

Finding Their Future

Cathy McMeekan guides students (and parents) through the college search process

Forty-five members of Saint George's senior class are waiting for the big envelopes to arrive in their mailboxes. Big envelopes carry acceptances from the colleges and universities they've applied to this fall, offering new academic horizons to explore.

Each of those envelopes also represents another success for Saint George's extensive college counseling process led by Cathy McMeekan, the school's full-time college counselor. She supports students and parents in each Upper School grade with everything they need to know about standardized testing, financial aid and scholarships, college athletics, and identifying resources for navigating the college process. Then there are the personal touches, like interviewing Upper School teachers for comments to include in the college recommendation she writes for each senior.

"I've worked in college admissions, which gives me experience and insights into how the college process works," says Cathy, who is currently president of the Pacific NW Association for College Admission Counseling (PNACAC). "That's an extensive network of college admissions colleagues that I can call on for advice or information."

Here are her answers to some common questions about the college search process:

What are colleges' priorities when considering student applicants?

"According to the survey of colleges and universities done by the NACAC every year, these are the top factors in admission:

1. Grades in college prep courses
2. Strength of curriculum
3. Standardized test scores
4. Overall HS GPA
5. Essay
6. Teacher/counselor recommendations

Depending on the type of college, the activities and achieve-

ments outside the classroom could be a significant factor in admission. But all schools regardless of type (unless it's an art school) would rank coursework, rigor and GPA at the top of their admissions factors."

What scholarships are worth pursuing to get the best return for your time?

"The number one source of financial assistance a student will get is from the institutions to which they apply and are admitted, so spending time on the college's website looking for their financial aid and scholarship requirements is your best use of time. Filling out the FAFSA form the first year, even if a family thinks they won't qualify for need-based assistance (especially in our current economic climate), also is helpful. Finally, scholarships that are local or regional have less competition than national ones, so applying for those outside scholarships are more worth the time than the national ones. Checking with organizations that the student or their family is a member of (for example credit unions, service organizations, and churches) also can be a great source for scholarships."

Where do Saint George's students apply for college and how successful have they been?

"The class of 2009 included 28 individuals of diverse talents, abilities, and interests. All of them applied to four-year colleges last year. Their applications spanned all major regions of the United States and into Canada and Europe; their final choice of schools reflects a similar geographic spread. Two-thirds of the class chose to enroll in universities outside the State of Washington, which is a continuation of the previous year's trend.

Collectively, the class of 2009 submitted 221 applications to 133 separate institutions of higher learning and was admitted to or waitlisted at 112 of these schools."

Cathy McMeekan acts as tour guide at the University of San Francisco during this spring's tour of California colleges



Upper School “To Do” Lists

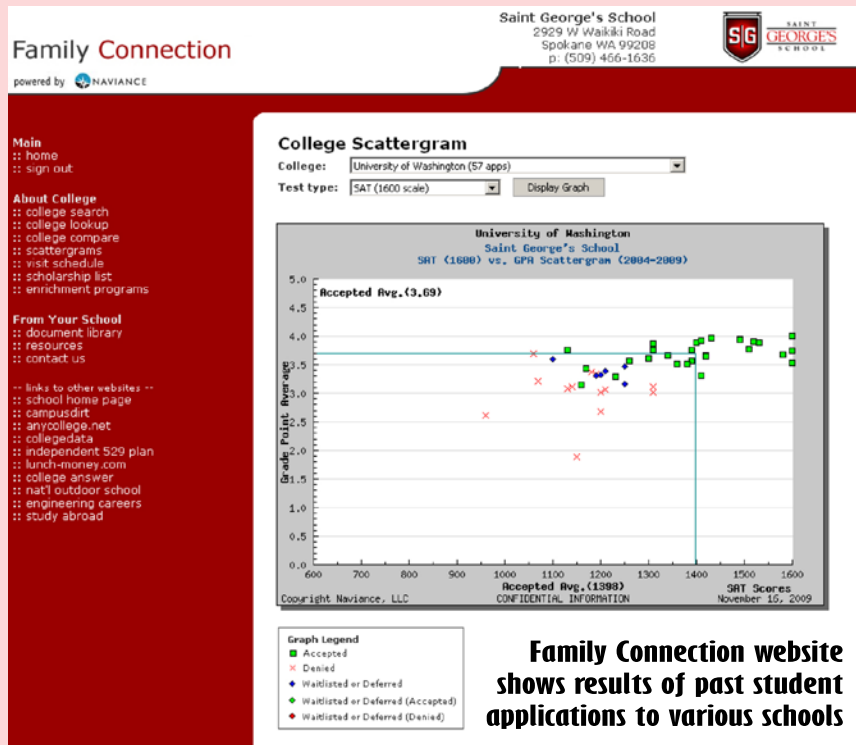
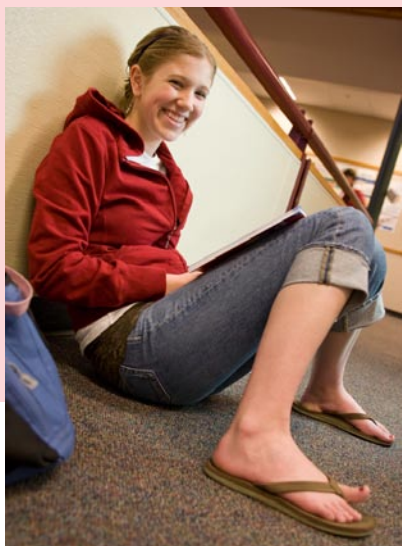
What should students be doing at each grade in high school to prepare for college? Here is SGS college counselor Cathy McMeekan’s list to help them get ready for college and into the schools of their choice.

Suggestions for Ninth Grade:

- ▶ 9th grade classes DO count in the admission process for 99% of colleges.
- ▶ If you are struggling in a class, ask for extra help — don’t wait until it’s too late!
- ▶ READ, READ, READ and WRITE, WRITE, WRITE.
- ▶ Get involved in something — sports, community service, clubs, music or theatre — there are plenty to choose from in high school.

Suggestions for 10th Grade:

- ▶ Take appropriately rigorous courses.
- ▶ Map out your remaining years in high school. Are there certain areas of study that you’ve found more interesting? Plan to take electives/AP courses in those areas.
- ▶ Become a leader, not just a member, of whatever you do at school and in the community.
- ▶ READ, READ & WRITE, WRITE



Suggestions for 11th Grade:

- ▶ Take appropriately rigorous courses and study hard.
- ▶ Polish your study habits.
- ▶ In extracurriculars, find a passion! Become a leader! Keep track of what you do!
- ▶ Create an activities resume — see examples on our SGS college counseling website or use the resume builder in Family Connection.
- ▶ Spend time in self-reflection, use the resources on Family Connection to help you assess personality, strengths, etc.
- ▶ Spring time is good time to start formulating a college list. (Cathy meets with all juniors to walk them through the process of creating a list.)
- ▶ Spring also is ideal to begin SAT/ACT testing and visiting colleges.

Suggestions for 12th Grade:

- ▶ Student continues to perform well during senior year, taking appropriately rigorous coursework.
- ▶ Early Action / Early Decision applicants must have all their application materials ready early.
- ▶ Visit with college reps at SGS, Spokane info nights, and at a national college fair.
- ▶ Register for fall SAT/ACT if necessary.
- ▶ Submit requests for supporting high school information 3 weeks in advance at minimum.
- ▶ Special situations to consider:
 - ▶ NCAA Eligibility Center for Division I & II athletes
 - ▶ GAP year options and timing
 - ▶ Applying to universities abroad