

Dear Junior Parents,

In case you missed **Junior Parent Night**, the Newton South kick-off to the **college admissions process**, we have assembled some notes here to bring you up to date, including links to important web-sites and checklists. Topics discussed include: testing (SAT, ACT, AP, SAT Subject Tests), Naviance soft-ware system, building a list of potential colleges to apply to, college visits, the Common Application web-site, teacher recommendations, interviews, and various tips from Newton South guidance counselors.

As this process should be individualized to meet the needs and desires of each student and family, please keep in mind the best thing you can do to support your child is be in touch regularly with his/her guidance counselor. We highly recommend that you make an appointment to speak with them in the next few months, if you have not already done so. These notes are intended to be an overview and not a comprehensive listing.

If at any time you have questions, you are always welcome to email the PTSO at: info@newtonsouthptso.org.

Betsy Blagdon and Lori Lass
Newton South PTSO

Junior Parent Night Notes

January 23, 2014

SPEAKER SUMMARIES

Marla Weiner, WISE Program Director

- Explained the WISE program (Wise Individualized Senior Experience), which allows qualified seniors to spend Term 4 working on a substantial academic project of their own design on a part-time or full-time basis.
- Senior projects/internships are created to help the student explore a personal interest, and may include a possible career choice, a special talent, a research project, or a community service project.
- Options are limited only by the students' imagination. (See links for more information.)

Shelly Borg, NSHS Director of Guidance

- Kids need to ask themselves: Who am I? What kind of future do I want?
- Encourage your kid to do the research and ask questions
- Realize that they might be paralyzed by fear of failure as they see this as the pinnacle of their lives to date (and possibly ever, since they have little perspective)
- Do as much as you can to reduce the stress – trust your intuition
- Keep telling yourselves that you will get through this
- Make sure you resist the urge to take over this process from your kids

- The college they choose should share the same values as the student
- Much more important than where they go, is what they do when they get there.
- No perfect process, don't think there is.
- The parent's job is to advise and support.
- Be the launching pad not the helicopter parent.
- Quotes from book "I'm Going to College, Not You"
 - Best parent impersonates wallpaper
 - Gives the student room to breathe
 - Yet always be there when student is ready to talk
- Student might look oblivious or disinterested, but rest assured that the wheels are spinning inside.
- Trust your student to know what they are looking for.

Barbara Brown, NSHS College/Career Counselor

- 17th year at South as college counselor
- Each child is different, each has their own timeline, own approach
- This is a collaborative effort between student, school and parents
- **Naviance** is the college admissions software tool used by both Newton high schools. It is the electronic system whereby all documents that are sent to colleges go through Naviance (reference letters, high school transcript, counselor personal statement, etc.).
- References and counselor statements are not visible to the students.
- Naviance can be a good organizational tool for students.
- Naviance can also be used for researching colleges and also facilitates communications from guidance counselors and Ms Brown to the students.
- Parents can log on as guests; students have their own passwords (parents cannot get student passwords from counselors, but they can from their student.)
- Barbara will now turn on access to the full Naviance software system for juniors. Ask your student for their user name (it's their email address) and password. In particular, the scattergrams on Naviance can help parents see where other NSHS students, with similar GPAs and SAT scores have had success getting in over the past 5 years. Use your student's midyear grades plus their PSAT scores to gauge academic fit (SAT scores generally run higher than PSATs, but this is a starting point until you have their SAT scores).
- NSHS hosts 75-100 college reps/year, dates will be listed in Naviance calendar starting in August
- No longer distribute a paper booklet because everything is on the Guidance section of NSHS website, including financial aid/scholarship info.
- Ms Brown is the go-to resource if kids need help putting together their lists of possible schools. See links for her email address.
- In October of senior year, Barbara will hold a Financial Aid night, where the complete process of financial aid will be explained.

Jon Westover, University of Massachusetts Admissions Counselor

- At South, you have access to great guidance counselors; use them.
- Students need to own their admissions process, it's their search.
- Last year, about 200 students applied from NSHS to UMass. The average for those who applied was: 3.7 GPA and 1310 SAT. For the 35 who enrolled, their average GPA was 3.7 and SAT was 1210. 200 applications/year has been consistent for the last few years.
- When looking at colleges, examine the academic profile of your student v. the average student who is enrolled

- Looking for an excellent FIT: academically, socially, and financially
- **Best advice: agree to only talk college admissions/deadlines/essays/etc. one night a week, and the rest of the week give your kid a break. Otherwise you will freak them out.**
- What size school do they want? What is the best learning environment for them?
- UMass has 22k students, 4600 freshmen
- Important: “can always make a big school feel small, but can’t always make a small school feel big”
- Example: UMass has specialty dorms, including ones for the honors program, sports team, etc.
- Students need to ask themselves: where? How far do I want to go?
- If your kid says “UHawaii,” tell them they will only come home once per year (who needs to leave Hawaii for spring break?)
- Most students choose something within 3 hours from home
- What is the best academic fit? Keep in mind, the vast majority of students change their major.
- Of the 4600 freshmen at UMass, 25% are undecided
- Ask yourself: what support services does this school offer?
- Keep in mind that most kids are only in class between 12-15 hours per week. Social fit is very important, because if they aren’t happy outside of class, then won’t be happy overall. If students have a special non-academic interest, they should research which colleges will allow them to pursue it.
- **Most important admissions factor: high school transcript, by far!**
- UMass recalculates GPA to include freshman year. If you get an A in an Honors class, then they use 4.5. If you get an A in an AP class then it’s 5.0.
- UMass calculates the GPA from freshman year, sophomore, junior and first half of senior (count it as full year)
- Research which tests your college accepts. Huge increase in kids taking ACT past few years.
- UMass takes both SAT and ACT, super scores (allows you to send your best scores for each section, regardless of date, they ignore the writing score).
- If your student has an idea of what field they want to go into, research classes required before getting to college. For example, business classes require a minimum of pre-calculus for math.
- Extracurricular activities: most colleges would rather see a student do 2 or 3 clubs and rise to a leadership level in at least one, rather than be in 17 clubs for one year each.
- College essay: no magic bullet. Will not get you in and will not keep you out (unless you reveal bad things about yourself which most people have the good sense not to do).
- Don’t buy the essay online, don’t let someone write most of it.
- Important: be sure your response answers the question!
- When the essay is done, finish it and move on. Does no good to work on it endlessly.
- Try to have fun and a sense of humor with this whole process.
- There is a book: “Colleges that Change Lives”, but ALL colleges change lives.
- Be wary of using the phrase “safety” school, as it inherently devalues a school, when it could be a perfectly fine choice.

Guidance Counselor Tips

I. College Admissions Process at Newton South

- Junior students go to two seminars with their guidance counselor: one in November and one in January.
- Early in September, there will be a **Senior Parent Night**, where the guidance counselors go over the nuts and bolts of how exactly the college admissions process works and how all the pieces come together. Please watch the PTSO Sunday evening newsletter for this important date.

- One important example of the information that will be covered at Senior Parent Night: the NSHS administration needs a minimum of 4 weeks notice before releasing transcripts. If your student plans to do any early decision or early action applications, then they need to plan ahead.
- Guidance counselors will send updates through Naviance system, so check email regularly.
- Educate yourself on the differences between early decision/early action/single choice, etc. It's important to be aware of what your student is going for. ED/EA decision deadlines can be as early as Oct 15, which means a student really needs to do a lot of work over the summer to have their act together fall of senior year. With rolling admissions, you can apply any time after August 1st and hear within a few weeks.
- Guidance counselors would like to see all of their students at least one more time before summer. Each one has a book by their office in which students can sign up for a time slot.
- Guidance counselors put a lot of time into the personal statements that they write for each student. Some guidance counselors start writing them at the beginning of summer, but then don't finish them until touching base with the student in the fall for any final details. Their job is to bring the student alive for the admissions committee. Plus, they can explain grade deflation at NSHS (i.e. how extremely challenging our teachers can be).
- Important: in order to help guidance counselors to write the best possible personal statement for each student, they need the **Parent Information Sheet** back from us this spring. (See list of links.)
- Junior GPAs won't be entered into Naviance until February, as the main office is still completing first semester grades for seniors.
- Regarding essays, most senior English classes at South spend time working on their college applications in class. In fact, some junior English classes do the same in the spring, so students have something to build on over the summer.
- Financial Aid timeline: the FAFSA (Federal Application For Student Aid) is available January 1st. You must first apply for a pin number before completing the FAFSA form. All families are encouraged to fill out the form, as many colleges require it for merit scholarships, in addition to financial aid.
- Fastweb.com is a clearinghouse web-site for scholarships. However, please be wary as they send lots of emails, so be sure to give them an email address different from your main email. Also, any request for money up front for scholarship information is a scam and should be ignored.
- Canadian universities offer a lot of value and can sometimes be an excellent choice for your student. Guidance counselor Jim Madeiros is planning a night in May where students can come hear from a speaker about Canadian colleges. (See links for more info.)
- Special needs: keep in mind that admission to college is not based on learning style. There are many different ways to approach college admissions for your special needs student. Please see your guidance counselor for options.
- Once your student has applied, the outcome can either be: accepted, rejected, deferred or wait listed. Deferred means that an early decision candidate is now combined with the regular admissions pool for consideration. Wait listed means that you are given a number and placed on a list. However, you should research any schools that you are wait listed on, as they have different policies. In general, you will be assigned a number. Some schools take very few off the wait list and others take more. Even though you have a number, students are not taken off the wait list in order, as colleges will pick and choose which students on the wait list best round out their class for that year.

II. Testing Information (SAT, ACT, Subject Tests, AP, TOEFL, etc.)

- SAT schedule: look it over and see what makes sense for your student.

- Students sign up on their own for testing, not through the guidance department. (Only PSAT registration is done through the school.)
- They use the SAT (College Board) or ACT web-site.
- SATs are offered in January, March, May, June, and again in fall. Most kids at South take them twice, some students take them three times.
- If your student needs accommodations, please be sure to allow additional time to request them.
- Test preparation is an individual choice, some use multiple test taking as their prep.
- Be aware that there are many expensive, for-profit test prep companies that offer free assessment tests to get you in the door, so they can sell their tutoring packages to you. As an alternative, the Newton South Guidance department lists several low cost options for test tutoring. (See links below.)
- For SAT Subject tests, teachers are a good source of information about whether a student is ready or not.
- If your student takes an AP (Advanced Placement) class, they will be expected to register and take the AP exam, which are given on the same day nationally. (See links for College Board web-site which lists the dates of all AP tests.)
- To register and pay for the AP exams, please contact Mary Ann Price at NSHS. (See links for her email.)
- Students who grew up speaking another language before learning English might benefit from taking the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) exam. The test is expensive and challenging, and registration often fills up fall of senior year. It's best to check with your guidance counselor before signing up to make sure this is right for your student.

III. List Building, i.e. Deciding Where to Apply

- Guidance counselors are happy to help students build their lists but there are so many schools, it's really important that a student do their own research.
- At NSHS, we generally think in terms of what are my "Reach" schools, "Match" schools and "Safety/Likely" schools
- South students apply to an average of 8-10 schools. National average is 4 – 6 applications.
- National average on the common app is 4 schools applied to, but they are thinking of capping it at 20.

IV. College Visits

- College visits: perfectly fine to only visit local representatives of the kind of schools you student is looking at. For example, UMass can stand in for a large state school, Boston University and Northeastern can stand in for an urban school, Williams and Amherst can be representative of smaller rural schools. Not visiting a school is not a negative – colleges understand that students and families are busy and distances far.
- When visiting a college, register on their web-site to hear an admissions presentation and to take a tour. Keep in mind that over February and April vacation, some presentations and tours will fill up, so plan ahead.

V. Common Application

- After a lot of difficulty this past year, the Common Application website has worked out its kinks and should be fine for our students.

- The Common Application web-site is a universal application that is an efficient way to apply to many colleges. The system resets itself every August 1. **Any work your student does on it before then will be erased!** Before August 1st, it's a good idea to go in and look around, see what this year's essay questions were and how many supplemental essays your schools requested, but don't save anything on it before August 1. (Brandeis was example of school with a lot of specific essays that were hard to repurpose. For example, "If you could be raised by a robot or an alien, which would you choose and why?")
- **Be sure student writes down their user name and password for the common app website. Eventually, it will have to match the username and password for Naviance.**
- The Common App will ask for your student's GPA (grade point average). Please use the GPA given on the students' transcript (which is the weighted sophomore – junior year NSHS GPA), so that it's consistent. (Some colleges choose to recalculate the GPA to include grades from freshman year, but you don't have to do anything about that.)
- In the Common App website, there is a PDF with very small print that has an overview of all the 400 colleges who use the Common App and their deadlines that you might like to refer to. (See list of links.)
- After taking the SATs, students might start receiving messages from colleges that their application fee is waived. Parents might be tempted to allow the student to use these "free" applications as a way to quickly apply to many more schools on the Common App. Bear in mind that colleges are doing this raise the number of applications they receive, and ultimately, to make themselves look more selective and move up in rankings. However, there is an emotional piece for each application. Please keep in mind how your student will respond if they receive lots and lots of rejections come March. Or the opposite: they might be completely overwhelmed if they get lots of acceptances, be completely lost how to choose, or want to choose a school you can't afford. That is why NSHS recommends students apply to around 10 colleges that you have carefully chosen together.

VI. Teacher Recommendations

- Teacher Recommendations: they can start asking either in the spring or the fall. If they think they want to do an early decision/early access admission, then it's a good idea to ask teachers in the spring. Ask two teachers from junior year. They will write about the student as a scholar and as a person.
- This fall: students can go in and read appraisals and see if that helps them choose which teachers to ask to do their recommendations. Newton South randomly selects two of your student's teachers at the end of each year to write an appraisal of how well your student learned that year. These appraisals are used by guidance counselors to help them understand the growth your student has experienced at Newton South.
- Keep in mind that the application deadlines are really for the student pieces of the application. If a teacher recommendation is a few days late, it's okay.
- At South, teacher recommendations are not reviewed by any one else. On Naviance, students waive their rights to see the teacher's recommendation. Once a student agrees to waive their right, they can't change it—so have to be sure about it.
- Can get recommendations from "other recommenders" such as coaches or a South staff member who knows the student well from a club, etc. These are usually mailed hardcopy and added to a file. They are more likely to be read by the admissions committees of smaller colleges, especially if a college feels they need more information to help them decide if the student is a good fit.

VII. Interviews

- Some colleges like to interview students. This can be done before or after they have applied, be done on campus or locally with an alumni, be informative or evaluative. Usually the smaller colleges prefer to do interviews, but since every school is different, it's important to research whether or not it's recommended.
- When considering whether or not to do an interview, keep in mind your student's personality. Interviews can be challenging for extremely shy or quiet students, but the guidance counselors are always available to help practice by doing mock interviews and role playing.

VIII. Additional Tips

- By far the most important thing for junior year: do as well as possible in classes, as a good high school transcript is critical. Colleges are going to be asking: what kind of a scholar is this student?
- When choosing senior classes, keep course load and balance in mind. Very important that students have time to sleep and just be.
- Guidance counselors and College Counselor Barbara Brown would like to meet with students together.
- There is a "Do What You Are" Inventory on Naviance that it would be good for students to complete. This survey helps students to identify potential career choices that match their personality and skill set.
- Note: there is a big college fair in Boston every spring. Dates this year are May 1 & 2.
- There will also be a spring college fair for small colleges.
- There are no automatic reminders on Naviance or anywhere for the many pieces that go into a completed application. This is where families can be really helpful. Some students like a giant bulletin board, some like a binder, and others like spreadsheets, etc. There is a section in Naviance in which you can input deadlines, if you choose.
- Some of the schools that are very popular with NSHS students are: UMass, Boston University, Maryland, Northeastern, Brown, Michigan and Tulane. In addition to these schools, it is helpful for a student to branch out, so you are not always competing against your classmates.
- **Please talk to your student about their virtual footprint, i.e. their presence on social media,** including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Ask.com, etc. In a recent article cited by Shelly Borg, one third of a college admissions personnel admitted to randomly searching social media sites regarding their applicants. Tech experts advise that once information exists in cyberspace, that it is impossible to completely erase it. Much safer to never post inappropriate things ever. Students think they have their Facebook settings marked private, but there are still ways to access info. Many college admissions people are young and right out of college themselves, and therefore very knowledgeable of how to access info. In particular, if your student joins the Facebook page of a college to which they've been accepted, then the college can see even farther into their Facebook postings.

IX. Recommended list of things to do next:

- Sign up for SAT and/or ACT testing (some dates/locations fill up). ACT is given at Newton North, not at South.
- Start to think about who would write a good reference (usually teacher from junior year), some teachers will limit how many evaluations they will write.
- Work with your student to plan a meaningful activity for their summer, such as a job, summer program, specialty camp, travel, etc. Think about which colleges might want to visit over the summer.
- Gather info for the Common Application. Can look at online but remember not to save anything

on that site yet, as it will reset August 1 and all prior information will be erased.

- Look at essay prompts on Common Application web-site.

X. Links for Web-sites and Information Cited in these Notes:

Guidance

<https://sites.google.com/a/newton.k12.ma.us/nshs-guidance/>

Meet the Guidance Counselors

<https://sites.google.com/a/newton.k12.ma.us/nshs-guidance/counselors>

Naviance System

<https://sites.google.com/a/newton.k12.ma.us/nshs-guidance/how-to-access-naviance>

Free and low-cost SAT/ACT test tutoring

<https://sites.google.com/a/newton.k12.ma.us/nshs-guidance/low-cost-test-prep>

Parent Information Sheet:

[http://nshs.newton.k12.ma.us/sites/nshs.newton.k12.ma.us/files/user/6/docs/guidance/Parent Info Sheet 2010.pdf](http://nshs.newton.k12.ma.us/sites/nshs.newton.k12.ma.us/files/user/6/docs/guidance/Parent%20Info%20Sheet%202010.pdf)

AP Information and Payment: MaryAnn Price maryann_price@newton.k12.ma.us

Application Deadline PDF

<https://www.commonapp.org/Login#!PublicPages/ApplicationRequirements>

GPA Calculator

<https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B0wINoSCdBUmVlk0T3g3cVZmSFk/edit>

Guidance Timeline

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XF1Bd89N_js19EK8kK0grseHDEQV0eGbWo4rQce0bVU/edit

2013 Profile of Newton South Graduating Students – Given Instead of Class Rank

<http://nshs.newton.k12.ma.us/sites/nshs.newton.k12.ma.us/files/user/6/docs/nshs/NSHSProfile2013.pdf>

NNHS College Guidebook

<http://nnhs.newton.k12.ma.us/component/content/article/127-health/6326-college-planning-guide>

Common Application

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

College Board (SAT , SAT Subject tests and AP testing)

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

ACT

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

Fastweb: <http://www.fastweb.com/>

WISE: <http://nshswiseprogram.weebly.com>