**Is Your Student Going to College? - An Admissions Counselor’s Guide for College Applicants**

1.            **Build a strong foundation in high school**.  To get ahead, begin establishing a strong grade point average (GPA) in ninth grade.

2.            **Participate in at least one extracurricular activity and one community service activity**.  What you do in your free time reveals a lot about you, particularly your passions and values.  Involvement in outside activities, particularly STEM-related clubs and organizations, may give you an edge over another applicant with equal academic qualifications.

3.            **Take standardized testing seriously**.  Test scores play a big role in landing an acceptance letter, so take plenty of time to prepare.  Sign up for prep courses and practice tests like the PSAT.  There are also free study guides and materials available online.  Make the effort to take both the SAT and ACT and take at least one of them twice to get a better score.  When taking advanced placement (AP) exams, keep in mind top colleges accept scores of only five or higher.

4.            **Prioritize your college applications**.  It takes time to compile a thoughtful, thorough college application.  Keep that in mind as you decide which universities to apply to.  Keep in mind, you’ll still need time to manage your high school course load and enjoy your free time with friends and family.

5.            **Incorporate your personality in the personal essay**.  While you don’t want to be too casual in your application, neither should you overuse jargon.  A good practice is   to give specific examples.  So, for instance, instead of writing that you “value community service,” tell a brief story from your volunteer work.

6.            **Show why you’re special**.  Schools are looking for students who demonstrate noteworthy ideas and accomplishments.  Sharing how you have triumphed in the face of difficulty like a challenging semester, family issue or other life circumstance demonstrates your best qualities.

7.            **Stay organized**.  Mark your calendar and stay on top of application deadlines, as well as cut-off dates for submitting deposits, transcript requests and immunization records.  A missed deadline could delay registration, prompt additional fees or lead to a lack of admittance into the university altogether.

8.            **Do not let finances deter you**.  Don’t automatically discount a school you’re interested in just because of cost.  Reach out to the Financial Aid office for more information and research your options.  Dig deep enough and you’ll find there are more scholarships available than you might think.  Check out the Scholarship Search tool on [www.STEMStudy.com](http://www.STEMStudy.com) , a great resource for students interested in applying to a STEM-focused college.

9.            **Contact the colleges**.  College fairs and university tours are a great way to not only collect firsthand information about the school, but also to meet one-on-one with an admissions counselor.

10.          **Be careful about your social media posts**.  Admissions Counselors may access your social media accounts, so be sure what they find is appropriate.  Something negative or unfavorable can lead to a denial letter or withdrawal of acceptance.