

MARCH 2026 NEWSLETTER

MCNEAL SAMS
COLLEGE CONSULTING



WHO WE ARE

McNeal Sams College Consulting provides expert, personalized guidance to students and families throughout the college admissions process. With decades of experience in counseling, admissions and career services, our team helps students identify best-fit schools and build strong, strategic applications.

WHAT WE ARE READING

"Atomic Habits," by James Clear, shows how small, consistent actions compound into remarkable results. For students navigating academics, activities, and applications, it's a powerful reminder: lasting success isn't built overnight. It's built daily, one intentional habit at a time.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS!

Decision season is here! Please continue to update your MSCC consultant as you hear back from colleges, and especially as you decide where to attend this fall.

IMPORTANT DATES

March 6 - Deadline to register for ACT testing on April 11
March 14 - SAT testing
March 17 - St. Patrick's Day

RESEARCHING COLLEGES

So you know where you want to go to college. You've joined the mailing list and you follow their Instagram account. But do you really know what life is like there on a daily basis? Certainly you can find information in the admissions section, but marketing plays a major role in how these sites are set up, with carefully curated photos and tidy checklists. Expand your search:



- **Explore academic department websites.** Virtually all will describe required courses, different specializations within each major, links to faculty and their websites, current research, and recent events.
- **Cost!** Check the financial aid section for information on need-based or merit scholarships; use an estimated family contribution calculator; and note any priority deadlines if you want aid.
- **Curious about the campus vibe?** Peruse the student newspaper—either a daily or a weekly—to learn about hot topics on campus and events coming up. Don't forget the opinions and editorials page, which will help you gauge the social and political tone on campus.
- **Campus safety:** are late night transportation or other resources available?
- **Housing:** Find floor plans, living/learning communities, and special features in residence halls.
- **What's for dinner?** Head to the student life or residential life section to see menus, complete with nutrition information.
- **Talk with alumni.** If recent graduates from your high school attend, they can give you the real scoop. (One note: consider your sample size. The opinions of one or two students shouldn't necessarily sway your decision.)
- **Your CustomCollegePlan account** offers a wealth of information on graduation rates, available majors, SAT or ACT ranges for admitted students, and more—including all of the Fiske Guide college reviews (now you don't have to buy the book!). Use [College Scorecard](#) to search for colleges with your preferred major. Find details on typical earnings for graduates, total debt after graduation, socioeconomic diversity, and more.

And of course, visit the campus if you can and meet with admissions representatives who are in town for school visits and evening receptions. Soon you'll have a multifaceted understanding of the schools that you might call home for the next four years!

MARCH TO-DO LISTS

Seniors

1. It's decision time! Your final admission decisions arrive this month. Review all admission decisions carefully, including financial aid packages.
2. Respond to any waitlist offers.
3. Reach out to your MSCC consultant if you need assistance discerning which option is best for you. We're here to help.
4. Attend admitted student events (virtual or in-person).
5. Continue monitoring your portals. [Use this checklist](#) to see the typically required steps for finalizing enrollment.
6. Keep grades strong.
7. Watch for the invitation to our complimentary "Transition to College" webinar series, which begins in April.

Juniors

1. Register for the SAT/ACT.
2. Continue researching colleges with intention to shape your list of colleges.
3. Finalize your summer activities (jobs, programs, internships, service), including time with your MSCC consultant to work on your applications.
4. Don't forget to meet with your school counselor. They play a critical role in your application process.
5. Visit campuses.
6. Track accomplishments for your resume and application activities list.

Sophomores

1. Choose junior-year courses thoughtfully. Balance rigor and success while considering what opportunities your choices open for senior year courses.
2. Reflect on activities: deepen involvement rather than adding more. How can you make a more significant contribution to the clubs and organizations?
3. Explore potential summer opportunities aligned with your interests.
4. Begin informal college exposure (virtual tours, conversations, reading, college fairs). Even consider doing a "sample" college tour to learn about the impact that size and setting have on a college experience.
5. Check in on your academic habits; having strong systems now will pay off later. Finish your year strong!

Freshmen

1. Focus on finishing the year strong academically.
2. Explore extracurriculars and identify what genuinely interests you.
3. Build relationships with teachers and mentors.
4. Practice time management and study skills.
5. Consider low-pressure summer enrichment (job, camp, volunteering, skill-building).