

THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

Nuts & Bolts: The Application Process

Selecting The Right Admission Plan

- Rolling
- Regular
- Early Action
- Early Decision

Nuts & Bolts of the Application Process (Getting it Done!)

- Types of Applications
- Supplements
 - Essay/Personal Statement
- Recommendations: Teacher/Counselor
- Transcripts
- Standardized Test Scores

The College Process: Selecting the Right Admission Plan

Once your list is ready, it is important to familiarize yourself with the specific requirements of each college before filling out applications. After carefully researching colleges and making a college list, it is important to consider the available admission plans and application requirements of each college.

Selecting the Right Admission Plan(s): Rolling, Regular Decision, Early Action, Early Decision

Below is a review of the general definitions of the various admission plans available to college applicants. Options vary depending upon the college so it is essential to know the details before making an informed decision.

Please Note: UC/CSU systems do not offer any options other than their 'regular application' process.

Rolling Admission

Admission decisions are made as applications are received by the Admission Office. Decisions are typically made within a few weeks to one month of the college receiving the application. Admission representatives typically take more time to review individual applications. Colleges will continue to accept applications until incoming freshman class is full. Be aware that the later an application is submitted, the likelihood that attractive financial aid and housing options are available lessens dramatically.

Regular Decision

Students apply by the 'regular' deadline which is typically between January 1 and March 1st except the UC/CSU systems which have a November 30th deadline. Colleges usually notify students of decisions between March and April.

The deadline for students to commit to a college is typically May 1st. This time frame is meant to allow students the opportunity to compare financial aid offers from colleges in the spring before making a commitment.

Applying Early

Many colleges have some type of early admission plan for students to consider. Applying to colleges 'early' means that a student may apply by an October/November deadline and receive an admission decision by December. This is appealing because the process ends much earlier than if you applied as a 'regular' student when students typically receive admission decisions from colleges in March and April. Of course, it isn't quite as simple as that – there's more to the process.

- **Early Action (Early Action non-binding)**

Early Action is the more flexible of the 'Early' options. Students who apply to a college under EA are guaranteed an admission decision early (usually by mid-December) and this option is non – binding. This allows more flexibility in that accepted students are not committing themselves to a specific college. Under these plans, you may apply to other colleges and choose a school to attend by May 1st just like regular decision applicants.

- **Single-Choice Early Action/Restrictive Early Action**

This plan works the same way as other early action plans, except that students may not apply early (either Early Action or Early Decision) to any other school; they may only apply to additional colleges under regular decision.

Early Decision (ED, Binding)

Early Decision plans allow students to apply early (the deadline is usually in October/November) and receive an admission decision from the college well in advance of the general notification date (usually in December). Part of the application process requires students to sign a statement that they are knowingly making a commitment to attend the campus should they be accepted and that no other applications will be submitted to other colleges using an ED program.

There is a catch: Early Decision plans are "binding," meaning that if accepted, students are obligated to attend that college and must withdraw any other application that may have been submitted. Although students may apply to only one college for Early Decision, the option to apply to additional colleges as a regular admission candidate still exists. Usually, colleges insist on a nonrefundable deposit well before May 1.

Advantages of Early Decision

- ED Admission rates may be higher than the regular admission pool. This is particularly true of the most selective colleges.
- Students who apply “early” can submit transcripts which list grades through the end of junior year. Such students are typically particularly strong applicants. Colleges like to use their ED pool to get the strongest students they can to commit to their school.
- Students who apply “early” have done their homework and likely met or exceeded the average requirements for admission.
- Student athletes may be invited to apply “early” to their top choice school to demonstrate their commitment to a college coach who can request special consideration for specific applications in the admissions process.

Disadvantages of Early Decision

- ‘Binding’ a student to one particular college may be too restrictive. If accepted, the student has committed to attend the college and withdraw all other applications.
- There is no opportunity to consider other options including financial aid packages.
- It is uncommon for a student to be prepared to fully commit to one college in the Fall of senior year without the opportunity to consider other options.

Possible outcomes of Early Decision

An early decision applicant can receive one of three outcomes in December:

- Admit (the student will be bound to attend the college).
- Deny (the student is not accepted to the college and may apply early to another school).
- Defer (the student will be reconsidered for admission with regular decision applicants).

NUTS & BOLTS OF THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS Getting it Done!

A college application is made up of several components and can sometimes be confusing. The purpose of this section is to give an overview of how students should acquire: teacher letters of recommendation, 'counselor reports' or 'secondary school reports,' transcripts, mid-year reports and how to send standardized test scores. It is important for you to review the process and then organize yourself and break down the process into manageable steps.

Final College List

All students must begin the actual application process with a comprehensive list that includes a few (6 -10 total) likely, possible and challenging (reach) schools. Remember: setting a limit on the number of colleges applied to is a good idea. Before doing anything else, colleges on the final list must be noted on Family Connection.

Filling Out College Applications

There are two types of applications which are typically used by colleges. While some colleges only one specific application, other colleges will accept both and allow students to choose. The most important thing is that you know the guidelines for each college on your list and follow the instructions carefully.

1. **College Specific Application:** Public universities such as the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU), some private colleges such as the University of Southern California (USC) and the Community Colleges each have their own unique application, created by the University/College representatives.
2. **Common Application:** This is a 'general' application which was created as an option for colleges that want to provide students with a more streamlined option for applying to college. Now online, students go to www.commonapp.org and create an account, fill out one 'Common' application and submit it to each of the participating colleges on their list.

In addition to the application, many of the (300+) participating colleges also require a brief 'supplement' that is unique to their school. A supplement could include anything from an additional essay or short answer question to providing basic information. All supplements may be viewed and organized on the Common Application website.

After more than 30 years, the Common Application is widely accepted by more than 300 public/private colleges and universities across the United States.

Application Deadlines

All college admission offices have established the last date any applicant may submit an application to be considered for admission. The exception is those colleges that have 'rolling' admission—which means that there is no final deadline. Colleges with rolling admission accept applicants until they have filled their incoming freshman class.

Regardless of a specific deadline or rolling admission policy, always plan to submit your applications ahead of time. Students who stay organized and plan ahead to complete each step of the application process in a timely manner should set a personal deadline which is at least two weeks ahead of the college deadline.

Always keep track of deadlines. Create an online calendar, use your planner or make a list of required application materials which includes the deadline. Your SI counselor will have many ideas on how you can stay organized. Ask for help if needed.

Nuts & Bolts of the College Application Process: Getting it Done! Application Process

The College Essay/Personal Statement

Purpose (of the essay)

The goal of the essay is to learn more about each individual student and bring depth to the application. A well-written essay can reveal important information about personal attitudes/qualities, feelings, imagination and creativity. Think of the essay as a written interview.

Please Note: The college essay in addition to the high school record, standardized test scores, extracurricular activities, and teacher/counselor recommendations will provide the basis upon which the college makes its admission decision. A thoughtful, well-written essay can affect the final decision in a positive way. The more the admission representative gets to know the student, the more influential the essay will be in the admissions process.

Prepare to Write

Engage in the writing process. Don't wait until the last minute and write whatever comes to mind. Think of this as your opportunity to personalize your college application.

Show, don't tell! Develop a framework so the essay has a smooth and logical progression from one idea to the next. Consider your purpose in writing, what you want to convey and the tone you think is appropriate for the topic. Decide on a style that is comfortable, rather than one that will impress the college admission committee.

Choose a Topic

Some colleges provide a topic(s) while others are open ended. It is important to narrow the topic and try to be as specific and illustrative as possible. As you begin, consider possible topics that will provide the reader with a glimpse of you as an individual.

One way to enhance your essay is to be specific about personal experiences. If applicable, describing a personal challenge provides valuable information about your thought process and values. Consider how various experiences during high school have impacted you. Leave no stone unturned; It's the seemingly insignificant experiences that can become the most revealing about your character and outlook.

For example, rather than writing about what you did on Immersion, focus on a specific incident that is descriptive of you and how that experience made an impacted or changed you in some way.

Write

It takes time to write an essay. Write the first draft, make it as rough as you need, then set it aside for a few days. Reread it with a fresh perspective and make the necessary changes. Consider organization, style, grammar, spelling and tone.

Get Feedback

Once you have rewritten your first draft, you may want feedback from people you know and trust: your parents, counselor, a trusted friend, and most likely, one of your English teachers. Your teacher can be particularly helpful because he/she knows the level of work you are capable of producing. It may also be easier for you to accept constructive criticism from your teacher as well.

Choose your readers carefully. Pick one (1) teacher to be your guide—too many differing opinions can confuse you and give you conflicting advice. Consider each suggestion carefully before choosing to incorporate changes into your essay.

Final Thoughts on Your Essay

Remember it is very important that your essay reflects your own 'voice.' Once you have made the final edits, have your English teacher proofread your essay once more before submitting it with your application.

You may also consider having someone who does not know you review your essay: a teacher, another counselor, a friend/colleague of a parent. Their initial impression of you after reading your essay should mirror the admission counselor reading your application. It will give you good insight into the message you're sending.

Nuts & Bolts of the College Application Process: Getting it Done! Application Process

Do's

- Do write about something that you know about.
- Do reveal yourself in your writing. Be yourself!
- Do show, not tell. Provide examples that illustrate your topic. It brings your essay to life.
- Do write in your own style and voice.

Don'ts

- Don't write what you think others want to hear.
- Don't exaggerate or write to impress. Do not invent "tragic" stories.
- Don't rely on a thesaurus.
- Don't neglect the mechanics of writing a good essay. Grammar and spelling count!
- Don't automatically rely on 'spell check'. Proof for grammar and spelling.
- Don't ramble! Be concise, say what you want to say and conclude.

Letters of Recommendation

There are two types of recommendations: Teacher & Counselor. Colleges typically expect two teacher recommendations and one counselor recommendation (Secondary School Report).

• Counselor Recommendations

Counselors characterize the student in terms of their overall experience at SI. This recommendation may also serve to support the student if there is anything which should be explained further or highlighted (low grades due to illness, strong year in a difficult situation, success in a specific subject, activity or anything particularly important to the student). In all cases the student's assigned counselor will write and submit the counselor recommendation. Input from other sources may be included.

• Teacher Recommendations

Teachers are expected to write about a student's performance in the classroom. Students should request recommendations from the same teachers for all colleges applied to. See guidelines below for specific suggestions on whom to select to write your teacher recommendations.

Selecting Teachers for Recommendation Requests

Ideally, colleges admission counselors want recommendation letters to provide information about applicants to enhance their knowledge of the student. The most effective letters offer context for a student's academic performance &/or provide information that does not appear anywhere else in the application.

Keeping this in mind, take some time to reflect on the statements below to help determine who would be the best teacher to write a letter for you.

Consider teacher(s) you had during junior year, then current teachers (1st semester senior year). Colleges find this more compelling because your recent teachers have knowledge of both your abilities and maturity level.

- Ask a math or science teacher if you are planning on majoring in premed, engineering, architecture or a science. Business majors may want to consider asking a math teacher also.
- Ask a fine arts teacher in your area of discipline IF you are planning on majoring in is dance, music, theatre arts or fine arts.
- For all other majors including undecided, ask a teacher who knows you well academically (in the classroom) and who can answer the following questions:
 - What distinguishes you from other able students?
 - What type of learner are you?
 - Did you do any special projects for a class?
 - Were you prepared and did you actively participate in class?
 - Did you go above and beyond what was required of you?
 - In short, what did you add to the classroom on a day-to-day basis?

Please Note: Choose your teacher(s) carefully. 'Teacher Recommendation' forms should go to the SAME TEACHER(S) for all of the colleges on your list.

Now that you have a few thoughts about which teachers to ask, see your counselor to discuss the details before making a request.

The College Application Process Teacher Recommendations: Step by Step

Please review and follow the steps carefully. This is a relatively easy process if you follow the instructions!

Step One: ASK the teacher personally if he/she will write you a letter.

Have a face to face conversation allows teachers to ask follow up questions, make specific requests or just let you know whether or not they believe they can write you a strong letter.

After your teacher agrees, it is essential that you follow the directions outlined below.

Step Two: Fill out a Teacher Questionnaire

Fill out a separate Teacher Questionnaire for **each** teacher writing a letter for you. The 'questionnaire' is located on Family Connection and contains the following questions:

1. What course(s) did you take with this teacher? Which school did you take this course?
2. Discuss two or three favorite or meaningful assignments/projects you completed for the teacher who is writing the letter.
3. Discuss personal contributions you made in his/her class and how your presence made a difference in the class.
4. What anecdotal comments did your teacher make about you in his/her class?
5. What would you like the teacher to say about you? And how can he/she justify it?
6. What was your biggest challenge in his/her class? How did you address it?
7. Mention if you have any out of school contact with the teacher such as sports, clubs, community service projects, IMMERSION TRIPS, RETREATS, fine arts performances.
8. Explain 2 or 3 words that 'capture' you as a person and/or student.

Step Three: Log on to Family Connection

Follow the instructions below. It is essential that all students follow these steps to ensure that recommendations are sent in a timely manner.

1. Log On to your Family Connection account
2. Click 'My Colleges' (left column)
3. Enter your Final College List (under 'Colleges To Which I'm Applying').
*Include all colleges on your list please!
4. Review your list and carefully follow step six of this guide (online recommendations) IF any of your colleges accept the Common Application:

Step Four: Fill out the 'Teacher/Counselor Recommendation Form' (cover sheet) for each Teacher and your Counselor.

Recommendations are either submitted online (Common Application & a few Colleges) or on paper through the mail. All students must make the distinction for all colleges on their list. After entering the final college list on Family Connection, the program will identify all colleges that accept the common application and therefore, may be submitted online.

1. **Common Application** recommendations will be submitted online by teachers and counselors using Naviance (Family Connection).
2. **Non Common Application** recommendations (for colleges that don't accept the Common Application) will be completed and mailed by the teacher/counselor and require a different process.

All recommendation requests (paper & online) require students to create a packet of necessary materials for each teacher and the student's counselor.

Step Five: Create a Packet for Each Teacher and Your Counselor

Please Note: A sample packet is posted in the Counseling Center for your review.

Plan to fill out the coversheet for your counselor even if do not need any recommendations.

1. Get three 10"x13" envelopes (one each for your teachers and your counselor).
2. Tape the 'Teacher/Counselor Recommendation Form' to the front.
3. Include any envelopes and forms for Non Common Application Colleges (paper submissions).

The College Application Process Teacher Recommendations: Step by Step

Step Six: Submit Your Request for Common Application (Online) Recommendations

1. *Make sure you have completed the registration page (only) at www.commonapp.org
2. Double Check your college list on Family Connection to make sure it is complete (see Step 3)
3. Save your completed 'Teacher Questionnaire' on Family Connection (for each teacher you asked for a letter)
 - Click 'Document Library' under 'From Your School' (left column)
 - In the 'Folder' section, Click 'Seniors'
 - Click 'View' button next to 'Teacher Questionnaire'
 - 'Open' the file and fill out a questionnaire for each teacher.
 - When you are finished, 'Save' as a Word Document on your computer.
 - Click 'My Journal' (left column)
 - Go to 'Add New Entry' which brings you to the 'Add Journal Entry' page
 - In the Subject area type in 'My Teacher Questionnaire'
 - Check the box 'Share With Teacher' (so your teacher can open it)
 - Find your document using the 'Browse' feature & 'Attach'
 - Click 'Add Journal Entry'

Include your teacher's name as part of the file name for easy retrieval.

Repeat the steps above for each teacher you asked for a letter of recommendation. They will each require you to submit a teacher questionnaire. If you have trouble attaching your questionnaire on Family Connection, send it as an email attachment to your counselor. We can help you.

3. Send Each Teacher an email from your Family Connection account officially requesting a letter of recommendation. Before you do this step, think for a minute....did you have a conversation with your teacher to make a formal request yet? If not, do that first!

- Go to 'My Colleges' (left column)
- Click "Add/Cancel Requests" under Teacher Recommendations
- Select your teacher's name(s) from the drop down menu and write a formal request.
- Click 'Update Requests' when finished.
- When finished, make sure that you have been directed to the 'Confirmation Page' to be certain your request was sent.

Step Six (Part 2): Submitting a Request for Non-Common Application (Paper) Recommendations

1. Use business size envelopes for each college.
For example: 4 colleges = 12 envelopes total
[3 envelopes/set: 1 for each teacher (if you ask 2) and 1 for your counselor]
2. Fill out the student information section of the Teacher or Counselor (secondary school report recommendations form if it is included with the application. Make sure you sign the form if indicated.

Secondary School Report Forms are the same as Counselor Recommendation forms—they just have a fancy title.

3. On a business size (9.5" x4") envelope:
 1. Fill in the address of the college admission office
 2. SI return address
 3. Put your name in the lower left corner with the words 'Teacher (or Counselor) Recommendation' below your name.
4. Put one stamp on the teacher envelopes and two stamps on the counselor envelopes.

If you have any questions about this process please see your counselor before you hand out anything to your teachers!

Transcripts in the Application Process

The High School Transcript is THE KEY document in the Filing and Review of a College Application. It is a record of every class and semester grade a student has earned while at St. Ignatius. Christian Service Hours and each student's specific senior schedule are also included, as well as any remediated coursework.

Transcripts fall under two categories: **"Official" and "Unofficial."** Each type of transcript is crucial to the application process and each serve different purposes.

Official Transcripts

A transcript is considered official when it is signed and either stamped with the school seal or printed on official paper by either the school Registrar or Docufide. This document is a key part of most college and scholarship applications as it is utilized for course and semester grade information during the application review process. Not every College/Scholarship will require an official transcript, SO it is essential to follow the directions specific to each application.

Unofficial Transcripts

An "Unofficial Transcript" is an uncertified and unsealed copy of a student's academic record. "Unofficial Transcripts" are provided to all seniors during the first meeting period of the Fall (typically in September). It is primarily necessary for your own personal use for filling out your college application and calculating specific GPA's (UC/CSU).

Note: Seniors will be given an unofficial "working" copy of their transcripts for use in completing college applications. UC's and CSU's do not require transcripts with their applications. They may request them at a later date, and will require a final transcript if you are attending a UC/CSU.

Ordering and Sending Transcripts

Seniors are responsible for ordering and sending their own transcripts to their perspective colleges during the application process.

There are two methods of requesting official transcripts: Online through Docufide and In person through our Registrar's Office.

1. Ordering Online: Docufide

Students can order transcripts **online** by logging onto www.docufide.com <<http://www.docufide.com>> or by linking to Docufide through your Family Connection account. There is a \$3.00 fee (for each transcript sent). This is the most common method of sending official transcripts at St. Ignatius College Preparatory.

Timing to Consider When Sending "Official Transcripts" through Docufide

There are three points in the school year when colleges typically ask to receive transcripts from seniors:

1. **Fall:** with the application, by the application due date.
2. **Mid-Year (February):** First Semester Senior Year Grades.
3. **Spring:** Final transcript at the end of senior year (to college attending only).

It is essential to review the guidelines for each college for all deadlines. Please read your application carefully!!!!

2. Ordering In Person: Registrar's Office

1. Go to the Counseling Center or the Registrar's Office (main office).
2. Fill out the **"Transcript Request Form"** and submit it to the Registrar.
3. Go to the registrar's office to pick up the requested transcript(s) and pay \$5 per copy.

It is essential to review the guidelines for each college for all deadlines. **Please read your application carefully!!!!**

Note: Seniors will be given an unofficial "working" copy of their transcripts for use in completing college applications. UC's and CSU's do not require transcripts with their applications. They may request them at a later date, and will require a final transcript if you are attending a UC/CSU.

Sending an Official Transcript Through the Mail

1. Go to the Counseling Center or the Registrar's Office (main office).
2. Fill out the "Transcript Request Form" and submit to the Registrar
3. Go to the registrar's office to pick up the requested transcript(s) and pay \$5 per copy.

The College Application Process: Standardized Test Scores

Standardized Test Scores

Students are responsible for sending their SAT, SAT Subject Tests, and ACT scores to their colleges.

Please refer to the 'Standardized Testing' section of this guide which provides an explanation of the process. Information is also available on the College Board Website (www.collegeboard.com) and the ACT website (www.actstudent.org).

Check in with your counselor if you have any questions.