
Relationship with the College Counseling Office

Student-Parent-Counselor

The college counselors and administrative assistant are available for consultation, conferences, and trouble-shooting throughout the school year and parts of the summer. Juniors are asked to express a preference for a college counselor in January (every junior receives his/her preference) and that person becomes his/her point person for the process although we work as a team and are always available to all students. Our expectation is that juniors will meet with their college counselor several times (at least twice) before and after Spring Break. Every student is an individual and his/her college search is unique. We look forward to having a close, honest, and supportive relationship.

Our hope is to have several conferences with parents during the junior and senior years, in person and/or over the phone. Close contact helps us know the student better and keep the parents' goals and preferences in mind. Important information will be shared with parents through e-newsletters and on-campus programs during the school year. Parents are always welcome to set up appointments and ask questions via email or phone. We greatly value and depend on your partnership in this exciting process.

Junior and Senior Seminars

It is unusual for a school to dedicate a course to the college planning and application process. Junior and Senior Seminar reflect Westtown's commitment to making this process a developmental one and our acknowledgement that students learn a great deal from each other as well as from us. Beginning in the second semester, Junior Seminar begins to meet weekly and each student is assigned to a section. Attendance and the completion of assignments are required. Assignments include readings in The Fiske Guide, establishing and using a personal account in Naviance, and completing several major projects: a Letter of Introduction, the Self-Assessment Questionnaire, a draft of the Common Application. Junior Seminar prepares students to write two college essays over the summer. Our curriculum complements our individual meetings with students which focus more on developing his/her college list and issues of personal and family concern.

Summer Homework includes completing a draft of the 2016 Common Application which becomes available for rising seniors on August 1st and writing two college essays for the student's English 12 teacher.

Senior Seminar runs for the entire year. In the first semester, the college counselors continue to lead and focus on the nuts-and-bolts of the admission process: recommendations, essays, financial aid and merit scholarships, sending standardized testing to college, and Common Application forms and supplements. In the second semester, Senior Seminar is taught by Health Department faculty who focus on issues fundamental to the transition to college and the first year college experience.

The Junior College Counseling Letter

Once final grades and standardized test results are in hand, the college counselors write a personal letter home to each junior and his/her parent(s). Juniors and parents will receive this letter by email in mid to late June. This letter will review everything we have learned about the junior's college search through personal meetings, questionnaires, and Junior Seminar. We will review the student's senior year course program and make recommendations for adjustments. And we will present a list of colleges sorted by selectivity: Reach, Mid-Range, and Likely. This list will include colleges in which the student and parents have expressed interest as well as our suggestions. This list should be used by a family for research and potential summer visits. Most importantly, it should serve as a guide in terms of the student's competitiveness for admission. Our goal is that every senior will apply to some colleges in each of the three categories of selectivity.

This letter should be read carefully by student and parent(s) and used as a guide throughout the summer. The college counselors are available by email during the summer to answer questions. Our first priority in the fall will be to meet with seniors and discuss this letter: how have his/her criteria changed based on research and visits, which colleges remain on the list or have been added, and which have risen as favorites.

The Transcript

In the late winter of the junior year, an unofficial transcript will be sent to each student and his/her parents. Our goal is to have all transcripts proofed, accurate, and ready to submit to colleges by the time school resumes in September. We strive for perfect accuracy but count on students and parents to help us find omissions or errors. When you get the transcript, we will ask you to look for grades that should have been changed, credits earned during the summer, and anything else that might be inaccurate or have been omitted.

When you apply, colleges expect Westtown to submit your entire high school academic record; this includes academic credits earned at schools (high schools and middle schools) attended previously that count toward high school graduation. If you entered Westtown in the Upper School, we will let you know if the transcript submitted from your previous school is acceptable in the college admission process. These transcripts (received when you applied to Westtown) have to be "official", meaning they have to be dated and bear the signature of a school official. Colleges want all of these credits represented in your application.

Naviance

<https://connection.naviance.com/westtown>

A web-based multifaceted research and management tool used by schools across the country, Naviance has been in place at Westtown for ten years. It provides students and parents with a

variety of research tools, helps with organization and record keeping, and serves as a formal means of communicating the student's list of applications and deadlines with the College Counseling Office. From Westtown's perspective, Naviance is a teaching tool, a structure for monitoring the application progress of seniors, a means of electronic submission of transcripts and letters of recommendation to colleges, and a longitudinal database of admission outcomes.

In Junior Seminar, students are given access to their password protected Naviance Account and are taught how to use the research tools, the Game Plan, the Resume Builder, and to create a list of prospective colleges that are under consideration. By using the web address above, parents can access the Naviance "Family Connection", enter as a Guest User, and use all the tools and view the college profiles. The student's college lists ("Colleges I Am Considering" and "Colleges I Am Applying To") are password protected. Many students share their password with their parents so that everyone can be on the same page – literally - during the research and application process.

Seniors are responsible for keeping their Application List up-to-date in their Naviance Account so that the College Counseling Office knows where and when to send their transcripts and letters of recommendation. Each week in Senior Seminar, seniors have the opportunity to access their accounts and make updates with our support.

Through an electronic partnership, Naviance transmits transcripts and letters of recommendation from high school to colleges. Aside from saving paper, time, and postage, this system allow students and college counselors to track the submission and receipt of applications and school credentials. Of the over 250 colleges to which Westtown students usually apply, about 90% accept electronic transmissions. For those that do not, we prepare traditional paper mailings.

Even though this process has shifted from paper to electronic for both students and schools, it is still a laborious process for a college to assemble a student's application folder and get it ready for the evaluation process. It can take two to three weeks before a college acknowledges that an application is complete. "Hurry up and wait" is a suitable description of this entire process. Naviance is a wonderful tool but it doesn't speed things along on the colleges' side. Seniors are reminded weekly to let the college counselors know if something doesn't seem to be right on their end (or with the colleges). We are experienced trouble-shooters.

Preparation and Submission of Applications

What We Do on Our End

Based on your list of applications and deadlines in Naviance, Westtown sends a college your official transcript (grades 9-12 including transcripts from previous schools if appropriate), the recommendation written by your college counselor on behalf of the school, the secondary school report form, and the school profile. The profile describes Westtown's history, educational philosophy, curriculum, and grading system. Grade distributions from the end of the junior year and fall trimester of the senior year are also provided.

Please note the following:

- Students are responsible for keeping their Naviance “application list up-to-date and communicate any special deadlines with the College Counseling Office.
- The College Counseling Office meets all deadlines. Seniors applying to colleges with “rolling” admission are responsible for telling the office when they submit their applications. Bear in mind that colleges do not always confirm the receipt of information in a timely fashion with students. We can tell in our Naviance system that a college has received our electronic submission of a student’s transcript and recommendations.
- Westtown cannot submit transcripts electronically to Common App colleges until the student has entered the college in his/her Common Application account and Naviance Account.
- If a college is listed in a senior’s Common Application account, s/he must apply using the Common Application, not a different application.
- Seniors’ transcripts are sent out before deadlines.
- The Mid-Year Report is automatically sent to colleges with first semester senior year grades in late January.
- The Final Report (final official transcript) is automatically sent to a senior’s college the week after graduation.

Teacher Recommendations

- The procedure for deciding upon, asking, and following up with teachers concerning letters of recommendation will be discussed thoroughly in Junior and Senior Seminar. Students need to be respectful of this process.
- Students should decide upon two teachers who have taught them in academic subjects in the junior and/or senior year. It is a good strategy to think of one teacher representing reading/writing and the other analytical thinking and problem solving. Some colleges will accept a third recommendation if it adds something different to the application but it come from a unique perspective. Other colleges limit the submission of recommendations to one or two. This should be discussed with the college counselor.
- Students can ask teachers to write on their behalf in the spring of the junior year or early in the fall of the senior year. Teachers expect 3-4 working weeks notice before a student’s first deadline.
- Some teachers will ask for the student to submit a résumé, a copy of the Common App, or interview before writing a letter. Teachers understand that they are writing from their experience with you – not a general perspective (that’s our job as college counselors).
- Once a teacher accepts the invitation, the student must enter the teacher’s name in his/her Naviance account. The teacher will receive an automatic email indicating that s/he may upload the letter of recommendation. The student can tell when the recommendation has been uploaded but cannot read the letter.
- Any teacher recommendations uploaded into the student’s Naviance Account will be sent by the College Counseling Office to his/her colleges along with the student’s transcript and counselor letter.
- Students are responsible for following up with teachers about letters of recommendation and expressing their appreciation.

Supplementary Information

Most colleges encourage (some require) students to go beyond the limits of the application to send information about special talents and accomplishments. This can be done through an extra essay, a focused résumé (on a particular area of talent such as athletics, performing arts, leadership, or service), a portfolio, or a digital presentation. It is important for applicants to find out from each college the amount of information and the format preferred. Fine and Performing Arts supplements are usually submitted to colleges through *Slide Room*.

The majority of Common Application colleges have a required *Writing Supplement* that asks for additional information on legacy relationships and/or short essays on various questions.

Athletes can find information about how to connect with college coaches on a college's website. Usually there is a *Prospective Athletes' Form* on the athletics webpage for use by high school students. This is an important first step. It takes effort and persistence to get noticed by a college coach. Meet with a college counselor, the Athletic Director, and the coach of your sport in 10th or 11th grade to talk about your interest in playing on the college level and formatting a strategy for development and recruiting. If you play on a team outside of school (competitive club, travel team, summer team), be sure to keep that coach, your Westtown coach, and college counselor on the same page.

The Common Application

www.commonapp.org

A membership organization of over 400 private and public colleges and universities, the Common Application (or "Common App" as it is known) is a wonderful time saving tool for students. Students create a password protected account, fill out the application form, build a college list, pay the application fee, and submit their application(s) and supplements electronically. Most colleges require an institution-specific supplement in addition to the Common App. In Junior Seminar, students complete a draft of their Common App which they revise in the summer once the form for their application year becomes available.

A Common App is not considered complete by a college until all the other components of the application are received: transcript, standardized testing, recommendations, supplement, etc. The submission of the Common App can get complicated but seniors quickly get the hang of it and know they can come to their college counselor for support.

The student's college application list in Common App is separate from his/her list in Naviance! Naviance includes ALL colleges – not just those which accept the Common App.

Standardized Testing

The College Counseling Office supports students' testing throughout their Upper School years. We strongly recommend that juniors take the SAT twice during their junior year, the ACT (April), and Subject Tests in the spring if appropriate. The college counselors work with each junior individually to map out a testing schedule based on the student's goals, college list, and academic interests and strengths.

It is the student's responsibility to send standardized test scores to colleges (if required) based on each college's requirements and deadlines. Westtown does not send standardized test scores with a student's transcript. Colleges want to receive scores directly from the testing agency, not the student or school. Each student controls this process from their on-line account with the testing agency; the college counselors review this process in Senior Seminar and are available to help students individually as needed.

International students who are not native English speakers are required by colleges to submit the results of the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). While the TOEFL can be taken year round at commercial test centers such as Prometric, Westtown will provide transportation only on selected dates to the closest test center. Students will be given these dates and information about the registration process. It is important that students repeat the TOEFL until they reach a score of 100 with subscores of 25 on each subtest.

A Word about Discipline

Students who have been dismissed from a high school or who have received a disciplinary suspension are required to report this information on their college applications and write a brief explanation. Westtown's policy as stated in the *Student and Parent Handbook* is that the college counselor will write a statement of support on behalf of a senior who has experienced a suspension. If the suspension occurred before the student's transcript was sent to colleges, the statement is included in the counselor's letter of recommendation. If it happens after that time, then a separate letter is sent. Colleges do not disregard disciplinary information but neither do they overreact. Each college reserves the right to request the information and treat each case individually in light of their institutional policies.

Our Text Books

THE FISKE GUIDES

After using many different books over the years, we have identified the two Fiske Guides as the best on the market. In Junior and Senior Seminars, we use The Fiske Guide to Getting In to the Right College. Juniors are responsible for purchasing the book before Junior College Workshop Day in January; parents may buy a copy at a discount from Westtown or on Amazon. Ted Fiske was for many years the education editor of the New York Times and in

The Guide to Getting In to the Right College, he presents a frank, balanced, and informative look at the college search and admission process. In The Guide to Colleges, he reviews colleges from a *qualitative* perspective as opposed to facts and figures that can be found on a college's website. In Junior Seminar, students will have weekly reading assignments in The Guide to Getting In to the Right College.

A Special Note for Parents

If we could make parents sign a contact, it would say....

I promise to:

- Read e-newsletters and progress reports from the College Counseling Office.
- Meet with my child's college counselor.
- Fill out and return the *Parent Questionnaire*.
- Assume that the College Counseling Office is doing everything humanly possible to help my child.
- Communicate with my child's college counselor if I have a concern that something is not going well.
- Try and understand that we should all spend our time and energy on the parts of this process we can control and do them as well and authentically as we can.
- Remember that none of us can go this road alone. It is a team effort but our shared goal should be for the student to "own" the process and the outcomes.
- Celebrate the work and the results not just as a means to an end, but as a wonderful growth experience for the student and family – and an entrée into young adulthood.