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Getting Organized in the Senior Year

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Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D. works as an independent college advisor in Lafayette. Dr. LaScala draws on 20 years of experience in higher education and research to customize the college search and admission process for students and their families. She has 3 daughters—one a graduate of Cal Poly (San Luis Obispo), one a sophomore at MIT and the youngest, a junior in high school. Dr. LaScala can be c

Times have changed and getting into college is much different than it was even five years ago. Selecting a college is a big decision, and both public and private schools are more competitive. Going through the college admissions process can seem daunting, especially to seniors who must kick into overdrive to accomplish the tasks associated with a college search and the application process. And, of course, this effort is in addition to academics, sports, volunteerism and jobs.

Our community has fine high schools and counselors. Yet school counselors have their hands full keeping their caseloads on track academically. Essentially it is the responsibility of the student, with support from family, to fully engage in the process of selecting and applying to colleges. Each college a student applies to should be a good fit—one where the student can spend 4 happy and productive years. Here is a check list of some basic tasks to accomplish during fall semester of senior year:

- Complete a college search of "best fit" colleges that include reach, good bets and almost certain to get in options.
- Find out and keep track of deadlines related to what the high school counseling office requires to send information to colleges
- Make an appointment with the school counselor to review college plans and get advice.
- Verify the accuracy of school transcripts and assess eligibility for the University of California (UC) as well as the California State University (CSU) campuses
- Note that the UC and CSU deadline is November 30th; private school deadlines are typically later
- Complete standardized testing requirements; these tests were best taken at least once before the senior year; if necessary, register for appropriate SAT or ACT testing and note that 2 SAT subject tests in different disciplines are required by UC
- Attend talks by college representatives who visit your school, attend college fairs, make campus visits, research college websites and guide books
- Go to each college's website, check admission requirements, download and review application forms for colleges that make it to the final list
- Ask teachers for recommendations as soon as the list of colleges is finalized (no later than November 1st—busy teachers need time to write recommendations)
- Work with the counseling office to make sure it has what it needs to send off the Secondary School Report and Counselor Letter of Recommendation
- Review essays and personal statements on each application; write drafts and finalize
- Check and apply to appropriate scholarships (often schools that have college and career centers post opportunities on a regular basis)
- Understand how these tasks differ for Early Action and Early Decision applicants

High school juniors and their parents can review this checklist and think about where they will be next year around this time. Start early! Getting all the information, keeping it organized and on track is not a matter of intelligence—it is a matter of time and discipline. Every family with a college bound

student needs to decide how to handle the timing and complexities of college admissions. There are many resources at our fine schools and our counselors are first rate. There are excellent books and websites, and good organizational tools (like simple paper folder systems color-coded by topic). One important resource is an independent college advisor. These professionals are accessible to their clients whenever there is a question or concern. Independent advisors should be well qualified and experienced, belong to professional organizations, and have excellent references from clients who have used their services. Their services should be based on four values: sound advice, integrity, respect and confidentiality. With all the resources in our community, students can stay on track for college! For prior articles in this series visit www.lamorindaweekly.com



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