

In terms of college admissions, you have probably heard that junior year is the most important year. If you have not heard that before, now you have. "In terms of college admissions, junior year is the important year." But why?

There are many reasons. When a student applies to college in the autumn of her senior year, the last complete set of grades a college will see will be those junior year grades. Colleges will be looking to see if the student maintained strong academic results during her first three years of high school. If 9th or tenth grade didn't go so well, colleges are looking for improvement. While a decline in grades in eleventh grade is not impressive, an explanation as to why a student's grades went down (i.e. taking more AP courses than one could handle, being involved in too many extracurricular activities, death of a family member, etc.) might ease an admissions officer's concerns. Remember, the first thing admissions officers are trying to figure out is whether or not applicants will be academically successful at their institution.

Other factors that make junior year important are standardized tests, the ACT and the SAT. Think about something you do well. How well did you do it your first time? Taking these exams should not be delayed until senior year. Take them at least once during junior year. If you are a junior and have not signed up for the SAT in March during Trip Week, then seriously consider the SAT and/or ACT in early June. Unlike the exams offered in April and May, taking the SAT and/or ACT in early June allows you to give it your undivided attention. If you earn a high enough score to get into the college you desire, then you are done with tests. If you do not obtain a high enough score, there is still time for more practice to improve.

This brings me to another important aspect of junior year in regards to college admissions – RESEARCH! For example, how would you know if your test scores are high enough if you don't know where you will be applying or don't know what each university requires in terms of test scores and GPA. It is important to know whether acceptance to a given university is *assured* or a *reach*, meaning your chance of gaining accepted is slim but not completely out of the question. Like a healthy stock portfolio, students should balance *reach* with *assured* colleges, but apply primarily to ones where you fit the admissions profile.

Making a list is essential. With a list of 20-30 colleges, a student and his/her family can manageably begin to research colleges and compare them based on criteria that is important to the family, with an eye toward the likelihood of being offered admission. From there, one can begin to whittle that list down to less than ten. When a family is considering ten or fewer options, they can then more thoroughly research those institutions, diving deep into the university's website and visiting the campus before applying.

In an In Focus article that ran in early November, I wrote about how early some college application deadlines can be. For example, the Early Action deadline for both UGA and Georgia Tech is October 15, which doesn't leave much time in one's senior year to conduct research, make lists or take tests.

At 6:00 PM on Tuesday, Feb. 13 in the Auditorium, I will speak to juniors and their parents in more detail about what to do during the all-important junior year and how parents can sign-up for Junior Meetings. This presentation will begin with a representative from GA Futures who will explain the program helps students research and apply to colleges in Georgia and how it can help families with financial aid and scholarships such as Hope and Zell Miller.