



US College Handbook for Students & Parents
Campion College Guidance Department, 2017
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Timeline & Recommended Activities

6B

Make the Year Count: For your college application submission (usually due before January 1 of 6A), your transcript will only capture your grades up to the end of 6B, hence the need to put out your best. (Subsequent grades will be automatically uploaded after this submission.) From a college application point of view, this is, therefore, perhaps your most important academic year both as it relates to how your term grades will affect your overall GPA and what CAPE Unit 1 scores you receive. However, students are often challenged by the transition from 5th to 6B—ensure that you get the help you need and settle into this higher level as quickly as possible.

Embrace Leadership: Now is the time to give more of your time to the leadership of the student body whether as a volunteer at school events; in an official role in a club, team or house; or by becoming a class representative. As an active participant in lower school, you've done the footwork, now take on more responsibility and shine.

Develop Relationships: For your applications, you will need between 1-3 recommenders and colleges usually want them to be current teachers (i.e. your 6th form teachers). Therefore, the impression you make on your teachers in and outside of the classroom matters a great deal. Take the time to get to know your teachers and vice versa. The same is true of your assigned college counsellor who will need to interview you with the relevant completed "brag sheet" and registration form before the summer begins. Remember, it is much easier to write a strong recommendation for a student who a teacher knows well.

Get to Know the Colleges: The Christmas term is full of visits by a variety of US and Canadian colleges to Campion as well as select college fairs held elsewhere in Kingston. Make the time to research the colleges before the visits and attend as many as possible armed with thoughtful questions about the programs offered and campus life. Even if you have never heard of the college, you should still try to attend—you may learn more about the general application process or financial aid etc which will be beneficial regardless of where you apply. These visits are also good opportunities to actually meet the people who will be reading your applications. Putting a face to an applicant's name and, better yet, remembering that great question the student asked, will make a difference. Similarly, **demonstrate your interest** in colleges by signing up for their emails on their web site, liking them on Facebook or following them on other social media. If you are able, use your holidays to visit the colleges and sign up for the official tours or other opportunities to meet admission representatives so that they have a record of your attendance. You can also do virtual tours of many campuses. In addition, some colleges offer paid "**fly-in**" programs whereby they invite you to visit in the summer and cover your expenses based on your application to these programs (note application deadlines are very early and admission is competitive).

Begin Testing: Some students are able to manage preparing for CAPE Unit 1 and taking either the ACT or SAT in the Easter Term or in May/June of 6B. Others prefer to wait until after CAPE Unit 1 and then study and do the practice tests over the summer in order to sit the September test. Either way, it is recommended that students ensure they have taken at least one test by September/October. This allows ample time to review the scores and either retake the test in the following months or take the additional SAT subject tests that may be required by your college—check the college's web site for more information. **All colleges accept either the SAT or the ACT**—which one you take depends on your preference and ability to score higher on one as opposed to the other. (A small number of colleges do not require these tests—check the admission requirements of your colleges.) Which test to take can be determined by taking the free online practice tests on each test site.

Please also note that most students study on their own and do well—paid classes are not required! There are also multiple online sites that can help, some with a minimal fee and some free like Khan Academy. In addition, the Department has books that you may borrow.

Use the Summer: This is a very important time in the college application process. During the summer between 6B and 6A, you should complete many of the required tasks without the added burden of schoolwork. This includes studying for your testing in September and refining your list of colleges based on considering several factors such as: the availability of the programs you are interested in; the availability and size of financial aid packages and scholarships for international students; the average 4-year graduation rate and overall retention rate; the diversity of the student population both in terms of race and international students; the faculty to student ratio and whether most classes are taught by professors or graduate students; the average size of classes and the university in general; the location of the school and proximity to an urban area and international airport; internship and employment opportunities; social, extracurricular and sports opportunities etc.

In addition, **CommonApp**, the most popular online application platform, opens on August 1. (Some colleges have their own online application platforms and these include MIT, University of California, University of Florida, and Georgetown University—these colleges often have earlier deadlines.) This gives you a month to create an account, complete all the basic information required on the application and begin work on the essay prompts (both the general one and those specific to each college, if applicable).

You should also research and note the admission, financial aid and scholarship requirements and deadlines of each college. In general, it is recommended that you have a mix of reach, match (target) and safety colleges. For a definition of these categories, see: princetonreview.com/college-advice/dream-match-safety-schools

Finally, as discussed above, summer is a good time to continue exploring your interests through volunteering, working, taking more challenging college-level courses online or elsewhere, and of course reading in general (newspapers, non-fiction etc) as well as reading from the recommended college-bound lists.

6A

Request Transcripts: It is recommended that you request your transcript from the main office as soon as you return to school in the September of 6A. You do not have to have a final list of colleges. You will simply select electronic application (which means any online application platform) and pay the required fee. (Very few colleges require a mailed copy of your transcript anymore.) In about a week, you should go and collect your unofficial copy. Your unofficial copy will be useful to you in completing your college applications. Check that all the information is correct and confirm this with the main office. Then, the office will send the official copy to your counsellor. Ensure that you have sent the relevant email request via the application platform to your counsellor who will then upload your transcript and your recommendation. Your counsellor will also automatically upload your Christmas term grades when they become available and your final transcript at the end of the year.

Ask for Recommendations: Teachers are busy people. Please be respectful about when and how you ask for recommendations—generally, the earlier, the better (at least four weeks in advance), and in person. You should also tell them what your deadline is (official or perhaps your personal one). Once they have agreed, send the relevant email request via the application platform. After a few days, check that the email request was received. If your deadline is approaching and the recommendation has not been uploaded, you may do a gentle reminder. If you have changed your mind and will not be applying anymore, please advise them of this change so that they do not waste their time. And, of course, always send a thank you note and inform them of your acceptances.

Complete your Testing: Aim to complete your testing as early as possible. This will give you the option to retake the test and decide on which test score to send to a college. You should not be taking the test in December for the first time. Getting the scores back and sending them to the colleges takes time (about one month). Check your college's testing deadlines to ensure you can meet them. Do as much prep work as you can so that you can do your best. Testing is not cheap and neither is sending the scores after the test results arrive; ensure that you use the free score service as far as possible when you register for the test.

Take Time with your Essay: Start your draft in the summer and allow enough time for people you trust to read it through and make comments. There are multiple online sites that offer tips on how to write a good college essay as well as examples of really good ones to inspire you. Some tips are:

- Make it personal—this is a wonderful opportunity for the colleges to learn more about you.
- Use real life examples—don't just tell them you are dedicated or brave etc, show them through examples within the story.
- Make sure it is your own work—do not allow an eager aunt or other adult to take over your essay. It should sound like your voice and be your story.
- Check and then double-check—spelling, punctuation and grammar are very important. Ask a teacher or other person with this skill to read the essay through to check for errors.

Complete the Supplementary Questions: Many colleges require you to answer supplementary questions and these answers can vary in length from one sentence to a full essay. Copy all these questions into a Word Document during the summer and work your way through them. Do not leave them until right before the application deadline. They are just as important as your main essay. In particular, many colleges ask: Why do you want to come to College X? Make sure you have done your research and can answer this in a meaningful way that will give the colleges a way to gauge your interest in their programs and offerings. For some majors (art, music, drama etc), you may also be asked to submit a portfolio—research this requirement carefully.

Fill out the Financial Aid Forms: In order to receive financial aid from a college, your family must demonstrate that it is in need of this aid by reporting on its financial circumstances and eligibility, and providing proof of such. There are no guarantees and often families are required to pay for a substantial portion of these expenses. There are also many expenses involved in studying abroad that are not stated explicitly such as airfare, transportation, winter clothes, computers, phone service, personal care items etc. Create a realistic budget and discuss a plan for how you and your family will cover all the costs involved.

If you decide to apply for aid, you should know that it usually comes as a package in a combination of grants (money that you do not have to pay back), loans (which you do have to pay back) and work-study opportunities (whereby you are required to work on campus and the value of this is accounted for within your package). Many colleges have a cost calculator on their web site which allows you to anonymously calculate an idea of what your family can be expected to pay based on your family's financial situation.

It is important to note that financial aid is very limited for international students—our department offers information on examples of the type of aid allotted to international students to use as a guide. In addition, there are only five schools in the US that are currently need-blind in their admission decision process for international students: Amherst, Harvard, MIT, Princeton and Yale. This means that, in general, the other colleges in the US do consider the fact that you are requesting financial aid in their decision process (i.e. they are need-aware). If you will need the entire cost of attendance covered, you should look for colleges that state they do offer aid to international students and will cover 100% of your need. These are very few in number and do not include any public (state) universities, which hardly give any assistance at all to international students. Having said that, there are many high achieving students from Campion and other Jamaican schools that have been awarded very generous packages by a variety of private colleges over the years. However, students and families should expect (and be prepared) to pay for some of the many expenses and part of the cost of tuition.

To request financial aid, most colleges require students to complete the **CSS Profile** on the College Board site. This is now available from October 1 and should be submitted as soon as possible (there is no need to submit your college application first). Note that some schools have their own forms. Check your college's financial aid section to learn more about which form is required and what is the deadline for filing. All of these forms will need to be completed by you and your family and/or guardian with accurate financial information. You should know that there is a fee to submit the CSS Profile, however, some schools offer a waiver or an alternate form/submission process for very low income students—email them for more information if you feel you qualify.

Finally, if you are a US citizen who is in need of aid, you must complete the **FAFSA** Forms available at <https://fafsa.ed.gov> as well as the forms above depending on the college's requirements. The financial aid and scholarships available to US citizens are significantly greater than those for international students. In addition, if you or your immediate family members can prove that you are residents of a particular state, you may qualify for in-state

tuition rates at that state's public colleges and this is substantially less than the tuition for private colleges or public universities in other states. Check your college's financial aid section and discuss your status with your family.

Search for Scholarships: In addition to offering financial aid, many schools offer a few merit based scholarships which often require separate applications and recommendations, and have very early deadlines (from October on). There are also some websites that list independent scholarships to which you can apply. However, be wary of scam sites offering scholarships in exchange for large application fees or the entry of credit card or banking information. Also, you should carefully read your college's policy on outside scholarships to ensure that they will not affect your financial aid offer. Do your research and act early!

(Athletic scholarships have a completely different application process and selection criteria and these scholarships can be withdrawn for a wide variety of reasons. If this is option is of interest/applicable to you, please do your research and discuss with our counsellors and your coaches.)

Apply Early: A number of colleges offer **Early Action** applications. This means that you submit all your documents (including testing scores and recommendations) in early November and the colleges will give you a response by mid-December including details of a financial aid package. Obviously, you will need to plan ahead and be very organized to meet this deadline but there are several advantages, including the fact that these schools will often fill a substantial percentage of their incoming class this way and begin distributing financial aid to those who apply EA. Note that some schools offer Restricted Early Action which means that you can only apply to that school as Early Action and to the others only as Regular Decision.

Also, note that Early Action is different from Early Decision. Early Action does not bind you to accept their offer and give up all other offers. **Early Decision** does bind you and therefore is not recommended for our students if financial aid is a requirement. In addition, many schools have an **unofficial priority deadline** of December 1 for applications. This is not stated but will often be listed on the college's scholarship information site as the deadline for automatically being considered for certain scholarships. For other schools, if you apply by December 1 your application will be read before the regular deadline—fresh eyes on an application can be a very good thing! However, be wary of any college that invites you to make a "VIP" or "fast" application with an early deadline. This is a new marketing technique to increase application numbers and is probably not the best choice of a college for you.

Finally, there are **rolling admissions** whereby some colleges make and release their decisions very soon after the application is submitted; in this case, the earlier you submit, the greater your chance of admission.

Regardless of which deadline applies to you, we recommend that you aim to complete your applications by December 1. This will mean that you will have no distractions for the term exams and can enjoy a relaxing break over Christmas. If you do decide to go this route, ensure that you discuss this with your counsellor and with the teachers whom you ask for recommendations well in advance of the deadline (at least four weeks).

Get Ready for the Interview: Some colleges will request (or offer) an interview by phone, Skype or via a visiting representative or alumni. In a few select cases, colleges will even cover the costs of a visit to their school for an interview after they have received your application. You should prepare for this by practising with your friends and adults. Sites such as College Board offer advice on interviews and sample questions. Also, ensure that you are up-to-date on current and world affairs and especially major developments in your area of interest. An interview is a great opportunity to impress the admission officers: ensure you have researched the college in order to answer questions and also have your own list of questions on hand. Be sure to get the name and contact information for the person who interviews you and send them a formal thank you email afterwards.

Keep in Touch: Keep your Campion college counsellor up-to-date with your plans and progress. Perhaps you have won a prize that you think should be included in your recommendation. Or perhaps you are having trouble deciding between two colleges. Your counsellors can guide you along this often confusing journey but only if they know what is going on. Your Campion counsellors will also be your best advocate in communicating with colleges.

Also, note that hiring an outside college counselling service is not a requirement for admission to any college. Most of our students do their own research and apply on their own and many have received outstanding offers from the most prestigious universities around the world for decades.

Do Not Give in to “Senioritis”: In the Easter term of 6A, teachers often observe a lack of energy and effort by those students who may have already been accepted to a college. We call this “senioritis”. Having spent seven years of your life at Campion, we encourage you to not give in to this “affliction” but rather to keep working and getting the grades you are capable of. You want to end on a high note with excellent CAPE Unit II scores and a strong term report. There is also the matter of your college’s acceptance offer: your final transcript can be negatively affected by poor grades in this term and, this has been known to lead to withdrawal of offers of acceptance by some schools. Do not let this happen to you!

Acceptances: Most colleges notify applicants by April 1 and require a reply (and deposit) by May 1. Information on your financial aid award and on obtaining visas, medical records and finances will be provided in your package. Read everything carefully especially the information on the financial aid award. Feel free to contact the college’s financial aid offices with questions on the specifics of the award and, to update them if something has changed in your family’s circumstances such as a parent’s illness or job status. Should you need to appeal the award, be polite and honest in your letter knowing that yours is one of many appeals they will receive.

Enjoy These Final Months: If you have been doing your best while at Campion and have worked hard on your testing and applications, you should now be in a position to enjoy the last few months of high school with friends who you may not see for a very long time. Congratulations and remember it’s not where you go but what you make of it!

Websites for Reference

Selecting a College

General information:

- bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges
- nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/
- collegeresults.org/
- collegeprotraits.org
- bestkeptcollegesecrets.com
- Also, the Fiske Guide has proven useful for many students: fiskeguide.com

Other:

- Reviews by students: unigo.com collegeconfidential.com/ colleges.niche.com
- Online college fair and admission officer links: collegeweeklive.com/
- Virtual campus tours: campustours.com/ and youuniversitytv.com
- Info on curriculum, average grad rate and cost by state: whatwilltheylearn.com/
- Info on salaries of graduates: payscale.com/college-salary-report
- Info on “best value”: kiplinger.com/tool/college/T014-S001-find-best-colleges-value-rankings/index.php
- Info on the “Colleges that Change Lives” group that offers a different perspective on the selectivity rankings: ctcl.org/about/
- Tool to use GPA and SAT/ACT scores to determine reach, match, safety college list (use as a guide only): collegesimply.com/
- Although there is some controversy on how US News compiles its rankings of colleges (see Malcolm Gladwell - newyorker.com/magazine/2011/02/14/the-order-of-things?currentPage=all), the site does offer useful for information on comparing class size, graduation rates, diversity etc. Also, look at lists such as “A schools for B students” and “Up and Coming Schools”. usnews.com/rankings

Applications

Common App: commonapp.org

Coalition: coalitionforcollegeaccess.org

How to Apply

The application platforms are generally very easy to follow and allow you to input information, save and then return at a later date to edit and complete. If you feel you need more information, there are many online resources on how to

apply and a good place to start is bigfuture.collegeboard.org as well as the US Embassy's Center in Kingston at edusajamaica.org. If you are unsure about any aspect, ask your Campion counsellor for help.

For those who want to do a complete course on applying to US colleges, sign up for the free online UPenn Coursera course hosted by Erick Hyde, University Connection Counselling Specialist: www.coursera.org/learn/study-in-usa/home/info

Testing

ACT: actstudent.org

SAT: collegeboard.com

College Board's Official SAT prep: khanacademy.org/sat

Free course at the US Embassy: edusajamaica.org/courses/sat-preparation-course/

For a list of test-optional schools: fairtest.org

Essays

Tips: bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays/8-tips-for-crafting-your-best-college-essay

Examples: admissions.tufts.edu/apply/advice/past-essays/

apply.jhu.edu/apply/essays-that-worked/

Tips on Interviews

bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/interviews/college-interviews-practice-questions-and-strategies

Financial Aid

Finaid.org

bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/financial-aid-101/financial-aid-glossary-learn-the-lingo

educationusa.state.gov/your-5-steps-us-study/finance-your-studies

educationusa.state.gov/find-financial-aid

Article: usnews.com/education/blogs/international-student-counsel/2015/04/07/how-to-demonstrate-financial-ability-as-an-international-student

CSS FORM: student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile

FAFSA FORM (for US citizens only): fafsa.ed.gov

How to compare financial aid data: collegescorecard.ed.gov

Scholarship Databases

bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/grants-scholarships

cappex.com/scholarships/

fastweb.com/

unigo.com/scholarships

Info on scholarship scams: ftc.gov

College Athletics

Most of the information available is intended for US citizens attending US high schools, but this site will give you some general information: Ncaa.org/playcollegesports

Lots of videos and insider info on the process: Recruitingrealities.com