# COLLEGE COUNSELING GUIDE

## 2025 - 2026

# COLLEGE APPLICATION TIMELINE

## (June–August) Summer Before Senior Year
- Create CommonApp Application
- Have college list organized in SCOIR
- Begin working on the Common App and essays.
- Ask for letters of recommendation (from teachers, counselors, or mentors).
- Research and register for fall SAT/ACT if needed.
- Start researching scholarships and financial aid options.
- **College applications usually open August 1.**

## September
- Finalize personal statement and supplemental essays.
- Request transcripts and test scores to be sent to colleges.
- Begin **submitting applications** (Common App and other platforms open August 1).
- Attend college fairs and visit campuses if possible.

## October
- **Submit MAAPP** (opens Oct 1)
- Complete Early Action (EA) and Early Decision (ED) applications (typically due November 1 or 15).
- Continue applying for scholarships.
- Attend the NACCAP College Fair hosted at PCS
- If opened, **complete housing applications**

## November
- Submit **early applications** by the deadline.
- Follow up with recommenders to ensure letters are submitted.
- Finalize Regular Decision applications.

## December
- **Submit FAFSA** (Opens Dec 1)
- Check emails for college updates, including interview requests.
- EA/ED decisions are typically released mid-December.
- Continue **applying** for scholarships.

## January
- Submit Regular Decision applications (most deadlines are January 1–15).
- Ensure all financial aid forms and applications are completed.
- Complete housing applications

## February–March
- Keep checking emails and portals for admissions decisions.
- Submit mid-year reports if required by colleges.
- Apply for more scholarships.
- If open, register for orientation

## April
- Compare financial aid offers.
- Visit/revisit campuses if needed.
- Make final college decision and submit enrollment deposit (typically due May 1).

## May-June
- Inform other colleges of decision to decline offers.
- Request final transcripts be sent to the chosen college.
- Plan for housing, orientation, and summer tasks.

# GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

## Diploma Types:

| Subject | Standard Diploma (No Advanced Classes Required) | Honors Diploma (10+ Honors/AP/DC Classes) |
|---|---|---|
| Math | 4 | 4 |
| Science | 4 | 4 |
| Social Studies | 4 | 4 |
| English | 4 | 4 |
| Bible | 2 | 2 |
| Foreign Language | 2 | 2 |
| Arts | 1 | 1 |
| Technology | 1 | 1 |
| Electives | 2 | 4 |
| Total Credits | 24 | 26 |

## ARE YOU WANTING TO GRADUATE WITH...

| Standard Diploma | You will need to have **24 credits**. Advanced classes are encouraged, but not required |
|---|---|
| Honors Diploma | You will need to have **26 credits**, including 10 advanced classes such as Honors, AP, or DC |

## HAS NO CORRELATION WITH:

| Honors | You will need to finish all classes with an overall numerical average of a **90-94** |
|---|---|
| High Honors | You will need to finish all classes with an overall numerical average of a **95+** |

## WHAT DO COLLEGES LOOK FOR IN A STUDENT?

| Factors | Most Important | Very Important | Somewhat Important | No Importance |
|---------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------|
| High school grades in college prep courses | 76.8% | 15.1% | 4.9% | 3.2% |
| Strength of high school curriculum | 63.8% | 22.7% | 10.3% | 3.2% |
| Test Scores (ACT/SAT) | 46.71% | 25.4% | 21.89 | 6.6% |
| Positive character attributes | 28.5% | 37.5% | 18.5% | 15.8% |
| Essay or writing sample | 18.9% | 37.3% | 26.5% | 17.3% |
| Extracurricular activities | 6.5% | 44.3% | 30.8% | 18.4% |

*NACAC STUDY ON 185 COLLEGES FROM 2012 - 2023*

## COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ARE LOOKING FOR A WELL-ROUNDED PICTURE OF A STUDENT. THEY FACTOR IN YOUR:
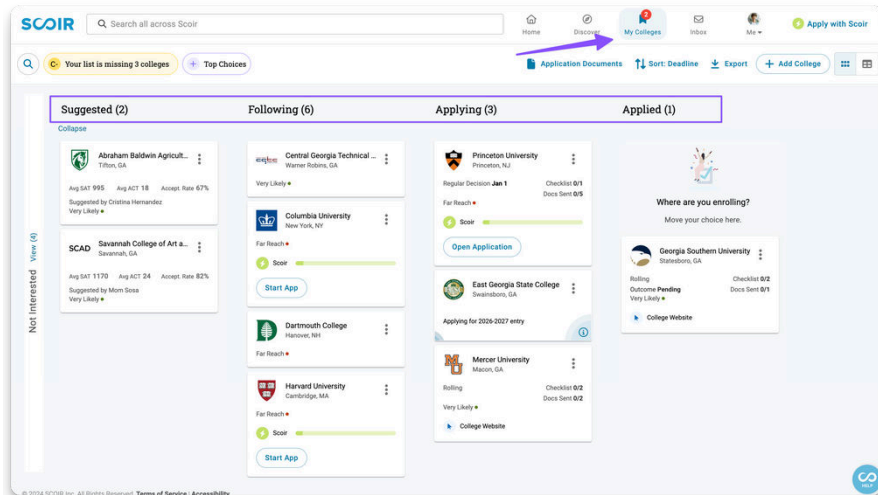
- HIGH SCHOOL GRADES & GPA
- STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
- STANDARDIZED TESTING
- SERVANT/INVOLVED LEADER
- CREATIVITY THROUGH ESSAYS
- PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS OR CLUBS

**WHAT COLLEGES LOOK FOR IN A STUDENT**

**SCOIR** is the **college navigation tool** used by PCS students and parents to **help simplify** the college process by:

- Helping identify colleges that are a good fit

- Tracks your extracurriculars, service, awards, clubs

- Builds a resume from your 'Activities and Achievements'

- Request and collect recommendation letters

- Managing a students college lists and applications

- Apply to specific colleges through SCOIR ⚡

- Send your transcripts 1000+ colleges across the US



## HOW TO LOGIN:

**Username:** PCS Email

**Password:** Create Your Own

| DOWNLOAD THE SCOIR APP | GETTING STARTED AS A STUDENT | FIND YOUR COLLEGE QUIZ | CREATE AN ACADEMIC RESUME |
|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |

# HOW TO APPLY TO COLLEGES

## APPLYING TO COLLEGE THROUGH COMMONAPP:

1. Create a CommonApp account
2. Add colleges to your list
3. Complete the CommonApp sections (Profile, Family, Scores, etc.)
4. Add recommenders (if required + give them a two week notice)
5. Complete college-specific questions and supplements
6. Go to 'My Colleges' then review and submit your application

*RECOMMENDED WAY TO APPLY*

**CommonAPP** is a single online college application form used by over 1000 colleges and universities. Instead of filling out the same general information—like your address, GPA, and extracurriculars— a dozen times, **you only have to do it once.**

| COMMONAPP TOOLKIT AND TIPS | CREATE YOUR COMMONAPP ACCOUNT | HOW TO APPLY USING COMMONAPP |
|---|---|---|

## APPLYING TO COLLEGE THROUGH THE COLLEGE WEBSITE:

1. Go to the college's website and click on 'Admissions'
2. You will be applying as an incoming freshman
3. Create an application account (use personal email)
4. Complete the online application
5. Pay the application fee (usually $30 - $70)
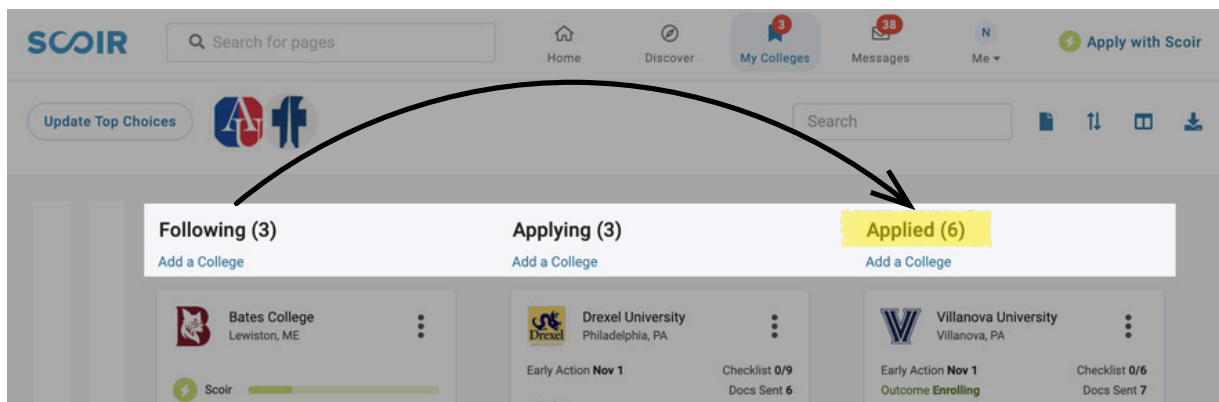6. Review and Submit Your Application

# SENDING ADMISSIONS DOCUMENTS

## FERPA RELASE THROUGH SCOIR

1. Log in to your SCOIR Account (PCS email + password)
2. Top right, click on your account and click 'View Profile'
3. Bottom right, 'Review and Sign' the FERPA forms to allow for documentation to be sent to colleges. This must be done in order to send documents.

## SENDING TRANSCRIPTS THROUGH SCOIR

1. Log in to your SCOIR Account (PCS email + password)
2. Build your 'My Colleges' list and follow any number of colleges
3. For each college you apply to, move it to the **'Applied'** section
4. Then fill out the 'How Did You Apply' form then click 'Save'
5. You're all done! SCOIR will notify the college counselor to send your transcript



## SENDING SCORES THROUGH ACT

1. Sign into your myACT account
2. Select the "Send Your Scores" option from the dashboard
3. Choose the test date + colleges you want your scores sent to
4. Pay the ACT fee and click 'Submit'. Allow for scores to be sent, received, and processed by the college you sent your scores to
5. While registering for the ACT, you can select up to four colleges to have your scores automatically sent to for free

# SCOIR + commonapp

## SCOIR + Common App Integration

This integration is entirely new, as it just rolled out in May of 2025. SCOIR and CommonApp are integrating with each other to make the college application and documentation process smoother. Read below for further details:

## How it works

### Connecting Accounts

- Students will be prompted to connect SCOIR and their Common App accounts by logging in at the touch points (photo shown below)

### College List Syncing

- Once connected, your students' My Colleges lists will sync with their Common App activity. I will know where they've applied and when they've applied, all within SCOIR.
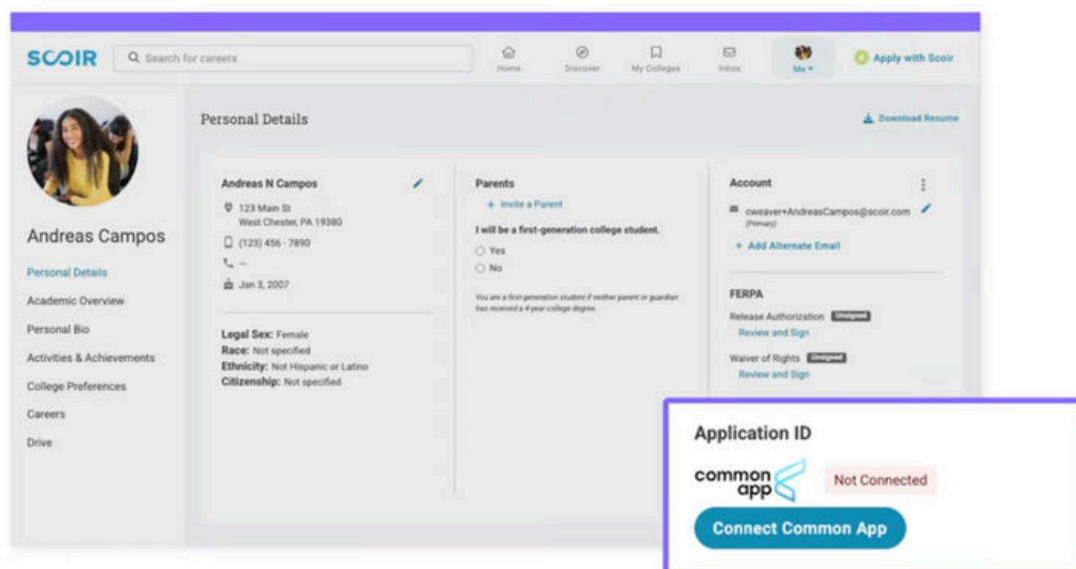
### Preparing and Sending Counselor Forms

- Students will complete their FERPA release & waiver, make Fee Waiver requests, and complete their portion of Early Decision Agreements in Common App for those colleges that they're applying to via CommonApp.
- Counselors will finalize their portion of shared forms, as well as build and send all other required forms entirely in Scoir. When submitting forms, they will be routed through Common App, which will then send it to the college for a consistent delivery experience.

### Notes for Students

- After you have completed your CommonApp application, you can then send that one application to multiple different colleges that you want to apply to. **If you have connected your SCOIR account to your CommonApp account**, it will move all of those colleges you sent your application to through CommonApp, into the 'Applied' section in SCOIR - allowing me to then send off your transcript. It eliminates that extra step of having to go into SCOIR and moving all of those colleges over to the 'Applied' section after you have sent your application off through CommonApp.
- Be aware that not all colleges are partnered through CommonApp, especially community colleges. Although 1100 colleges use CommonApp, you can see what all colleges partner with CommonApp, **here.**

## 2025 - 2026 ACT TESTING DATES

### 2025 National Test Dates Schedule

| Test Date | Regular Registration Deadline Late Fee Applies After This Date | Late Registration Deadline | Photo Upload and Standby Deadline |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| April 5, 2025 | February 28 | March 16 | March 28 |
| June 14, 2025 | May 9 | May 27 | June 6 |
| July 12, 2025* | June 6 | June 20 | July 4 |

### 2026 National Test Dates Schedule

| Test Date | Regular Registration Deadline Late Fee Applies After This Date | Late Registration Deadline | Photo Upload and Standby Deadline |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| September 6, 2025 | August 1 | August 19 | August 29 |
| October 18, 2025 | September 12 | September 30 | October 10 |
| December 13, 2025 | November 7 | November 24 | December 5 |
| February 14, 2026 | January 7 | January 21 | February 6 |
| April 11, 2026 | March 6 | March 24 | April 3 |
| June 13, 2026 | May 8 | May 27 | June 5 |
| July 11, 2026* | June 5 | June 24 | July 3 |

## HOW MANY TIMES SHOULD YOU TAKE THE ACT?

On average, a student usually takes the ACT around 2-3 times, and many students retake it more than that as it allows for them to adjust their study plans and focus on areas they want to improve.

## DO COLLEGES ACCEPT ACT SUPERSCORE OR ONLY COMPOSITE?

Many schools do take Superscores - which is your highest section scores across multiple ACT test dates into one score. Not all colleges superscore, so check each school's policy before sending scores.

# COLLEGE VISITS

## WHY SHOULD YOU TOUR COLLEGES?

A college pamphlet, brochure, social media, or website can only show you so much. If you want to get a feel for the college itself, a campus tour can offer you:

- To get a feel for campus size and culture
- An opportunity to meet with students
- Explore around that specific college town
- To learn about unique clubs and majors

## ON YOUR TOUR, ASK QUESTIONS LIKE:

- What makes your college unique or stand out?
- What are some popular student clubs and organizations?
- What do the dorms/residence halls look like?
- Are there internships or co-ops available for my major?
- What are the merit-based or academic scholarships?
- How safe is the campus or what kind of security is in place?
- Ask the tour guide: Why did you choose this school?

## WANTING TO SCHEDULE A VISIT?

## IMPORTANT COLLEGE VISIT INFO:

- 12th grade receives 4 college visits per year
- 11th grade receives 3 college visits per year
- 10th grade receives 2 college visits per year

- If visiting a college, it must be approved in advance and verified with official documentation from the college and sent to Mrs. Kimberly or Mr. Dallas.
- To ensure students are not missing excessive class time, if a student is struggling in their attendance, their college visit days will be limited. This will be up to the discretion of the administration & teachers.

# FINANCIAL AID

## CCS PROFILE

- Many colleges require the College Scholarship Service (CSS) Profile to determine your eligibility for non-government financial aid such as the universities own grants, scholarships, and loans

- All colleges also require the FAFSA

- Used to award non-federal financial aid funds

- Usually opens around October 1st each year

- Required by around 200+ colleges & universities in the U.S.

- There are **currently no schools in Mississippi that require it**; however, many out-of-state universities require it. Find out which colleges require it through this **link**.

- You can begin your CSS Profile **here** and if you would like to see a brief overview, watch this video tutorial: **What is the CSS Profile?**

## FAFSA

- Almost every college requires the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). It is the form students fill out to apply for financial aid to colleges.

- Used by the federal government, states and colleges to determine a student's eligibility for grants, federal student loans, work-study programs, scholarships, and state aid.

- Based on family financial information - uses prior-prior year's tax returns (Class of 2026 will use 2024 tax info)

- Many students from PCS will likely not receive financial aid from FAFSA; however, the Mississippi Aid Application **(MAAPP) requires the FAFSA** to be filled out. Students who are attending a college in Mississippi are very likely to receive free grants through MAAPP.

- FAFSA for this year's seniors will open up on **December 1st, 2025.**

- Required every year a student is in college and wants financial aid.

- Submit the 2026 - 2027 FAFSA online through **StudentAid.Gov** and here is a tutorial: **Start Your FAFSA Form**

# SCHOLARSHIPS

## INTERNAL (COLLEGE)

### Academic Merit (ACT & SAT) Scholarships

- Higher scores can lead to merit-based scholarships directly from the college.

- These scholarships are automatic, which means you do not have to directly apply for them after you have completed that college's scholarship application.

- Many colleges let you update your scores throughout the year to increase your scholarship amount - this deadline varies per college.

### Competitive/Special Scholarships

- These are merit-based scholarships offered directly by colleges/universities **to their top applicants**. They can be worth thousands—or even full tuition and room & board.

- All colleges have their own competitive scholarships, which will likely require a **separate application**; some schools require an additional application, essays, or interviews.

- **Highly Selective:** Awarded to students with outstanding academics, leadership, service, or talent.

- **Early Deadlines:** Many require applying by November 1$^{st}$ , but deadlines always vary - please check the college website for specific scholarship deadlines.

### Designation/Automatic Scholarships

- Awarded to seniors for academic and leadership achievements - Boys State, STAR Student, etc.

- Awards are automatic; You will need to apply & submit documentation as proof before the deadline.

## EXTERNAL (PRIVATE)

- Funded by outside organizations (not the college or government) and often requires an application, essay, recommendation, or resume.

- Available for a wide ranger of students - based on academics, leadership, community service, interests, etc.

### Websites:

- Get2College.com
- Bigfuture.com
- Fastweb.com

- Scholarships Corner
- Scholarships Owl
- Scholarships.com

- Amazon Future Engineers
- Coca - Cola Scholars
- Nissan Scholarship (MS)

### Scholarships Earned By PCS Students

- Elks MVP
- Junior Auxiliary
- RaiseMe (Ole Miss)

- Kappa Alpha Si
- Woodmen Life
- Dixie Youth Baseball

- PriorityOne Bank
- Citizens Bank
- Community Bank

- Pinebelt Foundation
- Toxey - Morris Foundation
- Harrison McClain Memorial

## FEDERAL & STATE GOVERNMENT

### FAFSA - Free Application for Federal Student Aid (opens December 1st 2025)

- <u>Pell Grant</u>: Factors such as family income/student aid index, and college choice. The cost of attendance can't impact whether or not and how much you can receive from the Pell Grant.

- <u>Loans:</u> Offers to help students cover the costs of college expenses that aren't covered by scholarships, grants, etc. Can potentially include interest

  - Do not view loans as the main source of $ to pay for college, but rather as an option to help you if you have any additional expenses left over.

- To view more detailed information on these, visit StudentAid.gov and view the 'Loans & Grants' section.

### MAAPP - Mississippi Aid Application (opens October 1st 2025)

- To begin, go to the MS Financial Aid website and click 'Request Account' then fill out the application

- For students who have Mississippi residency and plan to attend a college in Mississippi.

- FAFSA must be completed (You can still finish the MAAPP application before the FAFSA, since the FAFSA will not be open until around December).

- The application considers students for in-state scholarships and grants. Studies receive <u>either</u>:

- Mississippi Tutition Assistance Grant (MTAG): ($3,000)
  - Minimum of a 15 ACT & 2.5+ cumulative GPA
  - $500 for years 1 & 2
  - $1000 for years 3 & 4

- Mississippi Eminent Scholars Grant (MESG): ($10,000)
  - Minimum of a 29 ACT & 3.5+ cumulative GPA
  - $2500 for all four years

- Higher Ed Legislative Plan (HELP): (Covers tuition at public colleges in Mississippi)
  - Lower-Income (Based on family's taxes and from FAFSA)
  - Minimum of a 20 ACT & 2.5+ cumulative GPA

# COLLEGE ESSAYS

## WHAT COLLEGES LOOK FOR:

- Authenticity and Individuality
  - Show who you are through what you value.
  - They want to know *who* you are, not merely what you've done.

- Reflection
  - They want to see personal growth, lessons learned, or values that have been shaped by your experiences.
  - Your goal is not necessarily to impress, but to express.

- Clear Writing
  - Authenticity and reflection are important, but they cannot be executed well without a good structure for your essay.
  - Make sure to double-check your grammar and flow. Ask someone to read over it!

## TYPES OF ESSAY PROMPTS:

- Common App Essays
  - Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

  - Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?

  - Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

- More college essay topics/questions:
  - What interests or excites you? How does it shape who you are now or who you might become in the future?

  - What successes have you achieved or what obstacles have you faced? What advice would you give a sibling or friend going through a similar experience?
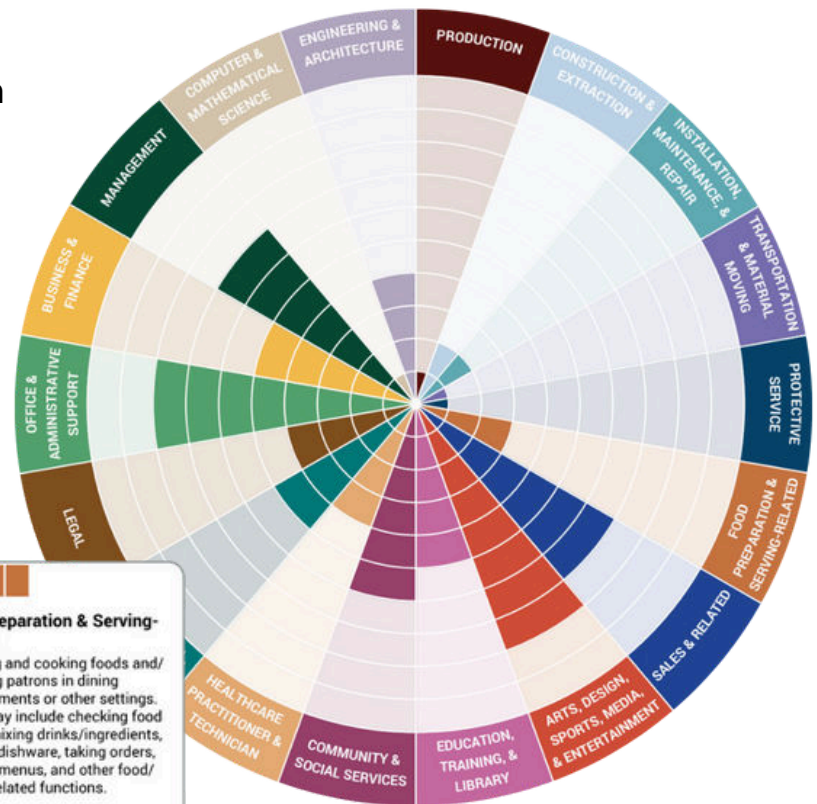
## HELPFUL RESOURCES & TIPS

- **2025-26 Common App Essay Prompts**

- **Harvard's Strategies to Writing Essays**

- **How to Tackle Common App Prompts**

- **College Essay Guy**

THE **NexTest** ADVANTAGE

**The NexTest program is a data driven assessment & walkthrough to help reveal a student's:**

- Actual learning interest & learning styles
- Behavioral strengths & weaknesses
- Aptitudes
- Underlying needs & expectations
- Major/ College Matches
- Job Matches



**Management**
Planning, directing, and coordinating high-level activities within an organization. Duties may include managing personnel, creating budgets, developing and implementing strategies, creating organizational policies, and supervising company operations. These managerial functions are similar in nature across various industries and fields (e.g. engineering, sales, human resources, medical).

**Business & Finance**
Analyzing and evaluating business/ financial information for the purposes of documenting, making recommendations and/or ensuring adherence to business protocol. Duties may include preparing financial reports, developing investment strategies, analyzing general business trends, or assessing risk/liability, to streamline the operations of an organization.

**Food Preparation & Serving-Related**
Preparing and cooking foods and/ or serving patrons in dining establishments or other settings. Duties may include checking food quality, mixing drinks/ingredients, cleaning dishware, taking orders, planning menus, and other food/serving-related functions.

**Arts, Design, Sports, Media, & Entertainment**
Creating and/or expressing ideas or demonstrating talents through various media for entertainment, informational, or instructional purposes. Duties may include acting, dancing, singing, designing graphics, operating media equipment, translating text, writing literature, producing/directing movies or plays, public speaking, radio announcing, competing in sporting events, news reporting, among other specific functions within the media.

**Office & Administrative Support**
Providing clerical support within an organization. Duties may include preparing statements, tracking accounts, record keeping, bill collecting, making phone calls, scheduling appointments, entering data, providing customer service, ordering and tracking inventory, handling monetary transactions, among other administrative support tasks.

**Sales & Related**
Selling goods or services to a wide range of customers across various industries. Duties may include selling retail, appliances, furniture, auto parts, medical services, insurance, real estate, financial or consulting services, securities and commodities, as well as other products/services.

## HOW IT WORKS:

- PCS will schedule a day to meet for students
- Students complete the assessment online - 40 minutes
- Receive results and will meet with you in groups to discuss college & career matches

## CONTACT:

**Trey Carroll**
tcarroll@nextestadvantage.com
601 - 720 - 3509

**When should I start applying to colleges?**
- Applications typically open August 1. Aim to apply by October or early November—especially if you're doing Early Action or Early Decision.

**What's the difference between Early Action, Early Decision, & Regular Decision in Admissions?**
- Early Action (EA): Apply early, get an early answer—non-binding. Can apply to multiple schools using EA.
- Early Decision (ED): Apply early, binding commitment if accepted. Can only apply to one college using ED.
- Regular Decision: Later deadline, more time to prepare.

**How many colleges should I apply to?**
- I would say 3 at minimum, but aiming for 5 - 7+ schools is a good target

**How do I send my transcript to colleges?**
- Move the college you are wanting your transcript sent to in the 'Applied' section in SCOIR; If you have taken any Dual Credit classes, you will need to log into Parchment.com for William Carey University, with your personal email, to send it to the college you are attending.

**How do I send my ACT/SAT scores to colleges?**
- Go to act.org or collegeboard.org and request that scores be sent to each college. Many colleges are no longer accepting test scores from counselors or on transcripts, but only accept the score report directly from ACT or CollegeBoard (SAT).

**How many extracurriculars do I need?**
- There's no magic number—quality > quantity. Focus on activities you're committed to and passionate about.

**What should I do if I haven't chosen a major?**
- That's totally fine! Apply undeclared/undecided—many students do. Choose colleges with a wide range of majors. Also, contact Trey Carrol with NexTest Career Assessment, and it can help narrow that down!

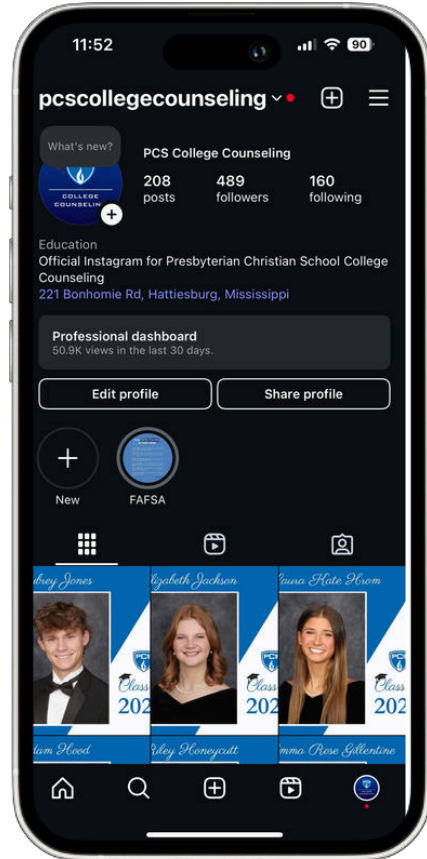**Who should write my letters of recommendation?**
- Ask teachers, coaches, mentors, or admin who know you well and give them at least 3–4 weeks' notice.

**How do I know if a college is the right fit?**
- Visit if possible (Visiting can make or break your interest in that college) research programs, ask about support services, and consider the location, size, cost, and culture.

**WEBSITE**





**INSTAGRAM**



## Either of These Provide:

- Upcoming events and college material
- Scholarship information & tips
- Application advice and how-to's
- College highlights for specific colleges

## Schedule a Meeting