




MCNEAL SAMS COLLEGE CONSULTING NEWS AND NOTES

OCTOBER CHECKLIST

 **PRIORITIZE YOU:** Soon, juniors will sit for the digital PSAT/NMSQT, a practice SAT and qualifying test for National Merit Scholarship Programs. Do yourself a favor, take care of yourself! The best preparation for the exam you can do at this point is to be well-rested, eat breakfast before the test, and bring water and high protein, low sugar snacks on test day.

 **GATHER:** Believe it or not, seniors will soon be completing their application submission. That means your McNeal Sams College Consultant will soon begin to focus on you and your college search. Make sure you have shared your latest transcript and any test scores with us.

 **REGISTER:** It's time to register for your first official SAT and/or ACT. Use these links to register:

[ACT](#)

[SAT](#)

WHY STRESSING ABOUT TESTING MAKES NO SENSE ...

Once upon a time, back in the old days, standardized tests such as the ACT and SAT were mandatory if you were applying to competitive colleges. Now, the vast majority of schools are test optional. According to FairTest.org, there are now XXX schools that are test optional in one form or another, as a matter of fact. Some (the University of California campuses, for example) are "test blind," meaning scores are not used at all in the admissions process.

So, should you test? There are some big "if's."

IF you make the time and are willing to invest that time (think: class or tutor) to prepare, strong test scores provide a useful data point for college admission offices.

IF you are applying for academic scholarships, a strong test score may be very helpful. (Side note: Most colleges that are test optional, also provide a test optional path to scholarships.)

IF you are applying to military academies, certain state universities (for example, Florida and some Georgia schools), MIT, or Georgetown, the tests are a must.

It is our recommendation that in most instances, a junior should choose to take at least one of the national tests, ACT or SAT, at least one time. You are only beginning your exploration of colleges. Who knows what schools will make sense a year from now? Who knows how you are going to do on the tests, if you don't try?

The great news about all of this, though, is that you are in a position to decide. Do your scores help the colleges you are choosing to apply to understand who you are as a student and your academic strengths? If yes, wonderful! Submit your scores. If they do not, choose to apply test optional.

Either way, put yourself in a position to have the appropriate conversation about test score use with your college consultant in August of your senior year. Take a test.



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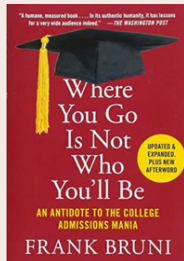
TALK AROUND TOWN

This month we discovered these useful resources regarding college admission:

Article: Featured in *The Week* newsletter, "[5 College Admission Trends to Watch Out For This Year](#)", Theara Coleman



Book: We recommended it last fall, but it is still a favorite, "*Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be*", Frank Bruni



Podcast: *Tiny Leaps, Big Changes*, by Gregg Clunis. Again, we suggested it last year. It's described as a "personal development podcast focused on exploring the day-to-day behaviors we all engage in that determine the results we gain in our lives."



FOCUS FEATURE: THE CAMPUS VISIT PART 2

Let's say you read last month's newsletter and our advice on it's time to visit colleges. And you're actually visiting campuses - great! Take time to enjoy the experience. Visit the student union; marvel at the variety of insignia wear; grab a bite to eat.

And when you're finished, *make some notes*. Jot down memorable moments, funny sights, impressions you had about traditions or buildings or the phenomenal chocolate chip cookies at the Science Center. It all matters.

Why? Because if you visit enough campuses, they begin to blur together. But equally important, the most common application essay of *all* is "Why do you want to attend our college?"

Okay, you're not necessarily going to base your answer around the chocolate chip cookies. But *specifics* are hugely helpful. It's all too easy to write an essay about the beautiful campus, magnificent quad, great resources...ZZZZZZZZZZZZ. That's been done before - thousands of times. Keep your admissions reader awake!

You are observant and thoughtful. Let that shine through in your "why this school" essay. Make your writing stand out. *The difference is in the details.*

KINDNESS CORNER: SMILE ... IT DOES A BODY GOOD

We recently stumbled upon an [article on Buffer](#) about the power of a smile. In fact, the author calls the smile, "the world's most powerful gesture." And there is a lot of research available detailing the many beneficial effects of smiling, both for those who do the smiling and those who receive the smile.

Junior year is stressful. Your course load is generally more challenging. You are expected to be a leader on campus and in your activities. EVERYONE has started asking you, "Where are you going to college?" It's a lot.

So give yourself a little endorphin lift and smile!



Want more proof? [Here's a scholarly article](#) from The Association for Psychological Science.