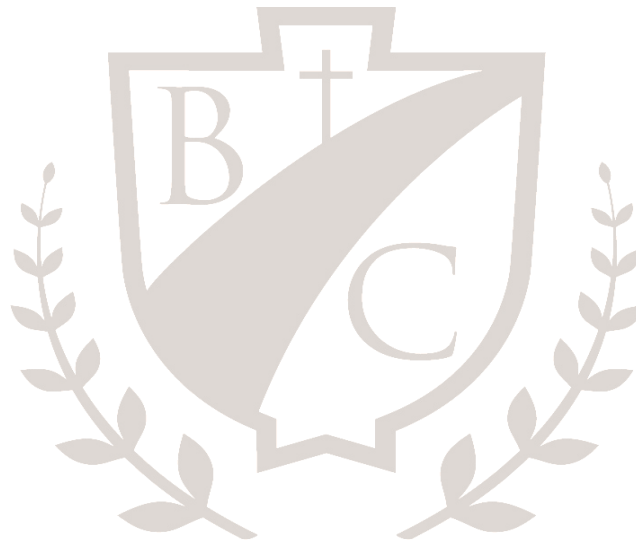


**The Essential Guide  
To  
College Planning**



THE  
BEAR CREEK  
SCHOOL

**The Office of College Advising**

**2010-2011 (for use by the Class of 2012)**

**[www.tbcs.org/collegeadvising](http://www.tbcs.org/collegeadvising)**

## *Table of Contents*

<b><i>The Journey from High School to College</i></b>	<b>3</b>
Philosophy of College Advising	3
College Advising Staff, Contact and CEEB code	4
Frequently Asked Questions	5
A 4-Year Overview of the Process	7
A Healthy Perspective is Critical	8
<b><i>What Colleges Look For in Strong Applicants</i></b>	<b>12</b>
Course Selection and Rigor	12
Standardized Testing Indicators	13
Demonstrated Leadership and Personal Priorities	13
From the Student's Voice: Essays that Hit the Mark	14
Observations from Others	15
<b><i>Where Do I Begin?</i></b>	<b>16</b>
What Really Matters to You?	16
Types of College and Universities	16
The Research Stage	17
College Tours	18
Brown Bag Visits to Bear Creek	18
Family Discussions	19
Standardized Test Preparation Options	19
How Many Schools? Defining the "Best Fit" List	20
<b><i>Elements of a Successful College Application</i></b>	<b>22</b>
Organizing the Application Process	22
Early Decision, Early Action, Regular and Other Application Options	22
Parts of the Application: Who Does What, When and Where?	23
I've been Accepted, Wait Listed or Denied...Now What?	24
<b><i>Financing the College Years</i></b>	<b>26</b>
Financial Aid, Merit Awards and Scholarship Searching	26
NCAA Opportunities	27
<b><i>A Final Word and List of Resources</i></b>	<b>30</b>
Appendix A: The Bear Creek School Profile	
Appendix B: Sample Application Management Checklist	
Appendix C: Standardized Testing Information	
Appendix D: Transcript Request Form	
Appendix E: Teacher Letter of Recommendation Request Form	
Appendix F: Sample Activities and Leadership Resume	
Appendix G: Recommended Reading List	
Appendix H: Sample College Tour Questions	
Appendix I: SAT and ACT Score Comparison Chart	

***The mission of The Bear Creek School is to provide a high quality, Christian liberal arts education in a nurturing environment that will enable each student to become the individual God intends.***

## *The Journey from High School to College*

### *Philosophy of College Advising at The Bear Creek School*

If the popular press had their way, students and parents would believe the following myths: excellent colleges are defined by their top tier rankings, GPA and SAT scores are the sole determiners of the admissions decision and personal success is ultimately defined by the college name that appears on the admissions acceptance letter.

At the Bear Creek School, we pursue a very different college selection paradigm, one that places a high regard on the unique story of each student as they pursue collegiate options and choices. We don't oversimplify the process, choosing the longer, more meaningful road that puts the student – not the rankings – first.

The college advising experience is a complete partnership between our staff, students in their 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade years, parents and college admission offices. The primary goal in this partnership is to link students with a number of options that will allow them to pursue their vision and passions at the collegiate level. Students are challenged to own the process: to value it not as an end to itself, but as an experience in effectively defining and evaluating watershed decisions in life. Each student is encouraged to look inward and pay careful attention to the patterns, interests and abilities that are uniquely theirs to pursue.

The Bear Creek curriculum is a powerful platform to advance our students into collegiate success. Students are continually challenged and exposed to big ideas through a sequence of courses raising the bar of learning across the academic disciplines. Students come to personally understand and utilize the power of their worldview. They are confident, discerning and invested in the future that awaits them. Colleges frequently comment on these essential attributes that clearly distinguish our students during the college admission selection process.

Students from The Bear Creek School continue to experience an exceptionally strong rate of admission. The breadth and caliber of college offers continue to include highly selective colleges, research universities, fine and performing arts schools, and domestic and international schools of distinction. This one fact alone confirms what we already know to be true: our students are fully prepared, accomplished and motivated to excel in any educational venture. The road ahead is literally opportunity waiting to happen.

The ultimate college selection follows a progression, often beginning with a growing awareness in the middle school years, into the early high school years, and culminating with senior year application submissions and acceptance decisions. College planning workshops, grade-level advising sessions, standardized test preparation, college tours, on-campus recruitment visits with admissions staff and individual college application drafting sessions are all intentionally designed and individually tailored to meet the needs of our students throughout the high school years.

College success and one's personal life accomplishments are, first and foremost, determined by the God-given passion, talent, motivation and discernment of the individual. High school students are as varied as their shoe selections—and the college selection process will ultimately follow that individuality. No one college fits all; and contrary to popular belief, there are multiple colleges that would effectively serve as the destination for any given student. Our goal is to work individually with each student to shape and refine a host of college choices based on their proven strengths, accomplishments and future directions.

The college decision making process is not a product; it is a culmination, a celebration and a bridge that links each student to their past and future potential. It is a validation of effort, challenge, perseverance, opportunity and calling. The Bear Creek definition of success is clearly about the quality of their continuing journey not just the selection of an intended destination.

***College Advising Staff and Additional Critical Administrative Faculty and Staff***

Blake D. DeYoung  
Director  
Master of Arts in Teaching, Concentrations in English and History  
[Bdeyoung@tbcsonline.org](mailto:Bdeyoung@tbcsonline.org)

Karen E. Beman  
Upper School Head  
Master of Education, Higher Education Administration  
[kbeman@tbcsonline.org](mailto:kbeman@tbcsonline.org)

Lynn Nail  
Registrar  
[Lnail@tbcsonline.org](mailto:Lnail@tbcsonline.org)

The College Advising Center is located in the Upper School Library. Office hours are 7:00-3:30pm Monday-Friday, 425-898-1720, ex 432. The College Advising section of the TBCS web page is an invaluable source of information and additional resources. [www.tbcsonline.org/collegeadvising](http://www.tbcsonline.org/collegeadvising) .

Individual student or family appointments are encouraged. Appointments are best suited during office hours, the lunch period and immediately before and after school. Drop-in appointments are welcome as time allows.

Students will need the following CEEB Code for a number of standardized testing forms and college applications. It will be helpful to keep this number handy. **CEE B CODE: 481592**

## ***Frequently Asked Questions***

### ***Q: How successful are Bear Creek students in getting in to good colleges?***

Bear Creek graduates have demonstrated great success in the college application process. The list below is representative of the diversity of schools that have offered admission to our past eight senior classes. Across all types – large and small, highly selective, both public and private – the list of admission offers is quite extensive. Much of the success of our students can be attributed to the high level of academic effort and preparation and a selection strategy that links each student with schools that match their intended goals, academic interests and other self-identified “best-fit” college characteristics. Congratulates to our graduates who are making an impact on campuses world-wide!

Acadia University, Azusa Pacific University, Baylor University, Berklee College of Music, Biola University, Boston College, Boston University, California Technical Institute, Claremont McKenna College, Columbia University, Cornell University, Drexel University, Duke University, Emory University, George Fox University, Gonzaga University, Harvey Mudd College, Johns Hopkins University, Lafayette College, Lehigh University, Linfield College, New York University, Northwest Nazarene University, Northwestern University, Pacific Lutheran University, Parsons School of Design, Pepperdine University, Pomona College, Point Loma University, Rollins College, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, Santa Clara University, Seattle Pacific University, St. Andrews College, St. Olaf College, Stanford University, Tulane University, University of Arizona, University of British Columbia, University of California –Berkeley, University of California – Los Angeles, University of California-San Diego, University of Chicago, University of Colorado, University of Dallas, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, University of Notre Dame, University of Pennsylvania, University of Puget Sound, University of Southern California, University of Tulsa, University of Virginia, University of Washington, Virginia Military Institute, Vanderbilt University, Washington & Lee, Washington University in St Louis, Western Washington University, Westmont College, Wheaton College, Whitman College, Whitworth College, Willamette College, Williams College

Each year the results of the college selection process will vary dependent on the individuals that make up that graduating class. Our overall satisfaction is very high with the success of students receiving admissions offers to many of their top choice schools.

### ***Q: When should I start to think about going to college?***

Some students have been thinking about college possibilities since childhood, but the majority of students start getting serious about the planning process in the fall of their junior year. We would advise that the most effective time frame begins in the fall of the freshman year and gains depth and momentum as the junior and senior years approach. Practically speaking, all students should be aware that the process officially begins when the first set of semester grades are reported on the transcript. At Bear Creek, the transcript lists all course work and grades beginning with the fall semester of the freshman year or the first semester of high school enrollment at Bear Creek.

As students begin to consider their college options, some of the most eager will need to remember that a thoughtful and reflective (and therefore, successful) college search process takes time. There are certain elements that cannot be rushed, certain realizations that only come with experiences and maturity. While some may be tempted as sophomores to confidently announce their final decision, the Office of College Advising encourages all students to keep their minds, and their options, open and engaged.

***Q: What can I do during high school to create as many college options as possible?***

Live your life to its fullest potential. Well-rounded, invested and motivated students are extremely attractive to every college and university in the country.

- ✓ Invest yourself in each class and develop strong academic skills. All classes at Bear Creek will challenge you. Choose to make each one count. AP classes in the sophomore through senior year will expose you to college level work and potentially count for college credit. Colleges will focus on your entire transcript, but AP classes provide a window into your ability to successfully manage a college level work load.
- ✓ Get to know your faculty and commit to doing your best work. Your diligence and faculty observations about you will play an important role in future admissions decisions.
- ✓ Explore a variety of out-of-classroom interests. Pick a few that really interest you and make the commitment to gain as much as possible from the experience. As your high school experience progresses, show a depth vs. breadth of experience and begin to invest more enthusiastically in areas which reflect your true passions.
- ✓ Read this handbook cover to cover. Most of the critical questions will be answered here. Utilize the skills and experiences of the College Advising staff. Schedule periodic meetings or drop-in to get to know your college advising staff.
- ✓ Ask the most important question of all: where can your emerging gifts and talents best be used to accomplish what God is intending for your life? Ask others to pray over your journey and seek the Lord's direction throughout the process.

You have been blessed with the opportunity to participate in an academically rich, faith-centered high school experience. Be a contributor here not just a consumer. Set high standards and own the journey. Your present and future opportunities are extraordinary.

***Q: Is it difficult to find colleges that will match my interests?***

Yes and no. There are well over 3000 colleges and universities to explore. Inevitably, there will be a healthy number of schools that would welcome your application and provide an excellent undergraduate experience. But the process must be intentional, based on who **you** are and what **you** value. It will require time, effort and a willingness to drill down and ask the tough questions of all potential schools.

Carve the time to explore web search tools, visit campuses, talk to people who know you well as you evaluate what characteristics really matter most. Start an early connection with the College Advising staff. As you approach the spring of your junior year, work with your college advisor in formulating a plan to narrow the field and identify roughly 6-10 schools that would be “best fit” educational communities. Be realistic regarding your academic profile. Understand the impact of your grades, standardized test scores, course selection and teacher recommendations on the overall admissibility to various schools. Reach for schools that provide the strongest blend of challenge and opportunity, but be realistic about your chances for acceptance. Most importantly, the best collegiate matches come in many shapes and sizes but are ultimately based on your willingness to own the journey and make the most of all the resources available to you.

## ***An Overview of the Four-Year Planning Process***

### **Freshman Year      The Road to College Begins Now**

- Course selection at Bear Creek is an excellent college prep sequence.
- Your grades matter. All semester grades will be posted on the transcript.
- Study skills and personal discipline take shape and become increasingly critical in your overall academic success.
- Exploring extra-curricular interests outside of the classroom will help shape how you direct your energies and may create future leadership opportunities.
- Attend the Advanced Placement courses informational meeting with your parents in the spring.

### **Sophomore Year      Overview of the College Selection and Admissions Process**

- Academic Planning is important. The first opportunity to select an optional AP course occurs in the sophomore year.
- Patterns are emerging that may indicate an academic interest area. Understanding the role and value of standardized testing is important. Sophomores will be pre-registered for both the PSAT in October and the PLAN test in November. Both are administered at Bear Creek.
- Sophomores will be given the opportunity to learn and evaluate how colleges select the best candidates. It is important for each student to see the link between their academic and extra-curricular efforts and the potential for expanding their collegiate options. Attend Brown Bag college visits to help with this exploration.
- More in-depth conversations at home help to shape the college planning journey.

### **Junior Year      Identifying Priorities and Engaging in the Process**

- Standardized test preparation is an excellent way to build test taking skills. Many juniors report that not only did they improve their overall standardized test scores, but a residual benefit occurred during classroom testing. Bear Creek continues to partner with the Princeton Review to offer test prep courses on our campus as one option.
- “The Research Phase” begins in earnest. Students will see an increase in college marketing materials and offers for summer enrichment experiences.
- Exploring Colleges through electronic search sites are helpful, but actual campus tours are one of the most critical discernment tools available. Juniors are offered the opportunity to explore in-state colleges during the fall college tour for juniors. Parents and students are advised to schedule on-campus tours in the spring.
- Students take CEI Inventory to explore interests, patterns of likes and dislikes and discover links to future academic fields and professional opportunities.

### **Senior Year      Making Informed Choices and Decisions**

- The initial list of best fit colleges should be developed during the summer prior to the senior year, and refined in the early fall.
- Seniors schedule regular college advising appointments to draft and finalize college applications. Typically, students are advised to apply to 6-8 well chosen schools. A higher number may be necessary depending on the level of selectivity.
- Making the best choice is often difficult when multiple offers of admission arrive. The advising staff are available to review the pros and cons of each offer and assist in determining the final “best fit”
- Celebration- We all share in the excitement of a job well done!

## *A Healthy Perspective is Critical*

High school college advisors across the country share a growing concern for all seniors. The current admissions landscape has produced an escalating amount of pressure and competitive expectation to apply to the most selective colleges and universities. Current economic conditions have done little to decrease the uncertainty. Admission to a highly selective college is a valuable achievement and may be a “best fit” scenario for many of our students. However, we suggest that an effective counter-weight for unhealthy pressure is a healthy perspective about the reality of college selectivity and a well researched set of match schools. For our seniors and their parents, this may be one of the most exciting –and stressful - ventures of a lifetime. The selection of a college is a defining moment, a right of passage that sets into motion a new level independence and the accompanying degree of personal responsibility. For most, it will shape the course for their future. As you prepare, take the time to dream and explore. Approach the process with great excitement but temper it with wisdom and a healthy dose of reality.

As a family, discuss any preconceived expectations of what types of schools seem to be a good fit. Decide what aspects of the college search should be most important as a link to your long-term goals. Stay focused on what *really* matters. Always consider the tough questions from the very beginning.

- What academic subjects really motivate you?
- How will perspective schools provide opportunities for you to grow and live out your faith?
- Which schools have the greatest potential for you to define and accomplish your future goals?
- How does cost factor into the final decision?
- In terms of location, be honest about your clear preferences for climate and distance from home.
- Take the time to reflect on who you are and what matters most to you!

Food for thought as you set your sights on the college selection process:

- 1) Be aware that there has been a significant “invasion of commercial values into the higher education marketplace.” Selectivity does not measure success. Be bold and courageous as you define what success looks like for YOU. Resist the temptation to allow others, especially the media and other commercial interests to define it.
- 2) Balance is the key. Stay focused on being a high school student, but be invested in the preparation process for college life. Make wise choices and carefully plan opportunities and experiences that will enhance the person that you are.
- 3) Be prepared for the intensity of demands that the search process will require. Don’t fear it, have fun with it—but stay organized. Invest in the process as a family and keep the lines of communication open.
- 4) By its very nature, the admission process breeds competition which, in and of itself, is not a bad thing. But, in recent years, the application and enrollment yields of many selective schools have caused an excessive bloat to the entire process. It is very important that students discuss annual acceptance rates with the college advising staff in determining the “reasonable chance” for admission at a wide variety of selective and highly selective colleges.

## *Don't Just Take Our Word For It...*

### *Other Higher Education Veterans Share Their Thoughts*

How do we put the increasing pressure of competition and selectivity into perspective? Spend a few minutes digesting some of what **Lee Bollinger, President of Columbia University**, expressed during his keynote address at the College Board Forum.

“The more fundamental issue facing education is the seemingly endlessly rising sense of competition—or a particular kind of competition—among applicants and students among selective colleges and universities.”

“And the problem—the large and fundamental problem—is that we are at risk of it all seeming, and becoming, more and more a game. What matters is less the education and more the brand.”

“The tentacles of this way of thinking have the potential to reach into every corner of our general understanding of intellectual and artistic life. Not all forms of competition are equal, and there will always be the risk of a downward spiral in an atmosphere that values the wrong things. We must never forget that much of what makes colleges and universities special, and over the long run socially important, is both highly fragile and counter-intuitive in a democratic and free market system.”

Additionally, the following overview spearheaded by **Lloyd Thacker of The Education Conservancy** may help put other aspects of this process into perspective.

### ***WE ADMIT... GUIDANCE FROM THOSE WHO DO***

Applying to college does not have to be overwhelming! The following principles and guidelines can help make the college admission process more manageable, more productive, and more educationally appropriate. This guidance is offered by the Education Conservancy, a group of admission professionals committed to calming the commercial frenzy by affirming educational values in college admission.

**Principles:** These guiding principles are relevant for parents, students, counselors and admission deans.

- Education is a process, not a product. Students are learners, not customers.
- The benefits and predictors of good education are knowable yet virtually impossible to measure.
- Rankings oversimplify and mislead.
- A student's intellectual skills and attitude about learning are more important than what college a student attends.
- Educational values are best served by admission practices that are consistent with these values.
- College admission should be part of an educational process directed toward student autonomy and intellectual maturity.
- Colleges can be assessed, but not ranked. Students can be evaluated, but not measured.
- Students' thoughts, ideas and passions are worthy to be engaged and handled with utmost care.

**Student Guidelines:** An admission decision, test score, or GPA is not a measure of your self-worth. And, most students are admitted to colleges they want to attend. Knowing this, we encourage you to:

- Be confident! Take responsibility for your college admission process. The more you do for yourself, the better the results will be.
- Be deliberate! Applying to college involves thoughtful research to determine distinctions among colleges, as well as careful self-examination to identify your interests, learning style and other criteria. Plan to make well-considered applications to the most suitable colleges. This is often referred to as “making good matches.”
- Be realistic and trust your instincts! Choosing a college is an important process, but not a life or death decision. Since there are limits to what you can know about colleges and about yourself, you should allow yourself to do educated guesswork.
- Be open-minded! Resist the notion that there is one perfect college. Great education happens in many places.
- Use a variety of resources for gathering information. Seek advice from those people who know you, care about you, and are willing to help.
- Be honest; be yourself! Do not try to game the system.
- Resist taking any standardized test numerous times (twice is usually sufficient).
- Limit your applications to a well-researched and reasonable number. No more than six should be sufficient, except in special cases.
- Know that what you do in college is a better predictor of future success and happiness than where you go to college.

**Parent Guidelines:** An admission decision, test score, or GPA is not a measure of a student’s worth. And, parents should always be mindful of the behavior they are modeling for their children. Knowing this, we encourage you to:

- Recognize that gaining admission to college is merely one step in a process of education that will include your student attending a college where she or he can maximize talents and growth. Emphasize the education.
- Resist doing for your students what they are capable of doing for themselves.
- Allow your child to take responsibility for his or her own part of the college application process. Be involved in the process, but do not try to control it.
- Resist relying on rankings and college selectivity to determine the most suitable colleges for your child.
- Realize that researching, selecting, and applying to colleges does not have to be an expensive process.
- Resist attempts to turn the process into a status competition. Develop a healthy, educationally based, and family-appropriate approach to college admissions.

- Consider that gaming the system may not only diminish your child’s self-confidence, it may also jeopardize desired admission outcomes.
- Listen to, encourage and believe in your child. Do not use the term “we” as in “we are applying to....”
- Discuss the idea of education as an ongoing process, and how selecting a college might be different from buying a product.
- Love them enough to let them demonstrate the independence you have instilled in them.
- Keep this process in perspective. Remember that student skills, self-confidence, curiosity, and desire to learn are some of the most important ingredients in quality education and successful college admissions. Do not sacrifice these by overemphasizing getting into the “best” college.

**Reprinted with permission. Lloyd Thacker; The Education Conservancy. 2007**

Special thanks to Lee Bollinger and Lloyd Thacker for their invaluable insight and wise counsel.

## ***What Do Colleges Look For in Strong Applications?***

Each year colleges and universities across the country gather admissions committees together with a clear and compelling purpose: to assemble a freshman class that mirrors the vision and mission of the institution and adds to the fabric of diversity and promise of its student body.

Higher Education today has the luxury of selecting from the largest population of college ready students ever in the course of its 300 year history. As the admission landscape continues to grow more and more competitive and colleges have more applicants than available space, certain criteria have become essential factors in determining which students ultimately receive acceptance letters. Based on the College Board's Annual Report, admission considerations generally follow the priority order listed below:

- Strength of academic program (challenging courses that are available to the student)
- Grade point average
- Standardized test scores
- Letters of recommendation
- Application Essay
- College interview (optional on some campuses)
- School organizations and activities
- Community and service volunteer activities
- Special interests and talents
- Diversity factors
- Internships and jobs
- Technical certifications
- Portfolio
- Resume

No one single factor will determine acceptance or rejection. All schools desire to see that the applicant has selected challenging courses in high school and has demonstrated a desire to grow academically. They also want to know about character qualities, interests, accomplishments and future goals. Most importantly, a college looks at the connection between three things: the level of independent motivation, success in the high school learning process, and the match between the student's goals and what the college has to offer. Across the board, schools are looking for students who demonstrate initiative and have demonstrated the desire to be life long learners.

### ***Course Selection and Rigor***

Colleges are looking for breadth and rigor in the high school academic record. If a student hopes to be admitted to a selective college, a demanding course load is a distinguishing factor in selection. The Bear Creek School has established a strong college preparatory course sequence. When options are available, students should seek the most challenging of courses in their academic interest areas. Students often ask if it is better to take a less demanding course and receive a higher grade, than selecting a particular AP course. Most admissions counselors are looking for evidence of a student's willingness to "take the challenge" as an indication that a student is prepared and has the skills to succeed independently in college.

### ***Standardized Testing Indicators***

*(See appendix for Standardized Testing Calendar)*

Standardized test scores are an important element in the admissions application review. Used as a compliment to the high school GPA, scores can confirm a student's relative strength in analytical reasoning (SAT) or in content knowledge (ACT and SAT Subject Tests). These exams are also used to level the playing field and mitigate the potential for grade variance and inflation among high schools. Both exams are widely accepted at many colleges and universities.

All juniors are advised to review their PLAN (pre-ACT) and PSAT (pre-SAT) scores with the college advising staff to determine if one of the two exams is a better reflection of your abilities. We strongly encourage you to take at least one set of SAT I and SAT Subject tests and preferably, two attempts at the SAT I before the end of your junior year. Students who demonstrate a strong performance on the PLAN should schedule at least one ACT exam in the spring of the junior year. Taking both exams allow students to leverage their strongest scores for admission consideration. Please keep in mind that although test scores are valuable, the rigor of courses and the grades achieved are the strongest predictors of ability.

Students are strongly encouraged to register for standardized tests in the winter and spring of their junior year. On-line registration through the College Board or ACT will allow you to determine appropriate testing dates and preferred locations. Pay careful attention to deadlines. Local testing sites fill up very quickly, so early registration is very helpful. For more detailed information, please reference the *Standardized Test Preparation* section.

The majority of Bear Creek students take advantage of an average of 3-5 ***Advanced Placement*** courses during their sophomore-senior years. Bear Creek currently offers 13 AP courses, though not all are offered every year. Each class is demanding, using college-level text books and an accelerated pace. Students have the opportunity to demonstrate a high degree of proficiency by sitting for the AP exams administered in early May. Typically college credit or advanced standing is offered by scores of 3, 4 or 5.

### ***Demonstrated Leadership and Personal Priorities: The Resume***

Students are so much more than the sum total of their test scores and GPA. All colleges attempt to attract a diverse population that will bring to the "community table" a wealth of interests, values, ideas and talents. Part of the application review process attempts to identify what you are passionate about—and one of the best ways to assess that is to see how you have spent your time out of class during your high school years. Not all colleges require a more formalized "resume" or "Activities and Achievements," but most schools value the information when included in the application packet. For most colleges, the "what" is important, but the depth of commitment and experience you have gained is a far more compelling and valuable insight into the stuff that makes you uniquely YOU.

Diverse or highly focused interests and a pattern of "stick-to-it" commitments matter in the overall selection process. Typically patterns of service, longer-term commitment to a developing interest, skill or talent and leadership recognition are highly favorable attributes. It is important to be reminded that leadership skills come in many shapes and sizes—all of which can be attractive to prospective colleges. Schools want to get to know the real you, your priorities, talents, personality traits and hobbies. As you think through your high school priorities, make sure to cultivate interests and potential co-curricular opportunities, not only will they be a valuable indicator during college selection—but, they will enhance and contribute to the quality of your life experience.

On a practical note, students (and often parents can contribute greatly to the historical record) should be compiling a list of interests, activities, hobbies, achievements, competitions, awards, and service projects

throughout their high school years. Create a spread sheet or hard-copy file in the freshman year and update periodically with additional material as appropriate. You will be ever so thankful when you sit down to complete each of your applications.

### ***From the Student's Voice: Essays That Hit the Mark***

The application essay (or “personal statement”) is one of the most important elements of the application packet. For the vast majority of students, it is the sole remaining piece over which they have full control (GPA is already calculated, standardized tests are already taken, letters of recommendation are completed by others, etc). The goal of the college essay is two-fold: 1) demonstrate writing proficiency and 2) capture the essence of who they are.

This is no easy task. And by the way, you’ll be capturing the essence of who you are in around 500 words.

The type of writing required is different than standard “academic writing.” Most application essay prompts are some variation on the question, “Tell us what makes you the person you are.” There is not a “right” answer to this question. Students need to approach this far differently than they would an academic paper – *they are telling a story, not making an argument*. If they tell the story in a compelling enough fashion, the sense of “identity” will be effectively established. The Office of College Advising tries to help students through this process in a variety of ways.

First, we meet with the senior class on a Saturday morning in late September for an essay workshop. During this workshop, we discuss how to approach the essay, examine and critique previous examples, the split into small groups to begin working through specific essay prompts and ideas.

Second, we highly encourage students to bring their essays to the Office of College Advising for editing and revision. Students should approach these editing sessions with an open mind and a willingness to listen and respond. Since students are presumably writing about themselves and their experiences in a revealing way, having someone critique that can be difficult. When we edit a student’s personal statement, we’re trying to improve the way a student relates the experience – not judging the experience itself.

Finally, beginning in the summer of 2011, the Director of College Advising will offer a one-week “College Application Essay” course for interested students. This will be a fee-based course that will require students to experiment with a variety of different essay prompts, engage in a peer-editing process, and will culminate with students completing a “final draft” of their college application essay.

In broad terms, as a student approaches the essay, they need to think not in terms of “what,” but in terms of “so what?” The college doesn’t want a laundry list of students’ activities – they already have that in another section of the application. And they don’t want an hour-by-hour description of a single meaningful experience. They want to know *why* that experience wound up as the topic of choice – what impact did it have on the student? Why? How did it change how the student acts now? What impact will that have on their campus? These become the focus of the paper – not what, but so-what?

This is what makes it so hard. Revealing the so-what is much more dangerous than sticking to the facts. Digging into the theme of one’s life is way murkier than developing a good plot. But the best essays are the ones that take the facts of one’s life and turn them inward, figuring out what the formative experiences are and how they’ve built one into the young adult that now is headed off to college.

Beginning in the fall of 2009, The Office of College Advising has developed a new policy related to essay editing. Students should bring their essays to the Director of College Advising and to *their current English teacher* for editing. Students are asked not to ask their former English teachers to formally edit essays. They may, of

course, discuss essay topics or strategies with any teachers, but too many teachers have been asked to edit too many essays, which dilutes the time they were able spend on their own current students.

### ***Observations from Others: Letters of Recommendation***

Admission Officers routinely espouse the value of letters of recommendation. The vast majority of letters of crafted by teachers, though they may also be written by bosses, coaches, advisers, and pastors. For the admission office, the goal of the letter is to have an outside evaluation of the student – an anecdotal confirmation of what the rest of the application packet seems to suggest about the applicant.

With this in mind, it’s incredibly important to think carefully about who should write these letters. Most students automatically drift toward teachers in whose classes they’ve gotten the best grades. And that may indeed be the right choice. But students should think about where they’ve grown the most, not just where they’ve performed the best. If a student goes from a C to an A in Mr. MacKenney’s Calculus class, there is a probably a fine “story” for a recommendation, even though the first semester involved a relatively low grade. Don’t think simply about the final grade – think growth, overcoming challenge, and the demonstration of fine, creative work.

Logistically speaking, students must organize and request letters of recommendation early – 4-6 weeks is the standard turn-around time for Bear Creek teachers. When students request these letters, they provide teachers with a “Letter of Recommendation Request form” (available online, in our office, or at the back of this packet). This form provides the teacher with the schools to which the letter(s) should be addressed, as well as valuable information about the student. In addition, students should provide teachers with any required forms to accompany the letter – *most* applications require a form in addition to the letter. Whenever possible, students should request all their letters at one time.

Once the teacher has completed the letter(s), they will return them to the student in a sealed envelope and those letters should be submitted in one large envelope, along with all other hard-copy materials.

## ***Where Do I Begin?***

### ***What Really Matters To You?***

There is no way around it: the student is the one that has to make this decision. Lots of people will (and should) weigh in – parents, the Office of College Advising, friends, siblings, extended family – but the student is the only one that will wind up sitting in class, making friends in the dorms, eating in the dining hall, and wearing the gown. To have moments of indecision, of wanting to put the decision in someone else's hands, is natural; to give in to that feeling is a recipe for an unhappy experience.

Throughout the searching, application and decision process, the student must constantly be asking (and answering) “What really matters to me?” Constantly prioritizing, researching and synthesizing all elements of the college experience is what makes for an informed decision. Consider this partial list of the ways you can slice the college pie (and think – what matters to me?):

- Size;
- Institutional type: private, public, research, liberal arts, secular, faith-based, fine-arts, etc;
- Geographic location: west, east, Midwest, international; etc
- Setting: urban, rural, coast, mountains;
- Reputation;
- Academic focus or prestigious majors;
- Cost;
- Athletics or school spirit;
- School amenities: dining hall, dorms, library, technology on campus;
- Friends or family members who attend or have attended.

The student's final answer, of course, depends on a synthesis of multiple elements from this list. But, *it might not include all of them*. To use one example, a student's top priority might be that the school be small – say, a few thousand. Locally, there are three schools that jump to mind: Seattle Pacific, Seattle U, and the University of Puget Sound. Those three schools share much in common besides size: strong regional reputation, emphasis on teaching, urban locations. But they differ widely on their approach to faith. But *does that really matter to me?* If yes, then there's work to be done, because those three schools approach a key element very differently. If not, then the student has a strong starting list.

### ***Types of Colleges, Universities and the Military Academies***

Expanding on the above list, it helps students to have an idea of the types of schools out there. This way, students can broadly categorize and organize schools. With over 3000 options, those early in the search process should take all the help they can get.

People often talk about “liberal arts” schools without being entirely sure what that means. Generally, it means an education grounded in broad course work (like a General Education curriculum at a four-year school vs. a content-specific education at a professional school). But functionally, “Liberal Arts” schools have often come to mean small, private schools with an emphasis on undergraduate teaching and, often, with some sort of humanities-based curriculum within their General Education requirements.

Liberal Arts schools are often set against larger state Universities (even though four-year state schools also have academic requirements across the liberal arts). Often, these state universities offer robust graduate programs and ongoing research projects which can pull faculty away from undergraduate teaching assignments. In this case, these teaching assignments then wind up in the hands of graduate students within

that discipline. That doesn't mean, however, that the education offered here is subpar – graduate students are qualified to teach the classes and, in some cases, are actually better teachers than the full professor would be.

Another way for students to distinguish schools is to consider their institutional mission. For many Bear Creek students, continuing in a faith-based educational community is important. There are literally hundreds of faith-based institutions (in Washington, for example, Seattle Pacific, Gonzaga, Seattle U, and Northwest, just to name a few of the larger ones). The finer elements of operating these schools will differ, but the common ground is that they emphasize that faculty incorporate faith-based worldview into their teaching and research.

As one final broad point of differentiation, students might consider schools that are specifically focused on one area. In our experience, this most commonly arises with students who are interested in a fine and performing arts school (for example, Julliard or Berkeley College). Students who feel they would be interested in this route should carefully consider whether or not the school offers the breadth of experiences and opportunities if the student should change their mind about career goals down the road.

The U.S. Military Academies (Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Army at West Point) offer students unique opportunities to combine military service to their country with top-notch academic preparation. Admission to the Academies is highly selective, involves demonstrated physical abilities, and begins much earlier than typical admission processes. A student's education at the Academies is completely paid by the U.S. Government and requires military service following graduation. Students who want to pursue this path should identify their interest to the Office of College Advising not later than first semester of 10<sup>th</sup> grade. In addition to the government-run Academies, some traditional undergraduate institutions offer students the opportunity to pursue their education in a military-style environment (these include The Citadel and Virginia Military Institute).

### ***The Research Stage***

This is, generally, a junior year activity. After identifying “what matters to me,” the student can begin filling in the gaps. Much of the knowledge comes naturally – most people know, for example, that the University of Washington is a top tier, large research University and that puts it in a certain place on a student's list. But there's a lot of misinformation out there, too. Often, a school's national reputation (usually from athletics) creates an impression. For example, most people are surprised to know that Duke, whose men's basketball team is regularly one of the top teams in the country, has only 6000 undergraduates – that's less than half the size of Western Washington University.

There are plenty of places to go for research. The internet is a fast, easy and effective one. The best single website, at least to start, is probably the College Board at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com). Here, students can create a profile and research over 3000 four-year schools based on dozens of categorical criteria. The websites of the individual schools are also excellent sources of information for more detailed or anecdotal information, such as individual academic programs, scholarships, extracurricular programs (e.g., study abroad), and faculty.

In addition, the Office of College Advising maintains a library of hard copy materials ranging from college brochures, viewbooks and academic catalogs to reference materials filled with useful comparative material.

Finally, the National College Fair and the National Christian College Fair are excellent opportunities for students to collect information and ask questions regarding multiple schools in one setting. The 2010 National College Fair is held in the fall at the Washington State Trade and Convention Center and attracts more than 300 colleges and universities. The National Christian College Fair is an evening event in October, and the 2010 fair will be hosted at The Bear Creek School. In addition, Seattle University hosts a spring

college fair, regional in scope and much smaller than the national fair in the fall. This fair generally occurs in March.

### ***College Tours***

Without question, being physically present on a college campus is an unparalleled opportunity to experience what life might be like as a student. Whenever possible, high school students should take every chance to explore any college or University campus. Even if a student is unsure whether or not they are genuinely interested in that particular school, experiencing the actual “vibe” of the campus gives them valuable comparative information.

These visits might take any number of different forms:

- *The Bear Creek College Tour for Juniors:* Every October, the Office of College Advising organizes a tour of 3-4 local colleges over a two-day period. The tour attempts to give students a window into a variety of different institutional types (state, private, large, small, etc) so that they can begin to understand what types of information is valuable and what kinds of questions to ask. Tour activities typically include a campus tour, lunch in the dining hall, a Q and A session with the Admissions Office, and a class visit. All juniors should plan to attend the college tour for both days.
- *Formal College Visit Events:* Most colleges and universities offer Visit Days or Visit Weekends for prospective students. These often provide comprehensive opportunities to experience campus because admission offices can arrange class visits, faculty panels, and student panels to a large group of prospective students. Contact the school’s specific admission office or view their website for details.
- *Individually arranged visits:* We have yet to hear of a school’s admission office that does not, at a minimum, make arrangements for students to tour the campus. Many offices will also arrange class visits, appointments, and overnight stays. Contact the admission office via phone or e-mail to arrange these visits.
- *Tour Companies:* Private tour companies arrange multiple-destination tours for out-of-area schools. For example, TBCS students have paid for tours that included airfare, accommodations, transportation, and all arrangements for ten east coast colleges. The Office of College Advising maintains several brochures and can suggest a tour company if students are interested.
- *“Hanging Out”:* There are any number of ways that students can experience campus life without jumping through the hoops. Visit a friend or older sibling. Go to a game. Go to a concert. Grab a cup of coffee in the student union building and read the school paper. Attend an evening lecture.

The bottom line is that no student should ever pass up an opportunity to get themselves onto a campus and experience what that school has to offer.

### ***Brown Bag and Off-Site Visits***

The Bear Creek School is fortunate to have many colleges and Universities from across the country visit our campus each year. These visits typically begin in mid-September and end in mid-November though schools occasionally visit at other times. Brown Bag visits normally occur during lunch, though may sometimes be scheduled during Office Hours or after school. Visits typically consist of a presentation by an Admissions Official from the school, followed by a time for students to ask questions specific to their needs. It is also an extremely valuable time for students to introduce themselves to an admissions officer who will likely play a role in their admission decision, should that student decide to apply. Brown Bags are intended for students only.

A schedule of Brown Bag visits is maintained in the College Advising section of [www.tbcs.org/collegeadvising](http://www.tbcs.org/collegeadvising), and a weekly schedule is posted on Mondays in the Upper School lounge area.

Many colleges and Universities have started to limit their high school visits due to budget and time restraints; this trend has continued more notably in the economic downturn. Most of these schools have replaced their high school visits with regional events designed to attract students from all over the area. These events are often held in hotel convention rooms or other large gathering spots. Some events are hosted by an individual school, while others may represent a consortium of schools. As much as possible, the Office of College Advising tries to keep a calendar of these events in the College Advising section of [www.tbcs.org/collegeadvising](http://www.tbcs.org/collegeadvising), though we are not always aware of all events. Students can find out if their school of interest is hosting a regional event through that school's Admissions Office website.

### ***Family Discussions***

If the college search and decision isn't the most stressful conversation that parents and kids have, it's at least on the short list. Often, parents and their children have very different ideas about the next four years – sometimes despite each other, sometimes in spite of each other, and sometimes to spite each other.

We find that whatever tension arises usually comes from one of two sources.

The first is the parents' own role in the whole process. The parents' role is a tough one; a balance must be struck between letting students own the journey, on the one hand, and holding them accountable for research, tours, and application deadlines on the other. Innocent and worthwhile questions from a parent can easily be misinterpreted by students, especially because there's so much anxiety surrounding this process already. Reminders about deadlines often beget "get off my back!" responses. In this case, parents should remind their child that they love them and care about them, and only want to ease the stress of the process down the road. If parents are worried that their child is delaying the process or in jeopardy of missing deadlines, they should contact the Office of College Advising to discuss the issue. We can sometimes exert a different – and more accepted – type of pressure to make sure things are moving along nicely.

The second source of tension can come from students and parents having wildly different ideas about "what is best" for the student. Parents often, rightly, have strong feelings about where their child should go to college – or at least where to apply. These feelings might come from the parent's own college experience, from neighborhood or workplace competitiveness, or from right or wrong perceptions about a certain school. There is nothing wrong with a parent sharing their own ideas, or continuing to ask questions, or telling of their own college experiences. But it's also important to recognize, as most parents who have been through the process will tell you, that kids are often very different from their parents. What works for one does not necessarily work for another. The campus experience that the parent remembers may have changed. Or the same things that made the parent's experience so wonderful might exist on another campus. The best thing to do in this situation is strike a compromise that you will each consider the other's views by researching and, if possible, visiting the campuses in question.

The bottom line: the best thing a parent can do in this process is provide questions, not answers. The answers must be there eventually, but they must come from the one who is (or should be) most invested in the process.

### ***Standardized Tests and Test Preparation***

*(For a complete list of standardized test dates for the upcoming year, please consult Appendix C at the end of this packet.)*

The vast majority of colleges and universities require that students submit an SAT or ACT score to be used in the admission decision. The SAT is an analytical reasoning test; there are three sections – Critical Reasoning,

Math and Writing – that are each worth up to 800 points. The ACT is a more content-based test with four sections (plus an optional Writing section). Each of the four core sections is scored separately, factoring a composite score on a scale of 1-36. The Writing section of the ACT is scored separately on a scale of 2-12.

Additionally, some schools require that students submit SAT II (Subject Test) scores. The SAT II's are shorter, content-specific tests across a broad range of disciplines. Up to three Subject Tests can be taken on the same test day, and most SAT I test sites offer SAT II's at the same time (in a different test room). Students can elect which SAT II's they want to take, though some schools will require that they take tests within a certain category (for example, at least one math or science test). Students should check a school's specific admission requirements to see if SAT II's are required.

Bear Creek highly recommends that all students take at least two college entrance exams (SAT I and/or ACT) prior to completion of their junior year. Many students will take two exams, *and* sit for SAT II Subject Tests. It is not suggested that students begin taking college entrance exams prior to the PSAT in October of their junior year – though that may be an option in certain rare cases.

As of the fall of 2009, the CollegeBoard has introduced a new option in how students report their scores to colleges. In the past, each score report contained all SAT scores that a student had taken in high school. Students can now choose which scores they want to send, withholding their lower scores. Individual colleges and Universities, however, may have differing policies; some may still want to see all test scores from an applicant. Students can find these policies at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) or on the college's Admissions website.

Bear Creek maintains a relationship with the Princeton Review to conduct test preparation courses on our campus. At this time, it is our practice to offer an on-campus course in the spring which culminates with the May SAT I test; the spring course meets one night each week with three practice exams on Saturday mornings (it does not meet during the week of spring break). The summer course meets once per week in the morning, with three practice exams on Saturday. All fees and the registration process are handled directly through the Seattle branch of the Princeton Review. The Princeton Review strongly recommends that a student not register for the course unless they can attend all sessions.

Alternately, students can prepare for the standardized tests on their own with purchased materials from any number of reputable companies (Kaplan, Princeton Review, Barron's) or with resources available online at [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org). Many companies and individuals also offer individualized tutoring services, though these can be very expensive. Please contact the Office of College Advising for help in securing these services.

### ***How Many Schools? Defining the “Best Fit” List***

Students (and parents) frequently want to know specifically “how many?” How many schools should I be considering? How many schools should I tour? How many should I apply to? There is no one answer.

What we do suggest is that the net is cast wide at the beginning and slowly narrows through the fall of a student's senior year. The funnel will get narrower automatically. As a student asks and answers the question of “What is important to me?” schools will (or should) quickly fall by the wayside. Getting on campus and experiencing large vs. small schools; traveling across the country and realizing how far Boston and New York *really* are; sitting in a class and realizing how terrifying (or exhilarating) it is to be in community with so many people who think *so differently* from you...these are all experiences that will naturally help students reduce dozens of schools down to a manageable application list.

For a point of reference, the Class of 2010 applied to an average of 5.4 schools per person, ranging from two applications to over fifteen. We highly recommend that all students submit at least two applications.

As each student and family goes through this process together, it will become clear what the “Best Fit” list looks like. For some students, the best fit list will have 2-3 schools on it. For some, it will have more than ten. Students should not approach this with an “I have to get down to ‘X’ schools” approach. The best words we hear, and the goal for each student, is the following sentence, uttered in the spring of the senior year: “I know it doesn’t matter which of these schools I choose to attend, only because I know I’d be happy at any of them.”

That’s the best fit.

## ***Elements of a Successful College Application***

### ***Organizing the Application Process and Managing Deadlines***

*(See Appendix B for an example of application management checklist.)*

The height of the application process falls in November and December of the senior year. The vast majority of deadlines – whether they are “hard” deadlines or just functional deadlines – occur during this window. Bear Creek does not officially reduce the coursework load for students during this time, so filling out applications happens on top of normal school activities. With this in mind, students should plan and begin filling out applications as early as possible to avoid deadline crunches. With the economy squeezing the budgets of higher education, being early becomes even more important.

The Office of College Advising highly recommends that students organize their application materials in one place. This organization looks different for each student: some use notebooks, some use accordion files, some use plastic boxes. Those who are the least stressed are the ones that keep copies of everything and maintain, on one Excel spreadsheet or other document, a list of required application elements and a record of date(s) submitted. This organizational tool should be brought to every meeting with the College Advising staff.

The production and/or processing of application materials can take quite a bit of time. While the student manages their application process, meets deadlines and is responsible for application submission, the application itself involves the work of several different people. Other sources include the school Registrar (official transcripts), teachers (letters of recommendation), the Office of College Advising (Secondary School Reports or Counselor Recommendations), and the College Board or ACT (for test score reporting). Students *cannot* decide the night before (or even a week before) a deadline that they want to apply to a school and expect to submit a completed application. Please see “Parts of the Application: Who Does What, When and Where” later in this section for more detail about managing these elements of the application.

### ***Early Decision, Early Action, and Regular Decision***

Application deadlines vary by school. Typically, schools begin accepting applications in the fall – anytime after October 1<sup>st</sup>. Deadlines for Early Action/Decision programs begin around November 1<sup>st</sup> and are usually complete by December 15<sup>th</sup> – but frequently earlier. Most Regular Decision deadlines are after Christmas and, depending on the school, completed by March 1<sup>st</sup>.

Students should carefully read the stated application deadlines which are clearly stated on the college’s application and/or Admissions website.

Many students struggle with the options for application timing. Statistically speaking, it can be to the student’s advantage to apply under a school’s Early Admission program. (This has certainly true since the 2009 application year, as many colleges admitted a disproportionately high percentage of their applicant pool from the Early group, ensuring a higher yield and more predictable class come fall.) It can also be a relief to the

student because most Early notifications are sent around Christmas time. By applying Early, a student is letting the school know that the school is the student's first choice and that they *intend* to go there if admitted. Within that framework, there are a few different Early options:

- Early Decision: If a school's program is called "Early Decision," that usually means that the student is **bound** to go that school if they are admitted. They are then required to withdraw applications from all other schools. The problem with Early Decision is that a student has agreed to attend the school without knowing what the school will offer in regards to scholarships or other financial aid. There is also, of course, the issue of changing one's mind. A student should only submit an Early Decision application if they have visited the campus, are completely sure it is their first choice, and have the financial leverage to attend that school without the concern of financial assistance.
- Early Action: The more common program is usually referred to as "Early Action." Like Early Decision, Early Action indicates that the school is a student's first choice, but the student is *not* required to attend that school upon an offer of admission. For most students, this is an attractive option. The majority of Bear Creek seniors apply Early Action to one school. Sometimes schools will waive or lower application fees for Early Action applications.

The other option, of course, is to apply under the school's Regular Decision deadline. The majority of applications to any given school are submitted under this deadline. If a student is attracted to a school but is unable to say with a high degree of likelihood that they would attend if admitted, they should apply under the Regular Decision program.

Note: Applying Regular Decision does not mean one can't submit an application by the Early Action deadline. They just don't apply under the Early Action/Decision program. Whenever possible, students should apply to schools well in advance of their posted deadlines.

Once a student has submitted their application, the school will make a choice in one of two ways. Some schools stockpile applications up to their stated deadline, then make all their admission decisions at one time and notify the applicant pool as a group (one round for their early pool and one for their regular pool). Other schools make their decisions on an ongoing basis. These schools notify each individual student at the time of admission. Depending on application load, student can expect to an admissions decision anywhere from 4-6 weeks after the complete application is submitted.

## ***Parts of the Application Process: Who Does What, When and Where?***

There are multiple parts to the application process, but the typical application includes the elements which follow in this section. Students should check carefully the list of required application elements on the specific school application. These elements remain the same whether the student applies “hard copy” or online. In the case of the Common Application, a single application format accepted by over 300 colleges and Universities, the student should check carefully to see that they have completed any additional required supplements (which are noted and available on the Common Application website).

Whenever possible, students should collect all materials and submit them together in one large envelope to the school, in order to minimize the potential for loss. The exception is official test scores, which must be submitted directly from the testing agency. If a student is applying online, they will often still need to submit hard-copy materials (official transcript, letters of recommendation, etc). Following the above approach, these should be submitted in one envelope.

### ***The Application***

This piece includes data to be reported by the student: personal information, intended major, parent information, etc.

### ***Activities Sheet***

Often wrapped into the application itself, this is intended to provide a window into what the student has done with their time outside of class. Applicants usually list the activity, length of time involved, amount of time spent (per week, per year), and sometimes the supervisor of the activity. Not every line has to be filled, but students should give a clear and comprehensive picture of what they do with their time.

### ***Personal Essay***

The personal essay(s) is the most important part of the application which is still under the student’s control at the time they apply. The essay should involve tremendous reflection on the student’s part and should capture both their writing ability and their personality in a way that cannot be duplicated elsewhere. The Office of College Advising conducts a half-day essay workshop in September for all seniors and offers to play a large part in helping students craft and revise their essays. Admissions personnel universally speak of the importance of the essay, and of the lack of seriousness with which many students treat it. It is an unparalleled opportunity for students to reveal their true selves. (Please see the new essay editing policy for students, described on page 14 of this handbook.)

### ***Official Transcripts***

(See Appendix D for a copy of Bear Creek’s “Transcript Request Form,” which is also available at [www.tbcs.org/collegeadvising](http://www.tbcs.org/collegeadvising).) Official transcripts are issued in a sealed envelope by the school’s Registrar. Whenever possible, students should request all needed copies at one time. The Registrar requires one week to process transcript requests.

### ***Secondary School Report (sometimes called “Counselor Report” or “Counselor Recommendation”)***

This document is supplied by the student but completed by the Office of College Advising. It is an attempt to capture the student’s academic record within the context of the school and the class. While the SSR asks about class rank, it is Bear Creek’s policy *not to rank students* due to our small class sizes. We include a personal letter in every SSR, as well as the Bear Creek School Profile. Our office prefers to have three weeks to complete these reports, especially during high volume seasons (November and December). Under no circumstances should students request completed SSR’s less than one week in advance.

### ***Letters of Recommendation***

(See Appendix E for a copy of Bear Creek’s “Teacher Letter of Recommendation Request Form” – this form must be submitted to each teacher whom you ask to write a letter.)

These are most often completed by teachers. When deciding which teachers to ask, consider carefully where you have done your best work. (This is not always the class in which you got the best grade. Think about creativity, growth, and improvement – these make for the best recommendations.) Many teachers are asked to craft multiple letters – sometimes over 20. To do justice to each student who asks, they take time. Our teachers have asked that they have not less than 5 weeks notice to complete letters of recommendation.

### ***Official Test Scores***

Official test scores are **not** reported on any Bear Creek document. These must come directly from the testing agency that administers your test. Each college has a four-digit code that students enter at the test’s website on their “Send Your Scores” tab. There is a nominal fee for each reported score, though students can request up to four school reports for free at the time of their testing.

For the SAT, send score reports from <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/scores.html>

For the ACT, send scores reports from: <http://www.actstudent.org/scores/send/>

### ***I’ve Been Accepted, Waitlisted, or Denied...Now What?***

Upon receiving an admission notification, the student is faced with a series of options. Taken one a time...

#### ***Accepted***

Congratulations – you’re in a good spot. Presumably, you still have choices though. Whenever possible, visit the final schools on your list after you’ve been admitted. It’s an entirely different experience to visit a campus during the spring of your senior year when you know you’re in...and might be a student there in a few short months. Make this a high-quality visit. Insist on visiting a class and/or meeting with a professor from your intended academic department. Stay overnight if possible. Spend time in the local area, checking out restaurants and nightlife. This could be home!

Once you’ve made a final decision, there are two things that need to be done. First, you must turn in your housing application as soon as possible (in fact, this might be done even before you make your final choice). Often, the housing application can fall through the cracks. Since many students choose not to live on campus, the large house packet may not come with your admission acceptance. There might simply be a small reply card that you send back in, indicating that you intend to live on campus and need a housing packet. Once you get the application packet, complete it (honestly, since it will be used to determine your roommate) and submit it with any required deposit money.

Second, you will need to submit a small deposit indicating to the school that you are enrolling. (This is frequently between \$300-500, and is usually applied to your tuition.) This can be done at any time, but should be done by May 1, which is the official National Candidate’s Reply Date. Colleges are like airlines: they overbook, assuming that not everyone will accept their offer of admission. After May 1, you risk losing your spot; your tuition deposit indicates that you’re coming.

#### ***Waitlisted***

Tom Petty said that the waiting was the hardest part. True. Students, whether they apply Early or Regular, might be waitlisted. This can mean one or more things: 1) they want to see more academic work or another (better) test score from you; 2) they want to wait and see what their “yield” is and how many spots they have available; 3) they just need to wait.

What to do? Don’t overreact. Often schools will solicit further information from you at this point; if they give you the option to interview for write an additional essay (and if you’re still interested in being admitted off the waitlist) **always** take them up on this opportunity. If not, *calmly* contact the admissions office (hopefully you have a specific contact), let them know that you received their waitlist notification, and ask if they have all the information they need. Ask if they want an additional essay or an additional test score. If the school is local,

see if you can schedule an admissions interview. If they say no to any of these, don't push. By calling and taking the initiative, you've offered them more information and shown them that this is important to you. Remember, if they wanted to deny you, they'd have done it already. You still have plenty to lose, so play this calmly and coolly and let the decision work itself out.

### ***Denied***

This is, presumably, a bummer. No one likes to be denied. In the vast majority of cases, the decision is final and it is best to adjust and move forward. (This is why the Office of College Advising strongly suggests that students apply to more than one school. You just never know.)

If a student is denied and feels that they would like to appeal the decision, the Office of College Advising will support them. The best thing to do is to follow the course of action outlined above in the "Waitlisted" section. Be calm. Call and ask if you can provide any additional information or come in for an interview. The next step is to formally appeal in a written document. This letter must be crafted by the student, but with the help of the Office of College Advising.

Again, a student should not expect a decision to be overturned. But in this case, if a student feels strongly that the school made a decision without the full picture, we will steadfastly support the student through the appeal process.

## *Financing the College Years*

College is just plain expensive—but most would argue the investment and financial sacrifices are worth it. Rarely do students select a college based on cost alone, but the financial impact of higher education is substantial and should be an important point of evaluation for each school on the “apply to” list. Currently, the range of college tuition, room & board, fees and related expenses can range from \$20,000 - \$60,000 annually. A growing number of schools are listing tuition alone at well over \$40,000 per year. As students plan for their undergraduate and for some, the graduate years, the cost can become exponential. Students and parents are strongly encouraged to discuss *now* the practical financial considerations that will impact your decision to accept any offer of admission.

The good news is that colleges seek well qualified students and have designed scholarship and financial aid strategies to recruit and retain them. These students are an asset to the educational venture of any institution and tend to receive a variety of offers with their admissions letter of acceptance.

The fact remains that there are any number of opportunities to assist in paying for college. From family asset management to individual scholarships, parents and students should begin this aspect of the research process early. As students and parents attempt to define “who does what” to prepare and manage the college prep journey, the financial side clearly rests in the parent’s domain. Students -- respect your parents and see the opportunity to go to college as a gift and a sacrifice on their part. Parents-- encourage the dreaming, but also be a *gentle* yet clear voice of reason when the financial conversation inevitable arises.

### *Financial Aid, Merit Awards and Scholarship Searching*

*A few facts to consider:*

- For Washington State residents, our public Universities and Community College campuses offer academic value propositions that are hard to beat, but these educational settings may not fit the needs of any number of students.
- Private universities and colleges typically have a much higher cost factor, but usually offer competitive scholarships to recruit and retain strong students. It is important to keep in mind that the sticker price listed is not always the final cost. Many students are eligible for scholarships that are determined once an admission offer has been determined. During the research phase of your search, check with each school to determine scholarship opportunities and eligibility.
- Roughly 75% of all **student aid is funded by the federal government** and administered through individual schools in the form of grants, loans and work study. Each student (with great parent support) will need to complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form annually to qualify for federal aid. The Web address for more information is [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). The site is also very helpful, offering estimating tools to help determine if a particular family may qualify for aid. The FAFSA is available online in November but may not be submitted until January 1.
- **Nonfederal assistance** is often provided by individual schools in the form of scholarships, and grants. Scholarships awards are typically based on academic ability or special talent. These scholarships are usually renewable each year upon meeting or exceeding an accepted performance level. Institutional and commercial loans and/or student employment may be other options to explore through the school.
- **Independent scholarships** are available through a multitude of private funding sources. The National Merit Scholarship is the most widely recognized of this funding type, but uniquely in this category, the NMSC is awarded by high performance on the PSAT exam taken in the fall of the junior year, not based on an individual scholarship application. Students are encouraged to start scholarship searching in the fall of their junior year. Notable sites include, [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com) and one of our regional favorites, the Pacific Northwest Scholarship Guide found online at

[www.collegeplan.org/cpnnow/pnwguide](http://www.collegeplan.org/cpnnow/pnwguide). The Office of College Advising also has a variety of hard copy and web listings of other financial aid resources.

- **Public or Private 529 College Savings Plans** are an increasingly visible option. The Office of College Advising does not formally endorse specific programs and does not provide financial advice. However, more information about Washington State’s GET (Guaranteed Educational Tuition) program is available at [www.tbcs.org/collegeadvising](http://www.tbcs.org/collegeadvising).

Caution: If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is! According to the Federal Trade Commission, be cautious of potential scholarship scams. Be aware of the following statements: 1) “The scholarship is guaranteed or your money back”, 2) “You can’t get this information anywhere else”, 3) “I just need your credit card or bank account number to hold this scholarship”, 4) “The scholarship will cost a small fee to hold it in your name”, 5) “You have been selected by a national foundation to receive a scholarship, or You are a finalist for a scholarship you have never entered.”

### ***NCAA Considerations***

The National Intercollegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) allows colleges to offer full or partial scholarships to a small, select number of athletes who participate in intercollegiate (or “Varsity”) athletics at member institutions. The NCAA classifies institutions as Division I, II, or III. (In addition, athletic scholarships may be offered at NAIA member schools, a smaller consortium of generally small schools. The NAIA operates under separate governance.) Under no circumstances are Division III schools permitted to offer scholarships based on athletic ability or participation; Division III athletes, however, may be offered academic scholarships. Division I and II schools, depending on the sport, offer scholarships ranging from partial to full, and may also combine athletic and academic scholarships for the same student.

### ***Athlete Visibility***

Students who are interested in athletic scholarships should identify a venue in which college coaches can evaluate their talents. Most team sports, with the notable exception of football, offer opportunities for students outside of the high school sports season. These teams, often called “AAU” or “select,” participate in year-round games and tournaments where college coaches can see multiple athletes at one time. If a student-athlete is looking for an AAU program, they should ask the AAU coach which tournaments the team participates in. (For obvious reasons, the more teams there are at a tournament, the more attractive it is to college coaches. The more tournaments a team plays in, the more opportunity for exposure.) Coaches also attend high school games to evaluate athletes, especially at the State Tournament level.

Generally speaking, if an athlete is talented, the coaches will find them – especially if they have “access” to evaluate the athlete at the above mentioned tournaments. However, sometimes prospective athletes take it upon themselves to initiate contact with coaches. This can be done at any time, though it generally occurs during the student’s sophomore year. Students should contact the coach(es) via phone or e-mail, let them know of their interest and accomplishments, suggest times that the coach can evaluate the student (summer tournament schedule, etc). Sophomore year is too early to send a formal video or resume to the coach. This is done later in the recruiting process, usually in the summer/fall of a student’s senior year.

A few families in this situation consider hiring a third-party service to help increase visibility for the student-athlete. These companies provide services like video production, e-mailing coaches, athlete resumes, and organization of recruiting materials. Like any marketing service, families should carefully consider whether or not they can handle this process with the help of resources that are already at their disposal *and* should consider the track record of the company in helping students secure college athletic opportunities.

## ***Recruiting Process***

The NCAA tightly regulates the recruiting process for student athletes and the rules can vary by sport. It is the responsibility of the college coach not to contact or recruit the athlete when/where the NCAA forbids it. Students who have questions about illegal or unethical recruiting behaviors should consult the Office of College Advising immediately as this behavior, even if it is not the fault of the student, can impact the student's eligibility to play for that institution.

In most cases, a student can initiate contact with a coach or institution at any time. If contact is initiated by the student, coaches are free to answer any questions related to their team or institution. Additionally, coaches may freely talk with students if that contact occurs on their own campus. Coaches may also communicate with prospective student athletes via hard-copy mail at any time. Coaches may not initiate contact with student athletes until July 1 after completion of the junior year (or, in some cases, after the first day of senior year).

This contact may take any of the following forms:

- Phone calls, which are limited by the NCAA depending on sport (usually not more than 1 per week initiated by the coach);
- E-mail, text or other digital communication (this is an area that is being continually studied and re-regulated by the NCAA);
- Visits to an athlete's practice or games;
- Visits to an athlete's home;
- An athlete visiting the institution – visits that are paid for by the student are considered "unofficial," while visits that are paid for by the school are considered "official"; students are limited in the number of official visits that they can take.

## ***Signing***

If a school and a student decide during the student's senior year that the match is good, the student will sign a National Letter of Intent to play for the school. This is, for lack of a better term, a scholarship agreement. It is a binding commitment that the student will play for that school (not the coach – a change in coaching staff does not excuse a student from their NLI commitment) for the duration of their eligibility. A student transferring (or changing their mind prior to freshmen year) after signing the NLI will impact their eligibility; most commonly, students have to sit out at least one year if they transfer. The amount of athletic scholarship will be addressed in the NLI.

There are two "signing periods": a one-week, early signing period in the fall (for most sports, in early-mid November); and the longer, traditional signing period (for most sports, in the spring). It can be a relief for students to sign during the early signing period – and coaches often encourage students to sign early – because it ends the competitive recruiting process, but a student must be sure that they are ready to make the decision.

Students can "verbally commit" to schools whenever they want (freshmen have verbally committed), and often coaches will encourage students to do so, but the only thing that verbal commitments do is strip the student of leverage in the recruiting process. Once a student has verbally committed, other coaches will often back away from recruiting that student. Yet a school is not bound one bit by a student's verbal commitment; they can still pursue other athletes, and may ultimately sign those athletes instead of the student who verbally committed. In addition, a school or coach may not publically comment on any recruiting efforts; they may not discuss who they are recruiting to media or other coaches.

### ***Before You Enroll: Admission and the Clearinghouse***

Student athletes apply for admission to a University in the same way everyone else does. They are not exempted from any application materials, required tests, or the general academic requirements of the University.

Before a student can participate in collegiate practice, games or make an official visit (paid for by the school), they must be registered with and approved by the NCAA Clearinghouse. This process usually occurs in the fall of the student's senior year. The Clearinghouse makes sure that a student's academic record and their standardized test scores (SAT/ACT) meet the minimum requirements for eligibility. The minimum requirements are a "sliding scale" combination of a student's "Core GPA" (approved academic courses) and test score; for example, a student with a 2.6 must have at least a 780 (Reading and Math combined) on their SAT. The Clearinghouse registration process is initiated by the student online at [www.ncaaclearinghouse.org](http://www.ncaaclearinghouse.org). Once finished with the simple registration process, a student should print, sign and submit the forms to the Office of College Advising. College Advising will then send official transcripts to the Clearinghouse. Finally, a student must send their own official test scores to the Clearinghouse. This process is the same as it would be to send scores to any University; the Clearinghouse four-digit code is 9999.

### ***A Word About Talent and Reality***

Bear Creek has already established a good record of students participating in college athletics and College Advising is well-versed in helping students, as much as possible, leverage their athletic talents in the college search. However, parents and students should realize that the awarding of college scholarships is extremely competitive and rare.

It is incredibly important to keep two points in perspective:

- College should be a multi-faceted experience blending academics, residential life, cultural experiences and a new social environment together – participating in college athletics, especially at the Division I level, will impact that blending. That is **not** to say that talented athletes should not participate in college sports. But there are only so many hours in the day, and college coaches demand (as they should, since they're often paying) that athletes dedicate an incredible amount of time, year-round, to their team;
- Parents and students often overestimate athletic ability. This is frequently fed by high school and AAU coaches who are trying to attract athletes to their team and use flattery to recruit; it's also fed by the attention of college coaches, who must cast their recruiting net very, very wide in order to wind up with a very small, talented and signed recruiting class. It's important for parents to encourage and praise their child's athletic (or any other) accomplishments. It's also extremely important to be realistic about the enormous number of potential student athletes in the nation and the very small number of scholarship dollars and roster spots.

### ***Final Thought from the Office of College Advising....***

Without a doubt, advising students and families through the college selection process is a rare privilege – and indeed quite the journey. It is our intent to offer as many tools as possible to equip students and parents to make excellent college choices. It is a complete partnership and the rewards to each of us last a life time. Thank you for allowing us to come alongside you during one of the most exciting seasons of life. May the Lord, by his grace and mercy bless your future path.

***List of attached Reference Materials\*:***

**Appendix A: The Bear Creek School Profile 2010-11**

**Appendix B: 4-Year Calendars (Gr 9-12)**

**Appendix C: Standardized Testing Information and Important Dates**

**Appendix D: Transcript Release Form (Available from the Registrar's Office)**

**Appendix E: Teacher Letter of Recommendation Form**

**Appendix F: Sample College Tour Questions**

**Appendix G: SAT & ACT Score Comparisons**

**Appendix G: Sample Application (Common Application, 2010-11)**

**Appendix I: Sample Application Management Form**

**\*Appendix documents included in hard-copy, but not available in online .pdf. For replacement copies, please contact the Office of College Advising  
Notes**