentation must show:

- The disability leads to a functional limitation in ability to take College Board tests, and
- The requested accommodation is appropriate

Usually, temporary medical conditions (such as a broken arm) are not considered a disability for testing accommodations by the College Board. Information about temporary medical conditions can be found at:

<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/testing/ssd/application/apply/medical>

For more information and links to required forms for requesting SAT accommodations, please go to:

<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/testing/ssd/application/apply/eligibility>.

## **2. The ACT:**

### *a. General Information about the ACT*

The ACT is another widely accepted exam that colleges and universities recognize to help the admissions decision. There are two different ACT exams, the ACT (non-writing) and the ACT (writing).

The non-writing exam consists of four multiple choice sections on the following subjects:

1. English,
2. Mathematics,
3. Reading, and
4. Science.

The ACT exam with a writing section includes the four multiple choice sections as well as a 30-minute essay to examine writing skills. The essay consists of an issue that has two different points of view; the individual then answers a question regarding their own position on the issue.

Students in grades 6 through 12 and high school graduates are eligible to take the ACT. Individuals should take the ACT at least two months prior to all application deadlines for colleges and scholarships.

Individuals can register online to take the ACT at:

[https://services.actstudent.org/OA\\_HTML/actibeCAcdLogin.jsp](https://services.actstudent.org/OA_HTML/actibeCAcdLogin.jsp).

### *b. Requesting Accommodations for the ACT*

Reasonable accommodations can be provided for students with diagnosed, documented disabilities. In deciding upon accommodations, ACT follows the following principles:

1. Requirements and procedures for test accommodations must ensure fairness for all candidates
2. Accommodations must be consistent with ADA requirements and appropriate and reasonable for the documented disability
3. Accommodations must not result in an undue burden, as that term is used under the ADA, or fundamentally alter what the test is designed to measure
4. Documentation of the diagnosis must provide evidence that the person's impairment substantially limits one or more major life activities. Applicants must also provide information about prior accommodations made in a similar setting, such as in academic classes and other testing situations

Comprehensive information about the required documentation and forms for requesting accommodations on the ACT can be found at: <http://www.act.org/aap/disab/policy.html>.

## **D. Pursuing a 2-year Degree**

### *1. General Information about 2-year Degrees:*

A student may choose to pursue a two-year degree (Associate's degree) instead of, or before, pursuing a four-year degree (Bachelor's degree). Even though many colleges and universities offer both two and four year degree programs, community colleges primarily focus on two-year programs.

Associate's programs are generally equivalent to the first two years of a four-year degree program, and are often designed for students who plan on transferring to a four-year program. In order to transfer from an Associate's program to a Bachelor's program (two-year to four-year) a student needs to have good academic performance to obtain admission into a four-year program.

Students may also choose to enter the work force directly after earning the two-year Associate's degree rather than continuing their university education.

### *2. Why a Student Might Choose to Pursue a 2-year Degree*

A student might choose to attend a community college or other two-year degree program if they are unable to obtain admission into a four-year degree program at a college or university. For instance, a student with a low high school grade point average, and/or low college admissions test scores might first attend a two-year program at a community college as a way of building good grades and college credit in order to eventually transfer into a four-year degree program.

A student might also choose to enroll at a community college for financial reasons. Generally, the cost of attending a community college to complete an Associate's degree is less expensive than enrolling in a four-year program.