



**COLLEGE GUIDE**  
**2018-2019**

Welcome to the College Counseling Office!

The Castilleja College Counseling Office seeks to empower students to direct their own college searches and reach their college decisions by providing information, advice, reflection and resources throughout the process to students and parents/guardians alike. The program is a natural extension of Castilleja's educational philosophy, emphasizing independent thinking, introspection, personal responsibility, leadership, and informed decision making. We believe that the college search process should be student centered, supportive, and even fun, and that it is a time for students to further develop their interests, explore and define their talents, and deepen their individual ideas and values.

Students who engage fully in the academic, social, and cocurricular life of Castilleja during their time in the Upper School will develop interests that they love and emerge well-prepared academically and socially for success in challenging undergraduate programs. Through this immersion in all that Castilleja has to offer, the college search process can become a natural part of a student's life and development.

Our mission is not about placing students in prestigious colleges, but about educating students to seek excellence and balance in all that they do, to engage the world around them, and to lead rich, full lives. Our hope is that the lessons they learn at Castilleja will serve them well as they venture out into the world as students and adults.

Gabrielle McColgan  
Director of College Counseling

Alyson Tom  
Associate Director of College Counseling

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## THE COLLEGE PROCESS AT CASTILLEJA

At Castilleja, the college process begins in earnest 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of the junior year, but everything you do at Castilleja up until then lays the foundation for a student-centered journey of self-discovery and fulfillment that will inform your decision of where to apply to college, and, ultimately, where to attend.

Prior to the junior year, college preparation is simple, but important: Develop sound study habits, take appropriate courses that increase each year in difficulty, focus on the "core courses" (English, world languages, math, science and social science); and pursue cocurricular activities of interest to you, whether at Castilleja or beyond the Circle. The Castilleja College Counselors will be available if you have questions about your Castilleja course selection or have specific questions about the college process. Don't spend a moment worrying about strategizing or trying to figure out "what colleges want." Be yourself and the rest will come into focus.

In the sophomore, junior, and senior years, we will keep you informed about test registration and application deadlines, test prep opportunities and choices, when and how to make the most of college visits, Castilleja course selection, and college-related programs in the area. Beginning junior year, you will have regular, individual meetings with your Castilleja College Counselor and specific assignments designed to help you reflect on who you are, what you value, what your strengths and weaknesses are, and what you want your college experience to be. We will also meet with your parents/guardians, and will ask them to write about you and share anecdotes that will assist us in getting to know you better. Junior College Seminars will provide an in-depth introduction to the college process as well, and your summer should include some time spent writing drafts of application essays and further researching colleges.

In the senior year, you will meet one-on-one as much as you need with your Castilleja College Counselor to further develop and then refine your college list and review your essays and other aspects of the college application; you can attend information sessions presented by admission representatives who visit Castilleja; we can assist you as you prepare for college interviews; and you will complete your college applications before leaving for Winter Break (on time and without too much stress!). Once admission decisions are made, we will help you review your options so you can arrive at a decision that best supports your goals and aspirations for college and beyond.

The Castilleja College Counseling Office also hosts informational programs in the fall for parents/guardians in the Upper School; College Financial Aid Nights for any Upper School families wanting to learn more about need-based financial aid; and monthly morning coffees during 2<sup>nd</sup> semester where Upper School parents/guardians can drop in and ask questions about the college process. Parents/Guardians are invited to contact the Castilleja College Counselors with their questions at any time.

Please visit the [College Counseling portal page](#) for more information and to access the College Counseling Events Calendar.

## WHAT ARE COLLEGES LOOKING FOR?

Each college has its own personality, and, accordingly, each college looks for different qualities in its applicants. But, overarching most admission committee decisions is the academic preparation an applicant presents.

The primary criterion for admission to college is academic excellence. Colleges look for your preparation and potential to succeed. They expect you to challenge yourself by taking a strong program throughout high school and earning good grades. The most important credential that enables a college to evaluate your academic record is your transcript. Remember, however, that the evaluation of your application goes beyond any numerical formula.

Colleges want to see your commitment, dedication, and genuine interest in expanding your intellectual horizons. They want to see the kind of curiosity and enthusiasm that will allow you to spark a lively discussion in the classroom and continue the conversation in your dorm. They want to see the energy and depth of commitment you bring to your endeavors, whether in class, while being part of a community organization, during a performance, or on an athletic field. They want to see the initiative with which you seek out opportunities that expand your perspective and that allow you to grow as a student and as a human being.

The College Counseling Office at Castilleja will assist you in identifying those colleges that will allow you to continue to grow and explore, that will challenge you intellectually, that will deepen your talents, and that will support you in your aspirations. And your Castilleja College Counselor will guide you in developing a strong application that will allow the college admission committees to come to know you.

## TRANSCRIPT AND CURRICULUM

Your high school transcript is the first application document colleges review in order to determine if you have the preparation and ability to succeed at their college. Colleges expect applicants to pursue a reasonably challenging curriculum, choosing courses from among the most demanding available. You should consult with your Castilleja College Counselor, your teachers, and your parents as you construct a curriculum that is right for you, taking into consideration the many obligations and expectations you have both in and out of the classroom. Chosen wisely and advisedly, your high school curriculum will inspire you to develop your intellectual interests, not suffer from unnecessary stress. There is no magic formula for getting into college. It is true, however, that your college search has the potential to be enjoyable and successful if you have taken full advantage of the opportunities available to you at Castilleja and have achieved at a high level in the classroom.

### Course Selection and College Admission

Each Castilleja student's curricular choices should start with Castilleja's graduation requirements. Castilleja's graduation requirements meet or exceed the minimum eligibility requirements for college admission; if you graduate from Castilleja, you will be eligible for admission to any college or university. We have included a chart below that explains those requirements.

We do recommend that most Castilleja students exceed our minimum requirements. We encourage students to register for some Honors, Advanced Placement™ (AP), and/or Advanced Topics (AT) courses when it is appropriate for their level and interests. Most selective colleges are seeking students that have chosen reasonable challenge from within the available high school curriculum. In other words, colleges ask that students take *some* courses from among the most rigorous courses available at Castilleja, not *all* of them. You should develop a balanced curriculum each year in Upper School that allows you to experience the breadth and depth of our curricular offerings, explore your interests in particular subject areas, and maintain your health and well-being outside of the classroom. There is not a single path through Castilleja's curriculum, and we encourage you to explore and take risks along the way. The Castilleja College Counselors are available throughout this process to offer guidance and advice.

### Minimum Requirements for Castilleja Graduation, UC, and General College Admission

These required and suggested college admission requirements are based on stated admission requirements and recommendations from colleges across the country. Meeting or exceeding these guidelines does not guarantee admission to any specific college, nor does following a different curricular pattern preclude admission to college. Students are advised to review the admission requirements for individual colleges in which they have an interest, and to consult with their teachers, advisors, and Castilleja College Counselor when selecting, adding, or dropping courses.

	<b>Castilleja Graduation Requirements</b>	<b>UC System Minimum Course Requirements*</b>	<b>Non-UC System Suggested Course Requirements**</b>
<b>English</b>	4 years	4 years	4 years
<b>Fitness and Wellness</b>	2 years	-	-
<b>History-Social Science</b>	3 years, including Cultures and Civilizations, The American Political System and The Individual and Society, and US History	2 years; additional courses strengthen application	3-4 years
<b>Mathematics</b>	Algebra II, Geometry, and one additional year	3 years required; additional courses strengthen application	3-4 years, taken in grades 9-12, through Precalculus or Calculus
<b>Science</b>	3 years of a lab science, including physics, chemistry, and biology	2 years of a lab science required; additional courses strengthen application	3-4 years of a lab science
<b>Visual and Performing Arts</b>	Core Arts and 1 year in a single arts discipline	1 year (2 semesters) in a single arts discipline; additional courses strengthen application	1-2 years or more, according to interest
<b>World Languages</b>	Through Level III	2 years required; additional courses strengthen application	3-4 years of the same language, taken in grades 8-12
<b>Electives</b>	Available in any of the above areas and Computer Science & Engineering, though not required; additional courses strengthen application	1 year (2 semesters) in "a-f" subject areas required; additional courses strengthen application	Take according to interest and schedule in any of the above areas and/or Computer Science & Engineering; additional courses strengthen application
<b>Senior Talk/ Global Leadership/ Community Leadership</b>	Yes	-	-

\* In some instances math and language courses taken in grades 7 and 8 will count toward the UC requirements. For further information on UC requirements visit <https://www.ucop.edu/agguide/a-g-requirements/>

\*\*Direct questions about your particular academic and cocurricular interests and how they relate to college admission to your Castilleja College Counselor.

# STANDARDIZED TESTS

Standardized tests are but one component of many that colleges consider when evaluating your application. In nearly every instance colleges place far more emphasis on the high school transcript, including the rigor of the courses you have taken as well as the grades earned in those courses, than they do on your test scores. In fact, a national survey taken by the National Association for College Admission Counseling has shown that, on average, college admission officers spend about 5 seconds reviewing a typical applicant's test scores! And every year, more colleges announce that they no longer require test scores for admission. This is not to imply that test scores have no value in the process, but it does underscore that your course selection and grades are more important, and that the way you think, how you approach your studies, and how you choose to spend your time outside the classroom all contribute to the strength of your application.

The Castilleja College Counselors will work individually with students to advise them on the most appropriate standardized testing for their curriculum and academic goals. In general, we recommend that students take the SAT with Essay or ACT Plus Writing twice, and no more than three times; most Castilleja students will take 2-3 SAT Subject Tests. Colleges usually give applicants the benefit of "best test" – either from your best single sitting or by creating a "super score" using the best section scores from more than one sitting – when evaluating your application. Always consult your Castilleja College Counselor before registering for any standardized tests. In general, students should not send official score reports to colleges until the fall of senior year. Go to <http://www.collegeboard.com> and <http://www.act.org> to learn about test dates and registration deadlines, and direct any questions to the College Counseling Office.

## Standardized Testing Timeline

*Freshman Year:* Usually no tests are necessary, although you could consider taking the SAT Subject Test in a foreign language upon completion of level IV, unless you intend to continue to a higher level in that language. We do not recommend that you order score reports to be sent to colleges until fall of senior year. Consult your Castilleja College Counselor before registering for any standardized tests.

*Sophomore Year:* All sophomores take the PSAT at Castilleja in October and a Practice ACT at Castilleja in the spring; usually no other standardized tests are necessary, although you could consider taking the SAT Subject Test in a foreign language, Math Level 2 or Chemistry if your coursework has prepared you. Review the "Castilleja Courses and SAT Subject Tests" grid below for recommendations. We do not recommend that you order score reports to be sent to colleges until fall of senior year. Consult your Castilleja College Counselor before registering for any standardized tests.

*Junior Year:* All juniors take the PSAT at Castilleja in October. You can take the SAT with Essay in March, May or June of the junior year or the ACT Plus Writing in February, April or June (or July, in some states); the fall of junior year is not recommended. Consider taking SAT Subject Tests if your coursework has prepared you. Review the "Castilleja Courses and SAT Subject Tests" grid below for recommendations. We do not recommend that you order score reports to be sent to colleges until fall of senior year. Consult your Castilleja College Counselor before registering for any standardized tests.

*Senior Year:* You may re-take the SAT with Essay in August or October or the ACT Plus Writing in September or October of senior year if you are not satisfied with your junior-year scores (November and December test dates are also available). You may also take additional SAT Subject Tests in the fall if needed. Review the “Castilleja Courses and SAT Subject Tests” grid below for recommendations. Check your colleges’ admission websites to confirm testing requirements, and keep application deadlines in mind when registering for tests this fall; scores from November test dates will usually not arrive in time to meet Early Decision or Early Action application deadlines. Consult your Castilleja College Counselor before registering for any standardized tests. Usually, you must order official score reports from College Board and/or ACT to be sent to each of your colleges prior to the application deadlines; be sure to check your colleges’ score reporting requirements. Please note that some colleges require that students report all standardized test scores and others allow students to choose what is reported. Students are responsible for understanding the policies of their colleges.

### **Standardized Tests Defined**

**The PSAT:** The Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) is the best preparation for the SAT. Students at Castilleja take the PSAT twice: in October of tenth grade and October of eleventh grade, in order to gain important standardized test-taking skills that will serve them well in future standardized testing. PSAT scores are not sent to colleges and do not factor in the college admission decision whatsoever. Scores from the eleventh grade test are used to determine eligibility for the National Merit Scholarship Program.

**The SAT:** Offered seven times a year, the SAT consists of four main components: Reading, Writing and Language, Math, and the optional Essay. While the essay is optional, a few colleges, including the University of California, still require the essay for admission purposes – all Castilleja students planning to take the SAT should take the optional essay. Usually the SAT is taken not earlier than March of the junior year in order to capitalize on as much of the English and math curriculum as possible, and to further develop critical thinking skills. Many students will not take the SAT until May or June of the junior year, and then take it again in the fall of the senior year. Consult your Castilleja College Counselor before registering for the SAT with Essay or the ACT Plus Writing; colleges accept both the ACT Plus Writing and SAT with Essay equally.

**The ACT:** Offered seven times a year (six in California), the ACT covers five skill areas: English, Mathematics, Reading, Science Reasoning, and the optional Writing section. While the writing section is optional, a few colleges, including the University of California, still require this section for admission purposes – all Castilleja students planning to take the ACT should take the ACT Plus Writing. Usually the ACT Plus Writing is taken not earlier than February of the junior year, in order to capitalize on as much of the English and math curriculum as possible, and to further develop critical thinking skills. Many students will not take the ACT Plus Writing until April or June of the junior year, and then take it again in the fall of senior year. Castilleja offers a Practice ACT to students in the spring of sophomore year to develop familiarity with the test. Consult your Castilleja College Counselor before registering for the SAT with Essay or the ACT Plus Writing; colleges accept both the ACT Plus Writing and SAT with Essay equally.

**Subject Tests\*:** Many Castilleja students take SAT Subject Tests to demonstrate their mastery of specific subjects. The content of each test is not based on any one approach or curriculum but rather reflects trends in high school course work. Twenty tests are offered in 5 different subjects. Most SAT Subject Tests are offered six times a year and students can take one, two, or three tests on a single test date. Each SAT Subject Test takes one hour and consists of multiple-choice questions. Students may not take the SAT and SAT Subject Tests on the same day, so you need to plan carefully with your Castilleja College Counselor to choose test dates that will support your college application deadlines. Very few colleges require SAT Subject Tests, those that do usually ask for two. Students thinking of applying to highly selective engineering programs should, in most cases, take Math Level 2 and either Chemistry, Biology, or Physics.

- Subject Tests should be taken upon completion of the course that best prepares students for a given test, as these tests are content-driven and not tied to a specific year in high school. Review the “Castilleja Courses and SAT Subject Test” information below before you register for and take any Subject Tests.

**AP Exams\*:** Advanced Placement™ (AP) exams enable students to demonstrate their competence in college-level AP courses through comprehensive exams given in May. Offered in some 30 subjects, students earning passing scores *may* be granted a higher course placement in college and/or some college credit, but credit is awarded at the discretion of the college the student attends and according to that college’s AP policy. AP exams were not designed for college admission purposes, although scores of 4 and 5 earned in the junior year may strengthen an applicant’s file in terms of academic profile. Exams are given at Castilleja only in the AP courses we offer; students should consult their AP teachers about eligibility and test dates. Advanced Placement™ is a product of the College Board.

\*Some international universities require AP and/or Subject Test scores for admission to certain programs of study.

### **Testing Accommodations**

Both the College Board and ACT may grant testing accommodations for students with learning differences who have gone through the request process and provided all required documentation. It is incumbent upon the student and family to research those requirements and timelines and work with the Castilleja Learning Specialist as early in the high school career as possible, or as soon as a learning difference has been identified.

Note: Students who have received Castilleja testing accommodations are not automatically approved for College Board or ACT accommodations; these are separate application processes. See the Castilleja Learning Specialist for more information.

### Castilleja Courses and SAT Subject Tests

Because SAT Subject Tests are based on knowledge of course content, it is better to take these tests according to course completion rather than year in school. While we recommend that students take the SAT with Essay and/or ACT Plus Writing no earlier than February of the junior year, we recommend that students take SAT Subject Tests according to the following course completion guidelines. In general, the few colleges that require SAT Subject Tests usually require only two, but students are responsible for knowing the requirements of the colleges to which they intend to apply. Remember that colleges usually need official test scores submitted by December of the senior year, earlier if a student is applying under an early application plan. Go to <http://www.collegeboard.com> to learn about test dates and registration deadlines, and direct any questions to the College Counseling Office.

SAT Subject Test	Castilleja Course (minimum course/semester completion*)
Biology E/M**	Biology with strong A grades, or Biology Honors with a grade of A, and with extra preparation
Chemistry**	Chemistry Honors with strong A grades, or Advanced Topics in Chemistry if taken in the junior year, and with extra preparation
Physics**	Not recommended, though a student who takes Advanced Topics in Physics in the junior year and/or is committed to additional independent study could take this test
Literature	Junior AP English grades of B+ to A, and an SAT Evidence-Based Reading & Writing score of 650 or above or PSAT Evidence-Based Reading and Writing score of 650 or above
US History	US History Honors or AP US History; this is, in general, an excellent test choice for most Castilleja students
Math Level 2**	Semester 1 of Introductory Calculus AB or BC, or the full year of Precalculus and Discrete Math; strongly recommended for any student considering a college major in a STEM field; NOTE: we do not recommend taking Math Level 1
Languages (Chinese, French, and Spanish)	Level IV, or AP/AT if taken in the junior year; NOTE: Not all languages are offered on all test dates, and the test with Listening, as compared to Reading only, is offered only in November; we do not recommend the November date unless you are fluent as a writer and speaker of the language

\*May and June test dates are highly recommended for most SAT Subject Tests; “completion” indicates that students can plan to take the SAT Subject Test in May or June of the school year during which they are taking the related course.

\*\*Students applying to highly selective engineering programs should, in most cases, take SAT Subject Tests in either Chemistry, Biology, or Physics AND Math Level 2.

NOTE: Although the UC system no longer requires SAT Subject Tests for admission, some programs of study within the UC system do; students must check with specific departments and majors.

## Test Preparation

You will find comprehensive study materials and advice on the College Board and/or ACT web sites, including sample questions, timed practice tests and test scoring. Paper versions of sample test questions are available in the College Counseling Office and electronic versions are available in Schoology. Additionally, the College Board offers a free online test prep program in partnership with Khan Academy and ACT offers a free online test prep program called ACT Academy; many other college search websites provide free or discounted test preparation. Test prep books are available at most bookstores and libraries. Your Castilleja teachers are also good resources. The value of test prep courses offered by for-profit companies and tutors depends upon the motivation and receptiveness of the student, learning style, tutor, time available, parent support, and so on. Most test prep courses and tutors are expensive and require a great amount of time, which can affect the student's ability to participate in cocurricular activities, complete homework, and earn good grades, and can place more emphasis on a score than is warranted. The Castilleja College Counselors can provide you with a list of test prep resources recommended by past Castilleja students.

- Continuous reading of good literature, attentiveness in class, retention of material learned in school, and plenty of rest are, in the end, the best preparation!

## Questions to Ask When Considering Test Prep Tutors and Companies

*Ask:*

- How much focus does the company place on hiring and training its teachers and tutors?
- Who are the teacher/tutors? How do you choose for me and why?
- Who's ultimately responsible for the tutors and why should we trust you/them? How long have they worked for you? How do you do background checks?
- What is the curriculum? Based on what? What research and revision is done of the curriculum and how frequently?
- Does your method work? How well? What if it doesn't work?
- How will we know when I approach my "score ceiling"? (That is, no amount of additional prep will have a significant effect on the score.)

*Avoid:*

- Anyone who gives a 100% guarantee of a specific number of points for improvement or anything that seems overstated
- Any company that presses you to sign up for more than what you need; e.g., maybe you need only math or only reading—why pay for both?
- Following the herd to the same tutor or company that "everyone" uses; do your own research
- Spending too much time on test prep or starting too early; good test prep is usually 6-10 weeks in length and ends just at the test date

*Insist on:*

- A diagnostic test (or tests) to determine which test is better for you, SAT vs. ACT
- A balanced curriculum: not too many test gimmicks; teaching should include content as well as strategy
- The product being tailored to you
- Current research and revision of tests and curriculum
- Buy-in from you—this won't work if you don't want to invest time and energy in it

## MORE THAN GRADES AND SCORES

The choices you make in your activities outside the classroom, the time you spend on those endeavors, and the leadership roles you play in cocurricular activities and nonacademic interests tell colleges a lot about you. Describing what you love about these interests in your application helps the admission committees discover the ways you might contribute to their communities, and brings an important perspective to understanding the full picture of who you are.

It's not about the number of activities you can list on an application grid. Depth of experience in one or two activities may demonstrate your commitment more than minimal participation in five or six organizations. The impact you have had on a club, in your school, or in the larger community—and the impact that experience has had on you—is of much more importance than a lengthy resume.

Use your early years in Upper School to explore many interests and discover your talents, and then focus on a few of those in greater depth and commitment in your last two years. Learn to choose from among your interests rather than running the risk of burning out on all of them. No college expects you to be all things to all people, and one of the greatest myths about college admissions is that you need to excel at everything.

Your academic interests could make you a great fit for a research internship or a class at a local community college; your love for your sport(s) might mean that you would enjoy coaching or mentoring younger athletes; your talent in visual or performing arts might lead you to participate in community events or regional competitions; finding meaning in serving your community might indicate that you would be a wonderful leader through an ACE Org or other local organization...and these are just a few suggestions! Work with your parents, your advisor, the ACE Center, your teachers or the Castilleja College Counselors to consider and reflect on what you enjoy doing with your time and then how to best pursue those interests.

College applications usually ask if you have worked, either in the summer or during the school year. Many students do work, but not all do, so if you have not yet had a paid job, don't worry. Colleges do not have an expectation that you will work. The exception to this is if you are on need-based financial aid, since financial aid packages include a student contribution expectation of at least several hundred dollars from summer employment, beginning with the summer immediately following high school.

Summer provides time for you to explore new interests and/or delve more deeply into current ones. As with school-year activities, summer commitments should not be about padding a resume and certainly do not need to be about attending expensive national or international programs, winning a Pulitzer Prize, or discovering the cure for cancer. Engage in activities that excite you, that further develop your talents, or that teach you new skills. This might mean you will travel across the country or around the world, but it might also mean you will stay local and ride your bike to work! (And who knows - what you choose to do *now* may help you discover the cure for cancer or write that award-winning novel one day!)

# APPLICATION COMPONENTS

## **Teacher Recommendations**

Most private colleges require one or two recommendations from teachers who have taught you in the 11th and/or 12th grades in one of the core academic subjects (English, math, world languages, history-social science, or science), though some will accept evaluations from earlier grades and teachers in other disciplines, in unusual circumstances and with permission. The teacher recommendation lets your colleges know what you are like in the classroom setting, and what their faculty can expect from you as a college student. Your teachers will write about your classroom participation, your writing, your critical thinking skills, your daily preparation, your attitude and how you approach learning, your ability to meet deadlines, your attendance, how you contribute to the classroom, how your thinking has matured, and how you have developed as a student over time, among many other aspects of your academic life.

Selecting your two teachers from among the many wonderful faculty at Castilleja can feel overwhelming, but a few simple guidelines are helpful: choose those teachers who know the most about your performance in an academic setting, who have written positive comments about your work in your comment cards, with whom you have a solid relationship, in whose classroom you either excel or have made great progress after initially encountering some difficulty. Remember, unless a college specifically requests it, don't use a coach or someone who can't speak to your academic achievements and potential.

Your Castilleja College Counselor will provide you with more advice and counsel, and will instruct you on when and how to ask your teachers to write on your behalf. They will also tell you what information you will need to provide your recommenders, and when. Remember to keep your teachers informed throughout the process if you make any changes to your college list, and you should certainly share your admission decisions with them in April and May. Once you have decided which college to attend, write thank-you notes to everyone who provided a recommendation and tell them where you've decided to go to college. Be sure to do this before you leave Castilleja!

## **College Counselor/School Recommendations**

Most colleges also want to hear from your Castilleja College Counselor, who will write about you in the larger school context, not just in the classroom. We will draw from comments provided us by your teachers, advisors, coaches, administrators, as well as from what we have learned about you over the years that you have been at Castilleja. We will also use information you and your parents have provided us through your junior year college assignments and the parent questionnaire. The counselor recommendation is submitted along with the Secondary School Report (SSR), your transcript, and the Castilleja School Profile, which provides additional contextual information for interpreting your courses and grades.

## **Optional Recommendations**

Some colleges—but not all—will allow you to submit an additional recommendation from a person who knows you outside the academic context. This might be from a peer, coach, clergy person, employer, or neighbor. An additional recommendation can be helpful if the person writing on your behalf knows you well AND can present a different aspect of you than your teachers and your Castilleja College Counselor.

An additional recommendation is NOT helpful if 1) the college has specifically stated they do not accept additional letters; 2) the person writing the letter does not know you well; or 3) the letter does not provide any new insights or information. Remember that it is not about who you know (or your parents know) but how that person knows YOU. A letter from a famous or influential person who does not know you is not helpful, and colleges often view such letters as an act of desperation or manipulation; such letters will not add to the quality of your application.

If you do decide to ask someone to write an optional letter of recommendation, be sure to have that person send his/her letter directly to your Castilleja College Counselor—not to the college!—so we can ensure that it is connected to all of the school documents submitted on your behalf. Optional letters sent to the colleges by a third party are often the last documents to be filed in your application folder, and oftentimes are not clearly addressed or identified as intended for your application.

Always consult with your Castilleja College Counselor before asking someone to write an additional/optional recommendation for you.

## **Essays**

It is in the college application essay, sometimes called the “personal statement,” where you are best able to distinguish yourself from other equally qualified applicants. Through your own writing, in your own voice, you are able to “talk” to the admission committee. It is here that you let them know who you are, what you value, how you think, what you think about, what excites or interests you, and what you would bring to their campus.

The strongest essays are those where the student’s genuine voice stands out. You should resist the urge to “package” yourself in order to come across in a way you think a college wants; what they want is to get to know the real you. Attempts at second-guessing the college or packaging yourself simply blur a college’s understanding of who you are and what you can accomplish. As with all things in life, it is best to be completely yourself.

Begin drafting your college essays early in your junior spring, if for no other reason than to become more comfortable writing about yourself and thinking about what matters most to you. Start by asking yourself a few basic questions:

- What do I want my application reader to know about me?
- If I could have a conversation with the admission committee, what would I tell them about myself?
- How can I present those ideas through one of the topics listed on the application?

Then, after you have a few drafts under your belt, take a fresh look at them and ask these questions:

- Did I convey the information I wanted?
- Did I convey my enthusiasm and passion?
- What has the reader learned about me through my essay?
- What kind of impression did I leave with the reader?
- Is this who I really am?
- Could another person have written this?

It is fine to ask a trusted adult who knows you well to read your essays and ask them if the essay reflects the “you” they know, and if what you have written is clear. However, we caution you to avoid getting too much feedback on your writing; you run the risk of getting competing opinions on your work and trying to please too many people - this can easily result in you forgetting to stay true to your own voice. And of course you want to work with your Castilleja College Counselor on your drafts to make certain you are presenting yourself authentically and clearly. It is NOT allowed for others to write your essay. Remember that this needs to be your work, your thoughts, your voice.

### **College Supplements (aka Writing Supplements)**

There are two broad types of supplements to a college application. One is the Supplement to the Common Application (aka Member Questions or Writing Supplements) that a majority of member colleges require, and the other is an institutional or Common Application Arts Supplement (see below).

The Common Application Writing Supplements allow colleges to ask additional questions not covered in the basic application so they can better know you as a candidate and why you would be a good match (or not) for their college. Supplements often require multiple short answers plus several additional essays. Each college creates its own unique supplement. The supplement requires thought and care, and should not be submitted hastily. This supplement is often where admission committees learn the most about you, why you are interested in their particular college, and where you can (or will not) emerge as a compelling candidate. Do not make the mistake of thinking that because it is easy to apply to multiple colleges using the Common Application you can simply add on a few more colleges at the last minute—the supplements will require a lot of time and energy, and if you don't invest in the supplements, the colleges will know that and the decision will most likely not be in your favor.

### **Arts Supplements**

The second type of supplement is the Arts Supplement. The Arts Supplement is for visual and performing artists who have achieved at a very high level (typically at the state or national level) and want colleges to review their portfolios or auditions as part of the admission process. Not all colleges will accept and review arts supplements; those that do may accept submissions in acting, creative writing, dance, film, instrumental and vocal music, and/or visual art. Check with each college to find out what disciplines they will review and what the submission requirements are for each discipline. Many colleges will only accept online submissions through a site called SlideRoom that will be linked through your Common Application account. You should always review the submission requirements well in advance, as it can take considerable time and outside assistance to gather all of the required pieces of the Arts Supplements.

### **Other “Supplementary Materials”**

Individual college supplements should not be confused with “supplementary materials” such as newspaper clippings, videos, recital programs, resumes, and so on. Students and parents often think the application will be enhanced if they inundate the admission office with such items, when in fact most colleges do not review them or even file them in your application folder. If a college clearly states they do not want such materials, then do not send them. And if a college suggests that they would accept them, be judicious in what you send, as “less is more” in such instances. Always consult with your Castilleja College Counselor before submitting any supplementary materials.

### **Interviews**

Some colleges offer optional informational interviews that serve as recruitment tools: to get to know you better and to answer any questions you might have about the college. Other colleges strongly recommend or require interviews, either on campus or in your local area, and evaluate you as a candidate – in many cases these interviews are considered a type of demonstrated interest. If you are applying to a college that strongly recommends or requires an interview, be sure you know how and by when to request an interview, and find out if you will be interviewing with an admission officer, a current college student, or an alumni volunteer.

Use the interview to your best advantage, to let the college know about your strengths, your interests, your personality, and what you will bring to the college in terms of intellect, energy, and interests. You may feel nervous about interviews, but remember that colleges want you to have a positive experience so that you come away from your interview liking their school and having learned more about them. While interviews tend to be more casual than formal these days, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Be on time
- Turn off your cell phone and *put it away* before going into the interview
- Avoid perfume and dress appropriately—follow Castilleja’s non-uniform day policies
- Speak politely and use proper English; no slang or swearing
- Be confident, but don’t become boastful
- Don’t respond with a simple yes or no; elaborate on your answers
- Have questions prepared for your interviewer, this is a time for you to learn as well
- Maintain eye contact, and be your best, friendly self
- Always be polite to staff, receptionists, and your interviewer
- Be courteous: thank your interviewer in person and follow up with a “thank you” email

### *Practice Interviews*

If you are concerned about interviewing or have never had an interview of any sort before, ask your Castilleja College Counselor to do a mock interview with you. You could also ask a family member or friend to practice with you, with each of you taking turns asking and answering the questions. Sometimes it helps to see both sides of the interview relationship. Remember, the interviewer isn’t trying to trip you up; they sincerely want to learn about you and like you.

### *Be Genuine and Spontaneous*

While it’s important to have some starting points for some of the questions you might be asked, don’t memorize a speech. Be yourself, be natural and at ease, so your true personality and energy come across. The interviewer is a real, live person having a conversation with you. Don’t be a robot.

### *Anticipate Questions*

The questions asked by interviewers can seem very similar from one college to the next. Here are some basic questions that come up fairly often:

- Why do you want to attend our college?
- What do you want to study in college (possible major)?
- What will you contribute?
- What courses have you enjoyed most in high school?
- Are your grades an accurate reflection of your potential?
- Which of your activities is most rewarding and why?
- What has been your biggest achievement?
- How did you spend last summer?
- What do you want to do after you graduate from college?
- What’s the most difficult situation you’ve faced?
- What’s the last book you read for fun?
- If you could change one thing about your high school experience, what would it be?

### *Don’t Panic*

If you are asked a question for which you have no answer, you can always say something like, “That’s a great question. Could I think about that and get back to you?” It’s much better to say, “I don’t know” than to pretend to be an expert. And if you say you’ll get back to the interviewer, make sure you do!

### **A Note to Parents/Guardians**

This is your child’s interview, so allow your child, the college applicant, to go into the building and greet the interviewer alone. If your child can’t drive alone to the location, provide a ride and agree to meet 60 minutes later somewhere. If the interview is at the college and you are there as well, go explore the bookstore or make your calls to those back home while you grab a beverage somewhere. Unless you are specifically asked to sit in, you should not be in the room.

# COLLEGE APPLICATION PLANS AND DEADLINES

Early Decision (ED): Students make a binding commitment to a first-choice institution where, if admitted, they will enroll. Applications are typically due around November 1, students learn of their decision by mid-December, and they must deposit and enroll if offered admission (and withdraw all other applications). Some qualified candidates will be deferred to Regular Decision for consideration in the regular admission cycle, while some may be denied at this time. In both instances, applicants are then free to apply to other colleges. Some colleges use a second round of Early Decision (EDII): applications are due around January 1 and decisions are released in mid-February.

Early Action (EA): Students apply early, usually around November 1, and typically receive a non-binding decision in mid-December or January, well in advance of the institution's regular response date. Applicants are free to apply to other Early Action colleges as well as Regular Decision and Rolling Admission colleges, whatever the decision, and have until May 1 to respond to an offer of admission.

Restrictive Early Action (REA) or Single-Choice Early Action (SCEA): Students apply to an institution of preference early, usually around November 1, and receive a decision early, usually in mid-December. They are restricted from applying ED or EA or REA/SCEA to other institutions, with some exceptions. If offered admission, they are under no obligation to enroll, and have until May 1 to confirm. Some qualified candidates will be deferred to Regular Decision for consideration in the regular admission cycle, while some may be denied at this time. In both instances, applicants are then free to apply to other colleges.

Regular Decision (RD): Students submit an application by a specified date, anywhere from November 30-January 5 typically, and receive a decision in a clearly stated period of time, usually on or before April 1. Students have until May 1 to reply to offers of admission.

Rolling Admission: Institutions review applications as they are submitted and render admission decisions throughout the admission cycle. Applications close when the class is full, which may be at any time during the admission cycle.

National Candidate's Reply Date: Colleges in the U.S. require admitted students to reply to an offer of admission (whether yes or no) by May 1; many colleges require a deposit with a commitment to enroll; *students may deposit at only one college*, but can remain on another college's waiting list. Remember: submitting your deposit late or not at all can mean the loss of your spot at the college of your choice.

## GAP YEARS

Some students choose to defer their enrollment at their chosen college or university in order to take a "gap year." Taking a gap year can be an extremely enriching experience, allowing you to pursue a cocurricular activity in greater depth, travel, work, or volunteer – the possibilities are limited only by your creativity! While there are many companies that exist to help you plan for and/or arrange your gap year, most Castilleja students find that they have the most fun designing their own experiences. Talk to your Castilleja College Counselor if you are considering deferring your college enrollment – it's never too early to start brainstorming!

Most colleges happily grant permission to admitted students who wish to defer enrollment, however you will need to ask for that permission by following your college's deadlines and procedures. If you know you want to defer enrollment as you begin your college research, you can ask colleges what their policies are for students requesting to defer; many students don't decide to defer until late in senior year, however. While not every college will be supportive of your plan, odds are that most will be thrilled that you want to take an extra year to mature and experience the world before you enroll on their campus. Studies show that students who take a gap year are more successful academically and socially once they get to college.

# COLLEGE VISITS

A visit to a college's campus is the best opportunity to get a firsthand view of a college. Visits are also a great way to show "demonstrated interest," an increasingly important aspect of the college application process. A college catalog, view book, or website can show you only so much. To really get a feel for the school, it helps to walk around the quad, sit in on a class, and visit the dorms.

When you begin your college search, it's wise not to think about a specific college you've heard about, but instead plan to visit "types" of colleges in order to get a feel for location, size, and other broad characteristics in general. You can narrow your focus later.

College visits may not be a possibility for every family, but it is very beneficial to visit some of the schools that you are most interested in attending. It can be helpful to consider in advance how much time and resources your family has to devote to college visits and plan your schedule wisely. If you can visit only one time, save your visit until you have been offered admission and then visit in April of your senior year. Note: Some colleges offer fully-funded trips to campus for students from low-income and/or underrepresented backgrounds, be sure to talk to your Castilleja College Counselor about these opportunities.

At the very least, use local resources, even if you aren't considering any of the colleges in the immediate area. You may be surprised by what you learn when you visit local campuses. And, what you learn from local visits will allow you to learn how to make the most of other college visits when you finally do make those trips outside the region.

## Get Answers to Your Questions

A visit gives you the chance to talk to students, faculty, and financial aid and admissions professionals. You can get answers to your questions, such as:

- What is the structure of the academic program? What are classes like? How does academic advising work?
- Are faculty accessible to undergraduates? Are most classes taught by professors or by teaching assistants?
- Can undergraduates participate in research? How competitive are research positions?
- Is there ample space in dorms or does there seem to be a housing crunch?
- What is the make-up of the current freshman class? Is the campus fairly diverse?
- What's the social scene like?
- How many students commute (and from where), and how many live on campus?

Pick up any official school material you see that will help your research. Don't forget to get business cards, too, so you will have a real, live contact if you have a question about admissions or financial aid and a person to write a thank you note to later.

Student-produced material will give you a sense of what campus life is really like. Read the student newspaper and check out bulletin boards to see what bands are coming to the campus, parties are advertised, internships are posted, and generally what the day-to-day energy of the place is. Don't be shy about initiating a conversation with students and faculty. Most will relish the opportunity to talk about their campus and community.

## How to Schedule a Visit

Most colleges use online registration for campus visits, while some colleges will accept phone reservations - check the website for each college you are considering visiting.

Pick a time that's convenient for you and your family. Have several dates and times under consideration, because information sessions and tour groups can fill up early and fast, especially during the usual times for winter and spring breaks. Many colleges will offer additional sessions in the summer months to accommodate families' summer vacations.

Don't worry if you can't visit while classes are in session, but do keep in mind that the campus won't feel as vibrant when all the students aren't there, and you may not get a true sense of the place. Try not to let that affect your opinion of the school unfairly. But visiting even when classes aren't in session is better than not visiting at all. Perhaps you can go back at another time, if the college remains on your list and you are offered admission. If you are able to visit during the school year, ask whether it might be possible to attend a class.

If an interview is suggested or recommended, be sure to make an appointment. (Interviews are usually only available for rising or current seniors.)

If you're curious about a club, program, or a sport, you might be able to arrange to attend a practice, rehearsal, or meeting. (Remember that the NCAA has very specific rules governing when and how recruited athletes can visit and speak with teams and coaches, and vice versa.)

In some of the larger metropolitan areas you will be able to include two colleges in a day, but don't forget to allow for rush-hour traffic and getting lost! Include some colleges in the area that you may not know much about; it's a great means of comparison, and you might be pleasantly surprised. Need some suggestions? Ask your Castilleja College Counselor!

### **Get Organized Before You Go!**

Be sure you have a list of standard questions with you when you visit, and a notebook in which to capture your thoughts for each school. Enter the name of the college, the date and time of your visit, and any other pertinent information well before you go; otherwise, you may forget to do this in the rush of getting to campus and finding the building where your tour starts. Take pictures so you can remember what you saw and start with a picture of the college's name – after a while, one college campus can look a lot like all the others! Your notes and pictures will help to remind you what you learned and what your first impressions were.

#### *Research the College (for juniors and seniors)*

Do some research on the college before you arrive on campus, especially if you have an interview scheduled. Some colleges offer informational interviews in lieu of group information sessions; some colleges include the information session in the tour and offer a conversation with an admission officer as an option; some colleges strongly recommend or require interviews, which are usually evaluative in nature. Know before you go!

Spend some time browsing the college's website to answer your own questions before you go; it doesn't make a good impression when you ask questions that you could have easily researched for yourself online.

Talk to currently enrolled students or alumni about the college. Your Castilleja College Counselor can provide you with names of Castilleja alumnae at colleges across the country.

As you begin your college process, start to make a list of what college characteristics are most important to you, so you know what to look for when you arrive. Use your list of preferences, likes, dislikes, concerns, etc., as a checklist for each visit, and try as much as possible to enter a thought about each characteristic after every campus visit, so when you get home you can make fair and equal comparisons.

### **On-Campus Interviews for Non-Seniors**

Freshmen, sophomores, and juniors don't need to take interviews. Usually all of your questions can be answered by the tour and information session. And, in most cases, you aren't prepared to interview well when your college search is so new. (Note: the exception is for those colleges that meet individually with students in lieu of a group information session.) If at all possible, wait to interview until the summer, fall or winter of your senior year, after you have narrowed your list of schools and thought carefully about what it is you hope to get out of your college education. When in doubt, ask your Castilleja College Counselor!

### **Is This College Right for You?**

You should develop your own way to keep good notes during and after each visit. It needn't be anything elaborate, and can be as simple as a chart in a spreadsheet tailored to what qualities and characteristics you determine are important to you.

You may discover, after visiting a college, that some of the qualities you thought were vitally important to you no longer are, and that other aspects of a college begin to gain importance in your search. Listen to your inner voice, trust your gut instincts.

- Do you feel comfortable walking around campus?
- Do you click with the students and faculty?
- Are the dorms where you want to live for four years?
- Can you change your major, study abroad, explore the curriculum before declaring a major?
- Will your classes be taught by faculty or grad students(TAs)? Does that matter to you?
- Are classes taught in a way that supports your learning style?
- Do you feel at home here? Is this how you pictured college?

Look back at your notes. Re-evaluate what you consider to be the most important aspects of your college. See if there are some common threads across the various colleges, both what you liked and what you didn't like. Using that information, you can expand your college list to include other schools you hadn't considered earlier, and remove some colleges that ended up not being the fit you are looking for. Bring your notes with you to a meeting with your Castilleja College Counselor so together you can determine your next steps.

### **A Note to Parents/Guardians**

You will certainly be welcome to accompany your child on the campus tour, and the admissions office may also welcome you at a group information session. But remember that the campus visit is really meant to help your child, the college applicant, get a feel for the college. Your support is important to your child, but it is very important that students be able to explore the college independently. If you're traveling as a family, you should plan to occupy other family members with alternative activities while your college-bound student explores the campus in depth. (And remember that prospective students should be at the front of the tours, with the tour guides, asking the questions, not the parents. Don't be more memorable than your child!)

## TIPS FOR ATHLETES

Students who have been active in athletics throughout high school may want to continue playing sports in college, and could base their college decisions, in part or entirely, on the availability of a strong athletic program and their eligibility to play their sport(s) at a particular college or university.

On the other hand, some student-athletes may decide that they want to play at the intramural or club level in college, and will search for colleges where there are excellent facilities and opportunities for the non-varsity athlete.

If you are hoping to play at the varsity level, you will want to understand the differences between NCAA Division I, II, and III colleges, and will need to learn about and observe any NCAA requirements and restrictions regarding the recruiting process for D-I and D-II sports. Top athletes should consult with their coaches and Castilleja's Athletic Director about their talent level and the types of programs they would be successful in, and they should talk to their Castilleja College Counselor early in the junior year about their recruitment goals.

For a comprehensive overview of the NCAA Divisions and to understand your eligibility requirements, review the [NCAA Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete](https://www.ncaapublications.com/): (the Guide is free to download here: <https://www.ncaapublications.com/>)

Here is a summary of the steps you should take to achieve eligibility:

Freshmen and Sophomores:

- Work hard to develop your athletic skills
- Work hard to get the best grades you can
- Learn to balance school and sports

Juniors:

- Meet with Castilleja's Athletic Director and your coach(es) to discuss your goals
- After meeting with your Castilleja College Counselor, register to take the ACT and/or SAT in the winter and have your scores sent to the NCAA Eligibility Center
- Contact coaches at the colleges you're interested in; provide them with an athletic stats sheet and film—most will ask you to complete an interest form on their website
- By the end of the school year register with the NCAA Eligibility Center, this includes requesting that Castilleja send your official transcript to the NCAA (<https://web3.ncaa.org/ecwr3/>)
- Continue to work hard to get the best grades possible and to develop your athletic skills. Stay healthy!

Seniors:

- Continue to communicate your interest to coaches
- For most sports, coaches can begin to contact you on July 1 – please check with your Castilleja College Counselor or the NCAA Eligibility Center for your sport(s)
- Be honest and clear with coaches regarding your level of interest
- Take the ACT and/or SAT again, if necessary, and have your scores sent to the Eligibility Center
- Make official visits to campuses, if invited and interested
- Commit/apply in the fall to the program of your choice
- Continue to work hard to get the best grades possible. Stay healthy!

## TIPS FOR VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTISTS

Similar to the concerns of athletes intending to play sports at a high level in college, the needs of visual or performing artists during the college process can require special expertise and attention. Students who possess noteworthy talent in art, film, dance, drama, music and/or creative writing should consider enhancing their applications with auditions or portfolios. Many colleges will accept arts supplements, and many have specific guidelines for doing so. Whether submitting the standard Common Application Arts Supplement through SlideRoom, or something specific to a given college, it is your responsibility to know and follow all submission or audition guidelines, requirements, and deadlines.

Students with extraordinary talent and passion for the arts may decide to major in the arts in college. If you are considering this, it is important to understand the different types of degrees offered, and to research the many colleges that grant professional degrees in the arts. These degrees include the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA in art, dance, drama) and the Bachelor of Music (BM in music performance, music education, music composition and theory, etc.). BFA and BM degrees typically require that 50% to 75% of the coursework be taken in the specific art discipline and related arts, while an art major (or film, or music, or dance, or drama) within the Bachelor of Arts or Science degree (yes, some colleges award that) will require only about 30% of the courses be taken in that area, with the bulk of the courses being taken from across the academic disciplines.

Some colleges also offer double degree options, usually five years to earn both the BFA or BM degree and the BA or BS degree in another, unrelated academic area. Most colleges will have theater programs, music ensembles, dance troupes, etc. open to non-majors for those wanting to participate in some fashion but not majoring in the arts.

Your Castilleja teachers, Castilleja College Counselor, and your private music or arts teacher can be helpful in exploring the many options and preparing your audition or portfolio, whether for augmenting your college application with an arts supplement or for admission to a professional degree program.

### *Resources:*

NACAC Performing and Visual Arts Fairs: <https://www.nacacfairs.org/attend/pva/>

National Portfolio Day: <http://www.portfolioday.net>

SlideRoom: Link to your application at [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org)

# FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Many families find the financial aid process overwhelming, or assume they will not qualify for need-based financial aid, or do not understand that private colleges can be less expensive than public universities once financial aid is factored in. If you find yourself in one of these categories, read on!

The Castilleja College Counseling Office offers Financial Aid programs every year for all families in the Upper School. We encourage all families that think they will need financial aid in order to send their child/children to college to attend at least one of these presentations, especially in senior year, to learn the basics about the aid application process, what colleges provide, what forms are required, and how to plan in advance for the cost of a college education. The Castilleja College Counselors are available year-round to answer your questions about need-based financial aid, merit-based scholarships, need-blind admission policies, and so on. We also have books in our resource area that can be very helpful to families with questions about the financial aid process. We are well-versed in the financial aid process and want to be of as much assistance as possible as you contemplate your financial situation and needs.

*Cautionary Note:* If you remember only one thing about financial aid and scholarships, it is this: Never pay any person or organization or website vendor to do a scholarship search for you, or to fill out financial aid forms and applications for you. More often than not, such "services" are scams, despite how official their materials might look. There is a wealth of free information and search sites available to you, including each college's Financial Aid Office. When in doubt about any program with a fee, ask us before making any commitment.

## Financial Aid 101

College costs continue to rise at schools across the nation. Fortunately, financial aid budgets have also grown. There is certainly competition for these funds, and you may wonder whether you will even qualify. Mandated by federal law, every college website has a Net Price Calculator that will project what amount of aid you might expect to receive at that college. Take advantage of this tool at <http://collegecost.ed.gov/>. While colleges can only offer you an estimate, this is a way to get a sense of how much, if any, financial aid you might qualify for, and this can be a great way to start the conversation at home about college costs.

Stated simply, financial aid comes in two basic forms: 1) Need-Based Financial Aid and 2) Non-Need-Based Financial Aid (or Merit Aid). The former depends on your family's ability to pay; the latter is more frequently tied to academic, athletic, artistic, or some other college-defined achievement or ability. Naviance has a database of merit-based scholarships for you to research—both scholarships provided by colleges and by private organizations.

Need-based financial aid is determined by a "Federal Methodology" developed and approved by the U.S. government. <https://studentaid.ed.gov> is the best place to learn more. The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is the form you must submit in order to determine the amount your family (parents and student together) can contribute to the cost of college. It reviews your assets, income, and other financial and biographical characteristics, such as age of older parent and number of children in college at the same time. This amount is known as the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and does not vary, regardless of the costs of different colleges. Even if you're not yet a high school senior, your family can visit <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa/estimate> to get a sense of your eligibility for federal financial aid.

Many private colleges and universities also require families to submit either the CSS Profile or a college-specific form, both of which seek additional information about your family's financial situation. The colleges then use their own "Institutional Methodology," in combination with the Federal Methodology, to determine what your revised Expected Family Contribution (EFC) will be at their institution.

To calculate your need, each college or university will take the total cost of attending their school, called the "Cost of Attendance" (or Student Budget), which includes tuition, room and board, fees, travel, books, and miscellaneous personal fees, and will then subtract your EFC from that budget. The result is your family's "Demonstrated Need" at that specific college.

Simply stated: Cost of Attendance - Expected Family Contribution = Demonstrated Need.

Some colleges will commit to meeting a family's full demonstrated need all four years, whether that need increases (e.g., another child enters college) or decreases (e.g., family wins the lottery). Other colleges will meet as much need as their endowments or financial aid policies allow, leaving families to fill in the remainder through other sources. (This is sometimes called "gapping.")

The financial aid offer is known as an "Award Package," whether that aid comes from 1) the federal government in the form of loans and work ("Self-Help") and/or grants ("Gift Aid"), or 2) the college you are attending, also in the form of work, loans, grants, and scholarships. Grants may be federal or institutional, but are essentially "free money"; you are not expected to pay the money back. College Work-Study or some form of campus employment is frequently offered as well, as colleges expect students to contribute to the cost of their own education. Loans may be offered to the student and even to the parents, whether subsidized by the federal government or not. Some of these loans include the Federal Direct (Stafford) Loan, the Federal Perkins Loan, and the PLUS Loan.

It is always important to review the Cost of Attendance to determine if all anticipated expenses have been included (sometimes they are not, so comparing aid awards can be more difficult), and to see what the balance of Gift Aid to Self-Help Aid is. Consult your Castilleja College Counselor if you have questions about your aid award, and don't hesitate to contact the financial aid office at your colleges for further explanation and verification of accuracy.

*Remember:* In applying for financial aid, families work with each college individually, and it is critical that all deadlines are met. You need to check with each school to learn what is required to apply for financial aid and when. It is important to remember the following: There are two "universal" dates for financial aid: 1) the FAFSA cannot be submitted until October 1 of the senior year, and generally should be completed no later than February 1; and 2) the Cal Grant GPA Verification Form for students applying for aid for California schools must be submitted no later than March 2.

### **Required Financial Aid Forms**

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): An online form from the federal government required of all aid applicants at both public and private colleges and universities; the new FAFSA becomes available online on October 1 of your senior year and must be completed each year for which you are applying for financial aid. Deadline: November 1 - March 2 of the senior year depending on your application deadline; know your requirements and deadlines for each college. <https://fafsa.ed.gov>

CSS Profile: An online financial aid supplemental application found on the College Board website, required by many private colleges and universities, in addition to the FAFSA; usually available online in October of your senior year; there is a small fee to submit the CSS Profile; the College Board automatically awards fee waivers based on the information you provide on the form. Deadline: Check the requirements of each college; Early Decision applicants will have to submit this in the fall, usually by November 1. <https://cssprofile.collegeboard.org/>

GPA Verification Form: Required if you are applying for need-based aid at any college in California, under the Cal Grant program. Castilleja will provide you with this form, and will submit it for you after you have completed the form; you must also submit the FAFSA to be considered for a Cal Grant. Deadline: March 2 of the senior year. <http://www.csac.ca.gov/>

## **A NOTE ABOUT INDEPENDENT COUNSELORS**

Some Castilleja families wonder if they should hire the services of an independent counselor. While we understand the external pressures of the college search process and are sympathetic to special needs that may arise for students, we believe that most Castilleja students do not need such services. The professional experiences and training of the Castilleja College Counselors, combined with the support of the administration and faculty, ensure that our students are receiving personalized, abundant, and accurate guidance tailored to the individual student throughout the college search process. The following advice is offered for our Castilleja community only. We know there are professional and skilled independent consultants who play an important educational role for students who do not attend schools such as ours and do not have access to adequate college counseling resources in high school – Castilleja students are not those students. Please carefully consider the following before deciding to purchase additional college application services for your daughter.

Perhaps, a bit of history might be helpful. The profession of independent counseling came into existence as the result of inadequate counseling resources at public high schools. There was, and is, a clear need for many students and their families to find information about the college process outside high school, especially in California where the average student:counselor ratio is about 900:1. But, in more affluent areas, independent counseling has developed into a perceived commodity, fueled by some combination of media frenzy, guilt, and social pressure. Even though the student:counselor ratio at Castilleja is 120:1 in the Upper School (for seniors it is currently about 30:1) and Castilleja students have extraordinary college choices each year, we often hear some version of: “If I don’t pay for an independent counselor, I am not supporting my child.” “Our neighbors have hired a private counselor, so we’re going to have to as well.” “Everything I’ve heard in the news suggests our child won’t get into college without the help of college coaching.” “I don’t know anything about the college search process; we need more help!” “More coaching is always better...” And so on.

To be perfectly candid, comprehensive college counseling resources – personalized support and a relationship with an experienced admission professional – is included in the Castilleja tuition. We have two full-time College Counselors plus academic and support staff dedicated to working with your daughter throughout her college process. The Castilleja College Counselors provide focused, individual attention as well as small and large group sessions throughout the academic year for students and parents alike. Our staffing level allows us to meet 1:1 every week with every senior throughout the fall semester and still have time to meet with students in grades 9-11 as needed. In addition, we have extensive experience working with students with a variety of special circumstances, whether learning differences, athletic recruitment, or the visual and performing arts process. In addition, we engage in ongoing professional development that keeps us fresh and knowledgeable about the college admission landscape, and we have years of professional, selective admission experience on the college side reading and evaluating thousands of applications.

The Castilleja College Counselor is your daughter’s primary and best-resourced advocate in the college application process. We can function in a way that independent counselors cannot: we have full access to school records, teachers, coaches; we are the person contacted when a college has a question about an applicant; we write the recommendations that most colleges require; we have deep knowledge of Castilleja, its students, and Castilleja’s applicant history; and we have professional relationships with college admission officers throughout the country. We are dedicated to supporting your daughter throughout her college search. Time spent with an independent counselor is time the student doesn’t have to meet with her Castilleja College Counselor, meaning less time for us to get to know your daughter well and for her to cultivate her relationship with us. Independent counseling takes up time that your daughter could be using to study and earn good grades, to participate in an activity she loves, or to spend more time with her family and friends.

We will keep your daughter informed about due dates, and we will meet and communicate regularly and often with the students about upcoming major “deliverables” connected to the college process. However, in keeping with our counseling philosophy regarding empowerment and developing decision-making skills, we will not “nag” or track down or complete work for any student. For a true procrastinator or a student with severe organizational struggles, and if the family dynamic doesn’t lend itself to parents serving as the moderator, then working with an independent counselor might be a way to proceed, if the independent counselor understands that is the service you are purchasing. If you believe you fall into this category, we ask that you talk to your Castilleja College Counselor and carefully review the resources and recommendations of the Independent Educational Consultants Association (IECA) before you sign a contract with someone outside Castilleja.

Employing an independent counselor will not hurt our feelings, nor will it cause us to work with your daughter any differently. If you do employ an outside counselor, please let us know and grant permission for us to communicate with that person. We do not want your daughter to feel uncomfortable if she receives conflicting advice from her Castilleja College Counselor and her independent counselor. We do not want her to feel that she must keep it secret that she is working with an independent counselor. We do not want her to start the college process earlier than necessary and “burn out” before the actual process must begin. Most importantly, we do not want her to mistakenly learn that college preparation is an activity in and of itself rather than the natural next step in her educational path. In the end, what we all want is the best for your daughter.

College admission isn’t a contest to be won or a consumer commodity to be bought; it is a process to be savored and through which your daughter will grow, if she is allowed to do this herself. No college counselor can guarantee a specific outcome, but we can promise you that we will provide your daughter with the best information and attention possible throughout her time working with us. As with all things at Castilleja, the college process is an educational journey for your daughter, one which, with the help of the Castilleja College Counselors, will teach her how to research, make choices, come to know herself, develop life-long skills that will serve her well, and attain a well-deserved sense of pride and accomplishment when she is offered admission and selects where she will enroll in the fall.

Resources:

National Association for College Admission Counseling, [www.nacacnet.org](http://www.nacacnet.org)  
Independent Educational Consultants Association, [www.iecaonline.com](http://www.iecaonline.com)  
Higher Education Consultants Association, [www.hecaonline.org](http://www.hecaonline.org)  
American School Counselor Association, <http://www.schoolcounselor.org>

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

### **Application Systems**

The Common Application

<https://www.commonapp.org/>

The UC System

<http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/admissions/>

The Cal State System

<https://www2.calstate.edu/apply>

### **General College Information**

Big Future by The College Board

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search>

Colleges That Change Lives

<http://www.ctcl.org/>

U. S. Dept. of Ed. College Navigator

<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>

National Survey of Student Engagement

<http://nsse.iub.edu/index.cfm>

### **Virtual Campus Visits**

CampusReel

<https://www.campusreel.org/>

College Click TV

<http://www.collegeclicktv.com/u-walk/>

Virtual College Tours

<http://www.ecampustours.com/>

### **Gap Year Opportunities and Summer Programs**

AmeriCorps

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ Americorps>

Gap Year Programs Around the World

<http://www.usagapyearfairs.org>

Summer and Seasonal Jobs in Great Places

<http://www.coolworks.com/>

Volunteering, Working, and Cultural Exchange Around the World

<https://www.workaway.info/>

### **Blogs/News**

*The New York Times* Education Section

<http://www.nytimes.com/section/education>

*The Washington Post* Education Section

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education>

Willard Dix-College Counseling Culture

<https://collegeculture.net/>

### **Additional Links of Interest**

The Education Conservancy

<http://www.educationconservancy.org/>

The National Center for Fair and Open Testing (leading the Test Optional movement)

<http://www.fairtest.org/>

## **Books**

*Admission Matters: What Students and Parents Need to Know About Getting into College* by Sally P. Springer, Jon Reider, and Marion Frank

*The Best 382 Colleges* by The Princeton Review

*College Admissions Together: It Takes a Family* by Andrea Leiman and Steven Roy Goodman

*College Unranked: Ending the College Admission Frenzy* by Lloyd Thacker

*Colleges that Change Lives: 40 Schools That Will Change the Way You Think About Colleges* by Loren Pope and Hilary Masell Oswald

*Creative Colleges: A Guide for Student Actors, Artists, Dancers, Musicians and Writers* by Elaina Loveland

*Fiske Guide to Colleges* by Edward B. Fiske

*Gap to Great: A Parent's Guide to the Gap Year* by Andrea Wien

*Gap Year: How Delaying College Changes People in Ways the World Needs* by Joseph O'Shea

*The Insider's Guide to the Colleges: Students on Campus Tell You What You Really Want to Know* by Yale Daily News Staff (last published in 2015)

*The Launching Years: Strategies for Parenting from Senior Year to College Life* by Laura Kastner and Jennifer Wyatt

*Off to College: A Guide for Parents* by Roger H. Martin

*The Thinking Student's Guide to College: 75 Tips for Getting a Better Education* by Andrew Roberts

*Understanding Athletic Recruitment: A Comprehensive Guide for the High School Student-Athlete* by Jeffrey Durso-Finley & Lewis Stival

*Where You Go is Not Who You'll Be: An Antidote to the College Admissions Mania* by Frank Bruni