



**Considering the Options:  
A Guidebook for Investigating  
Early College Entrance  
Student Version**

By  
Nancy M. Robinson, Ph.D.  
Professor Emerita of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences,  
University of Washington  
and  
The Davidson Institute Team

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## SECTION ONE

# An Introduction

1. Who considers early college entrance?
2. Tips for using this guidebook
3. Icons
4. Opportunities to share ideas
  - ◆ Assessment 1.1: Questions to discuss

For students whose development is markedly more rapid than that of their age-mates, there eventually comes a time when they are academically ready for college-level work at an atypically young age. For some, this may mean one or two semesters early; whereas other students may be ready at a much younger age. This guidebook is designed to serve as a self-study guide to help students gain perspective in order to:

- Decide whether early college entrance is appropriate and if so, when and where;
- Assess maturity level and readiness for early college entrance;
- Engage in the kinds of preparatory experiences that are basic prerequisites for succeeding with excellence in college-level work;
- Select, among the alternatives available, a menu of appropriate choices for college-level work;
- Determine the best fit among educational opportunities.

This guidebook is designed for students to use as an investigative tool while making decisions about early college entrance options. There are many factors to consider in this process.

### **1. Who considers early college entrance?**

Many - indeed, probably most - academically gifted students are ready intellectually for college at least one or two years before their age mates. While many of these students can handle the pressures of college life without special support, some of these students may not be ready personally for college.

For those who do opt to enter college as 16- or 17-year-olds, special provisions may or may not be necessary. They may be able to handle dorm life, to manage their own affairs with maturity, and to take advantage of the college environment, without special attention or parental support. It is very common these days to find a number of 17-year-olds on campus who have "come in the front door," fulfilling all the ordinary admissions requirements and even achieving advanced status by means of previous college courses they have taken, or the Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate credits they are awarded at the discretion of the college. (See Section 4).

However, for a few exceptionally gifted students, acceleration by a year or two is not enough. It is a very different matter to be a young student on campus than to be a 17-year-old freshman. Consequently, students who enter college more than a couple of years early, often called radical accelerants, have considerably more complex issues to deal with. For example, there may be a significant discrepancy between intellectual and personal readiness for early college entrance.

While both groups of students can profit from using this guidebook, students and parents who are contemplating radical acceleration into full-time college need to take extra care in planning ahead, weighing all alternatives, and making thoughtful decisions.

Each student who considers accelerating through secondary school and/or entering college early has his or her own reasons for doing so. While it is likely that a number of these reasons are similar, individual differences produce a myriad of possibilities. No single text could cover all potential scenarios. We encourage you to recognize the decision process as a work in progress. It is very likely that students and parents will experience unanticipated questions and concerns in this process. In addition, parents and other family members may have different perspectives from one another during the course of this decision making process.

For the benefit of everyone involved, we recommend that parents and students be open-minded and flexible when considering accelerated education and/or early college entrance.

Discuss your concerns with one another frequently and thoroughly. All too often, students and parents feel trapped by limited choices. Even when a decision has been made about acceleration, it is important to keep options open. Circumstances change. Students and parents may find that what seemed to be the best option is not what they anticipated. Open dialogue with one another is a key factor in communicating throughout the process of deciding whether or not to pursue early college entrance. By considering all the options, even those that do not initially seem to be desirable, students and parents are more likely to feel comfortable with choices that are made.

## 2. Tips for using this guidebook

This guidebook introduces ideas and issues that are relevant to making decisions about acceleration into college. These ideas and issues are organized into sections that build upon one another. While we generally recommend that those who are new to this process work through this guidebook from start to finish, the sections can also be used as independent units. Each section provides information to consider and questions to answer that are designed to engage students in critical thinking about their options. We recommend completion of all sections of this guidebook in order to achieve the maximum benefit from the information and questions included.

As mentioned, we also encourage students and parents to work together when using the Parent Version and the Student Version of the guidebook, which can be found listed separately on the Davidson Institute for Talent Development website at [www.DavidsonGifted.org/Young-Scholars/Guidebooks](http://www.DavidsonGifted.org/Young-Scholars/Guidebooks). An interactive decision process is likely to be more thorough and productive than one conducted in isolation. For this reason, we have included icons throughout the text to indicate opportunities to express your thoughts with others.

We welcome your feedback on your experience of working through this guidebook. Please feel free to contact us at [info@davidsongifted.org](mailto:info@davidsongifted.org).

## 3. Icons

The following key provides information about the icons in this guidebook:



The Parent/Student icon is placed in the text at different points where we feel it is particularly important for you to discuss the decision-making process within your family.



This icon indicates an assessment tool to help you with your decision about early college entrance.



This icon indicates additional resources or more information on a particular topic. Please see the Resource Appendix at the end of this guidebook for full citations.



## **ASSESSMENT 1.1**

### **Getting started: Questions to discuss**

We encourage students and parents to be actively engaged in the process of investigating accelerative options. We recommend students and parents think about and discuss the questions in this section before moving on through the remainder of this text.

1. What do you hope to learn about learn about yourself in the process of working through this guide?
2. What do you hope to learn about early college options?
3. How would you like each other to be involved in making decisions about accelerating through secondary school and/or entering college early?
4. How do you plan to deal with different perspectives in this process?
5. Have you set ground rules for discussions with one another?
6. How do your answers to these questions compare? Are any of them the same? Different? Are you surprised by the other's answers?

## SECTION TWO

# How I See Things: Student Self-Exploration

1. How do I see myself in comparison to other students?
2. How do I think and learn?
  - ◆ Assessment 2.1: How do I think and learn?
3. Resources on thinking and learning styles
4. What are the strengths and struggles I experience in an academic setting?
  - ◆ Assessment 2.2: Strengths & struggles I experience in an academic setting
  - ◆ Assessment 2.3: What are some characteristics of people who have successful academic experiences?
  - ◆ Assessment 2.4: What skills have I pursued?
  - ◆ Assessment 2.5: How do I balance my time and interests?
  - ◆ Assessment 2.6: With whom do I enjoy spending time?
  - ◆ Assessment 2.7: Summarizing your thoughts
5. Sharing your responses with your parent(s)
6. Resources on time management



## **1. How do I see myself in comparison to other students?**

There are many factors involved in deciding if early college entrance is the right educational option for you. While there is no single list that can be used to help make this decision, this section and the remainder of this guidebook will help you gain a better understanding of what early college entrance could mean for you.

This section is divided into a number of different areas for you to explore, and provides you with an opportunity to think about and write down important things about yourself. The information you compile in this section will be important in the process of increasing your self-awareness and your ability to articulate your interests and needs. Each area includes questions designed to facilitate further discussion of factors involved in decisions about whether you wish to pursue early college entrance. Some questions ask that you write a short passage while others ask you to circle the response that seems to fit best for you. Other items are in the form of a checklist. We encourage you to answer these questions independently before sharing your answers with your parents. Your parents can be working on the Parent Version of this guidebook while you complete the questions asked in this section.

Take as much time as you need to answer these questions. The questions you find difficult to answer might indicate areas you would like to further explore. Mark those you particularly wish to address with your parents or other adults in your life. You may also want to revisit particular items or amend your responses after spending more time thinking about what is involved in entering college early.

**Remember, this is an exploration, not a test! It is okay to be unsure of some of the answers.**

## **2. How do I think and learn?**

Everyone sees things a little bit differently. Some of the differences in how people think are related to where they are in their development. For example, many young people tend to think in a concrete manner. This involves seeing things in such a way that there appears to be a clear right or wrong answer to a question based on the information in the here and now. People who think in a more abstract manner tend to engage in active reasoning and draw conclusions based on more than just the information presented to them. Abstract thinkers are capable of formulating hypotheses and drawing conclusions based on possibilities and probabilities rather than strictly concrete information. Determining whether you are a concrete or abstract thinker may be helpful information when considering your decision regarding early college entrance.

In addition to different developmental levels, there are many stylistic variations in how people think. Differences in how people think are not always recognized or valued. This can present a challenge for those who are thinking in a way that is different from their age peers. However, this can also be useful information when deciding whether early college entrance is an appropriate option for you.

Critical thinking skills are instrumental to getting the most out of your education. Critical thinkers ask questions. In this sense, “critical” is not meant in a negative manner, but refers more to the idea of critiquing information in a constructive way. Rather than accepting facts as presented, a critical thinker seeks to understand the underlying principles or how something came to be accepted as factual. Critical thinking involves being open to possibilities and further inquiries. Many great accomplishments have resulted from people who have thought critically about existing information and come up with new ideas and solutions.

In addition to thinking differently, people also learn differently. Some people do very well in some learning environments but not so well in others. For example, some people feel they learn and retain more information if they have a chance to see, hear, and write about aspects of the information that is presented. The structure of any particular class is not likely to promote optimal learning for all students. This is often the case when there are strict guidelines about how information is presented and how assignments are to be completed. Knowing your strengths and weaknesses associated with how you think and learn can be beneficial in finding an optimal match between you and your learning environment.



## **ASSESSMENT 2.1**

### **How do I think and learn?**

Please circle the most accurate answer to the following questions.

Do I see things in a different way than my age mates do?	Yes	No	Sometimes
Do I learn much more quickly than other students my age?	Yes	No	Sometimes
Do I think “more abstractly” than other students who are my age?	Yes	No	Sometimes
Do I question facts and other information in a more constructive manner than my classmates?	Yes	No	Sometimes

*If you answered “Yes” or “Sometimes” to any of the questions listed above, please provide a brief explanation or example(s) of how you have been affected by these differences.*



### 3. Resources on thinking and learning styles

Learning about yourself in the process of considering early college entrance is at least as important as learning about your options. While understanding your thinking and learning styles is not absolutely necessary to enter college early, such knowledge can be beneficial in the creation of a positive educational environment for you. There are a number of books and resources available about thinking and learning styles, as well as developmental levels, if you or your parents have more questions about how you think and learn about things. A sample of these resources is listed below.

#### Text resources:

- *Asking the right questions: a guide to critical thinking* by M. Neil Browne, Stuart M. Keeley
- *Six thinking hats* by Edward de Bono
- *Becoming a critical thinker: a user-friendly manual* by Sherry Diestler
- *Becoming a master student* by David B. Ellis (Chapter 8 addresses thinking)
- *Thinking Styles* by Robert J. Sternberg
- *Piaget's theory of cognitive and affective development* by Barry J. Wadsworth

#### Internet resources:

- Study Guides and Strategies at <http://www.studygs.net/index.htm> provides an organized and thorough list of tips and skills, including information for specific subject areas.
- The Critical Thinking Community at Sonoma State University <http://www.criticalthinking.org> offers this library of critical thinking resources <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/index-of-articles/1021> with information to further develop critical thinking skills.

### 4. What are the strengths and struggles I experience in academic settings?

Ideally, an academic setting provides students with challenges to work through and incorporate into the process of their intellectual development. With challenges come opportunities to understand your strengths, as well as to recognize areas where you struggle. Many bright students have not often had the experience of really struggling in an academic environment. It's easy to mistakenly assume that if intellectual endeavors usually come easily, there is a problem if they become more difficult or require unprecedented effort.

A true challenge involves growth, which is often accompanied by some frustration. This frustration may stem from realizing that problem-solving techniques or processes that have worked in other situations need to be modified. Some tasks require more effort than you are used to applying to an intellectual task. Learning to recognize that strengths and struggles are both important components in intellectual growth and development will assist you in successfully navigating the challenges you will face along the academic paths you choose.



## **ASSESSMENT 2.2**

### **What are the strengths and struggles I experience in academic settings?**

Please take a moment to consider the following items on this topic . . .

My greatest strengths are:

I have worked to improve my strengths by:

My greatest struggles in academic settings are:

I have worked to overcome these struggles by:

How do I handle being frustrated by something that is difficult?

How do I handle rules? Do I handle rules differently at school than at home? If so, how?

How do I deal with a situation when I feel I'm under too much stress or have too much to do?

Who or what has been supportive of my strengths and efforts?



### **ASSESSMENT 2.3**

#### **What are some characteristics of people who have successful academic experiences?**

Please provide a brief list of characteristics you think describe each of the following:

**... an effective learner:**

**... an excellent student:**

1. How do the characteristics you identified relate to one another?
2. Do some of the characteristics you identified apply to both effective learners and excellent students?
3. If so, what characteristics are they?
4. Which of these characteristics do you feel that you exhibit?
5. Has anyone told you that you have particular characteristics that match any of those you listed? If so, which ones?
6. Are there characteristics you listed that you would like to develop? If so, which ones?



## **ASSESSMENT 2.4**

### **What skills have I pursued?**

Developing skills takes practice. Even if you have a great talent in a particular area, it's likely that it will take some time and effort to further develop the skills involved in making the most of your talent.

*Please create a list of the activities you have been involved in. This list can include anything of interest to you that involves the development of skills. For example, if you have played an instrument, please list the instrument(s) you have played and the length of time you have played.*

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Number of Years</b>

Which of the activities you listed above have involved practicing, even if you didn't always feel like it?

How do you feel about your progress in developing these skills?

Have I been able to seek out assistance when I've felt stuck? How?



## ASSESSMENT 2.5

### How do I balance my time and interests?

Effective time management skills are essential for success and satisfaction in school, both before and after you enter college. Such skills will not only keep you on schedule with plenty of time allotted for all tasks, but will also give you the empowering feeling of being efficient and on track. Furthermore, you'll be able to make time for your social life, pursuit of your interests, and physical activities that will keep you healthy. Here are some things to think about...

Please circle the most accurate response to the following statements.

- |  |     |    |           |
|--|-----|----|-----------|
| 1. I effectively prioritize tasks  | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 2. My life feels comfortably "full."   | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 3. My life feels too full, to the point of being out of control.   | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 4. I get my homework done promptly and independently.  | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 5. I consistently turn in my homework.   | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 6. I wait until the last minute to finish an assignment or project.  | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 7. I am comfortable taking tests.  | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 8. I study for tests in a systematic way.  | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 9. In my academic work, I do my best.  | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 10. In my academic work I feel OK if I just get by with the minimum.                                       | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 11. I push myself.   | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 12. I need others to push me.  | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 13. I can take suggestions from others.  | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 14. I ask for help when I need it.   | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 15. I enjoy feeling challenged.  | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 16. I can tolerate structured guidance from others.  | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 17. I am able to manage at least a couple of extracurricular activities without much help from my parents. | Yes | No | Sometimes |



## ASSESSMENT 2.5 (CON'T)

- |   |     |    |           |
|---|-----|----|-----------|
| 18. I spend a lot of time playing computer and/or video games.              | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 19. I spend a lot of time investigating many topics on the Internet.        | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 20. I spend a lot of time researching my areas of interest on the Internet. | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| They are: _____   |     |    |           |
| 21. I spend a lot of time watching TV.                                      | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 22. I spend a lot of time reading in just one or two genres.                | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| They are: _____   |     |    |           |
| 23. I spend a lot of time reading in areas of my special interests.         | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| They are: _____   |     |    |           |
| 24. I spend a lot of time reading, and my reading interests are broad.      | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 25. I spend a lot of time hanging out with my friends.                      | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 26. I spend a lot of time performing music/dance                            | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 27. I spend a lot of time participating in athletics                        | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 28. I spend a lot of time doing: _____                                      |     |    |           |

*Review your responses to the statements listed on the two previous pages and consider the following questions.*

1. How would you describe your ability to wisely prioritize tasks?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Are you surprised by any of your responses? If so, which ones?

## ASSESSMENT 2.5 (CON'T)

3. Are there any statements you wish you could honestly respond to differently? If so, which ones?
  
4. Which statement(s) address behaviors you would most like to change?
  
5. How can you go about changing these behaviors?
  
6. Who or what might assist you in changing these behaviors? Place a check mark next to all that apply.
  - Parent(s)
  - Other family member(s)
  - Teacher(s)
  - Tutor(s)
  - Friend(s)
  - Classmate(s)
  - Peer mentor      Daily planner
  - Assignment planner/calendar
  - Clock/watch, alarm
  - Schedule
  - Study skills guide(s)
  - Priority list(s)
  - Other ideas (please specify)



## **ASSESSMENT 2.6**

### **With whom do I enjoy spending time?**

In thinking about the social situations you may encounter if you go to college early, it's a good idea to think about the friends you have and whether early college entrance would help or hinder your ability to find compatible friends. For some students, a lack of friends and/or intellectual peers is one of the reasons to seek the company of older students. For others, the lack of age-peers in a college setting would be felt as a serious loss. If you've been successful at making friends before, you are likely to be successful at making new friends; if you haven't made many friends, it may be that you haven't found others who share your interests.

Please place a checkmark by each of the following statements that describe your social situation.

- I feel that I don't have enough friends.
- I have a circle of friends who like me.
- I feel that I have about the right number of friends, but I do not have a deep connection with any of them
- I have at least one good friend with whom I have a truly satisfying relationship.
- I feel lonely much of the time.
- I hardly ever feel lonely.
- I'm very shy in social situations.
- I feel reasonably confident in social situations.
- I feel comfortable with people who are different from me.

## ASSESSMENT 2.6 (CON'T)

Please circle the most accurate response to the following statements.

I most enjoy spending my time with...

- |  |     |    |           |
|--|-----|----|-----------|
| 1. People my own age                                       | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 2. People who are older than I am                          | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 3. People who are younger than I am                        | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 4. Bright students   | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 5. Students who share academic<br>6. interests with me     | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 7. Students who share non-academic<br>8. interests with me | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 9. Members of my family                                    | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 10. People of the same gender                              | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 11. People of the opposite gender                          | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 12. Popular students                                       | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 13. Unpopular students                                     | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 14. A group of friends or acquaintances                    | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 15. One friend at a time                                   | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| 16. Other (please describe)                                | Yes | No | Sometimes |



## **ASSESSMENT 2.7**

### **Summarizing your thoughts**

Now that you've had the opportunity to think about a variety of factors that influence whether early college entrance would be an optimal match for you, it's a good time to summarize your thoughts regarding the decision process. As you work through the remainder of this guidebook, we recommend that you refer back to this assessment tool to help you continually think about and update what you see as the potential rewards and challenges of early college entrance.

*Please list what you currently perceive to be the greatest potential rewards and challenges of early college entrance.*

Potential Rewards	Potential Challenges



## 5. Sharing your responses with your parent(s)

At this point, we recommend that you spend some time discussing this section with your parent(s). Your parent(s) have answered similar questions about you and your interests in Parent Version of this guidebook.

*Here are some questions to consider as you talk with your parents:*

1. How will you and your family handle situations in which you have different perspectives about answers you have provided here?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How might you and your family use this information in the process of deciding if and how to pursue early college options?



## 6. Resources on time management

There are an amazing number of resources available to assist you in effectively managing your time. Here are a few we recommend to get you started:

Text resource:

- *Becoming a master student* by David B. Ellis (Chapter 2 addresses time)

Internet resources:

- Learning Strategies, The University of Kansas <https://sim.drupal.ku.edu/learning-strategies>
- Managing Your Time, Dartmouth <https://students.dartmouth.edu/academic-skills/learning-resources/time-management-tips>
- Time Management Tips, University of Minnesota Duluth Student Handbook [http://www.d.umn.edu/kmc/student/loon/acad/strat/time\\_manage.html](http://www.d.umn.edu/kmc/student/loon/acad/strat/time_manage.html)

You can also find links and information on a growing number of programs and resources by accessing our searchable database, Davidson Gifted Database. We welcome submissions of new resources as well as comments on existing resources listed on Davidson Gifted Database at [www.DavidsonGifted.org/Search-Database](http://www.DavidsonGifted.org/Search-Database).

SECTION THREE

## **Advantages & Disadvantages of Early College Entrance**

1. Where have I been and where am I going?
  - ◆ Assessment 3.1: Where have I been and where am I going?
2. What am I looking forward to? What am I not looking forward to?
  - ◆ Assessment 3.2: When I think about attending high school, I see...
  - ◆ Assessment 3.3: When I think about attending college, I see...
  - ◆ Assessment 3.4: Summarizing and sharing your thoughts
3. Why would one want to skip, or even shorten, the high school experience?
4. Potential advantages of early college entrance
5. Potential disadvantages of early college entrance

## **1. Where have I been and where am I going?**

It is important in the context of working through this guide to express your thoughts on why you are considering early college entrance. As you advance academically, you will be required to write more frequently and at greater length. People will want to know what you think about particular topics and you will need the ability to express such thoughts in writing. People you talk with throughout the decision process will want to know about your academic trajectory. It's likely that you will encounter people who do not agree with your educational plan. In these instances, it will be helpful to have thoughtfully considered why you are accessing college opportunities so that you can concisely explain your reasoning, if you choose to do so.



### **ASSESSMENT 3.1**

#### **Where have I been and where am I going?**

To help you prepare for such experiences, we recommend that you take some time to write at least one page about your academic experiences and aspirations.

Please include a summary of where you've been, where you are now, and where you'd like to go in terms of your education.

Please use the remainder of this page, using as much space as necessary.



## 2. What am I looking forward to? What am I not looking forward to?

You probably have some ideas and expectations about what high school and college would be like for you. Entering college early may involve skipping part or even all of high school. While they vary somewhat from one individual to another, there are advantages and disadvantages to early college entrance. There are likely to be at least a few things you are looking forward to and a few things that you're not looking forward to, regardless of the final decision you make about early college entrance. The following list is designed to assist you in further investigating how you feel about particular activities and opportunities associated with high school and college.



### ASSESSMENT 3.2

#### When I think about attending high school, I see...

*Please circle the more correct response.*

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Extracurricular activities: newspaper, band/orchestra, clubs       | Y | N |
| 2. Running for a student government position                          | Y | N |
| 3. Team sports and individual sports competitions                     | Y | N |
| 4. Academic or music competitions                                     | Y | N |
| 5. Junior year abroad   | Y | N |
| 6. Social experiences with friends                                    | Y | N |
| 7. Special academic opportunities (including scholarships and awards) | Y | N |
| 8. Slower academic pace   | Y | N |
| 9. Running out of courses in interest area(s)                         | Y | N |
| 10. Friends who don't share my interests and priorities               | Y | N |
| 11. Other (please describe)   |   |   |

Which of your responses reflect potential positive aspects of attending **high school**? Potential negative aspects?



### ASSESSMENT 3.3

#### When I think about attending college, I see...

*Please circle the most correct response.*

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Academic challenges that encourage real engagement and excitement  | Y | N |
| 2. More mature friends  | Y | N |
| 3. Much broader selection of courses  | Y | N |
| 4. An opportunity to study subjects more in-depth   | Y | N |
| 5. Faster trajectory to graduate studies  | Y | N |
| 6. Other (please describe) _____  |   |   |
| 7. Demands for independence, time management, study skills, etc.  | Y | N |
| 8. Taking more responsibility for my education  | Y | N |
| 9. A higher degree of stress than I'm used to   | Y | N |
| 10. Having to do a lot of writing on my own   | Y | N |
| 11. Difficulty in establishing a circle of friends who are accepting of a younger student                   | Y | N |
| 12. Difficulty in finding friends who share my interests  | Y | N |
| 13. Having to be a commuter when many students live on campus, or having to live on campus before I'm ready | Y | N |
| 14. Lack of opportunity to participate in sports  | Y | N |
| 15. Other (please describe) _____   |   |   |

Which of your responses reflect potential positive aspects of attending **college**? Potential negative aspects?



### **ASSESSMENT 3.4**

#### **Summarizing and sharing your thoughts**

How did you see the positives and negatives in a high school versus a college setting? Did you find that there are a greater number of things that you look forward to in a high school setting or a college setting? What are your thoughts on how to balance the potential gains and losses of early college entrance?



Have you shared these thoughts with your parents and other important adults in your life? How do their ideas compare to yours? What compromises can each of you make to most effectively address your thoughts on what you look forward to in different educational settings?

### **3. Why would one want to skip, or even shorten, the high school experience?**

For highly gifted students, the ordinary pace of secondary school often proves a poor match for their intellectual level and developmental pace in comparison to the fierce love of learning that is so important in their lives. It is this mismatch with the ordinary secondary school curriculum that drives many students to search for a better academic fit.

Students who are advanced academically often long for friends who are as personally mature as they are, who share their finely tuned interests and sophisticated sense of humor, whose quickness and depth of thinking equals theirs, and who share their mature sense of intimacy and loyalty in friendships. Many exceptionally bright students, throughout their lives, have felt more comfortable with adults and older students than with their age-mates. They anticipate greater ease in finding compatible friends at the college level than in high school.

### **4. Potential advantages of early college entrance**

If the following points seem to describe you and your experiences, entering college early may be a viable option for you:

- If even the most challenging courses open in your school seem to move at glacial speed and next year's classes seem no more promising, the challenge of college courses may look very attractive.
- If you love learning – you feel a hunger to acquire a deeper understanding of your world either about a variety of topics or a few – and you enjoy (yes, enjoy) communicating your ideas by writing and talking about them, college study may be what you're looking for.
- If you have a long educational trajectory ahead (perhaps you want to go into neurological surgery or obtain multiple graduate or professional degrees), getting an early start may also look attractive. However, this path doesn't necessarily call for radical acceleration.
- If your current friends' interests don't match yours – especially if their priorities are less ambitious than yours and they are not very engaged with their studies – then college friends might be more compatible. Of course, you might look deliberately for a new set of friends without going to college early. You might look for a more academically serious high school, or join clubs devoted to your talent area, or get into competitions where you'll meet other serious students. Loneliness may not be a good enough reason to skip high school, but it's a serious reason.

### **5. Potential disadvantages of early college entrance:**

If the following passages describe you and your experiences, you may want to spend some additional time thinking through the potential disadvantages of entering college early:

- For many students, secondary school (middle school and high school) provides special opportunities that would be lost by early entrance to college. Consider carefully what is important in your life. Are you looking forward to editing the school newspaper? Playing in the orchestra or jazz band? Competing in the Math Olympiad or the Intel science competition? Completing an IB diploma? Going to the Prom? Being valedictorian at your high school graduation? Spending a year as a foreign exchange high-school student? However, even if many of these activities and opportunities interest you, you may not feel it's worthwhile to remain in high school for years to enjoy them. Be sure

to explore what opportunities are open to you at the colleges you are considering – some of these, such as working on the school paper or playing in the band, may be available.

- If competitive sports such as golf or tennis, or contact sports such as football or basketball, are important in your life, you may want to defer putting yourself in the college scene. The physical maturity and size of the usual-age college student might well provide too much competition and even prove a hazard in contact sports. On the other hand, you should check out whether you could continue to participate in high school sports even if you are a full-time college student.
- On a more academic note, bright as you are, you may not yet have all the prerequisites in place for excellence in college-level work. This is not so much what you know, but how well you are prepared to cope with demands on a level you may not have experienced before. Working through the remainder of this guidebook will help you to identify skills and maturities in outlook that would be beneficial to you in a college setting. If they're not in place, you may want to postpone entrance until you've been able to acquire them.
- Very young students, even extraordinarily bright ones, often aren't yet comfortable with conceptual thinking on an abstract level. Logical as they may be, they are more likely to see relationships in the here-and-now, in a relatively concrete mode – and some need more time to mature in their thinking.
- And of course, the social setting is very different in college. Depending on the institution you choose, you may find yourself the only very young person on campus. At some colleges, almost everyone lives in dorms. If you're younger than 16, you'll more than likely be living at home. Dorm life often presents too many opportunities for distraction (and temptation) for the young student. At some other colleges, especially community colleges, few people spend any more time on campus than they have to; many of them have jobs or families to take care of. Even if you find a circle of friends with similar intellectual interests, the age difference will pose (not necessarily insurmountable) barriers to deep friendships. You need to face this issue head on and decide how you will handle issues such as not being able to drive a car, limits on the social affairs you can or want to attend, and situations that are risky.
- On the other hand, most of the highly significant experiences you'll encounter during your college years will take place outside the classroom. Some will involve working with individual professors and their research groups; some will involve study groups you and your fellow students create informally to deepen and extend your understanding of the material; some will be social and academic opportunities to interact with people whose backgrounds, ideas, and values are very different from yours; some will take place during campus extracurricular or service opportunities in which you engage. If you are participating in campus life marginally as a young student and living at home, you may miss out on some of these valuable growth experiences.

A greater understanding of what you identify as advantages and disadvantages associated with early college entrance can assist you in the decision process. What you perceive as advantages and disadvantages may change somewhat over time. As such, we recommend that you investigate alternatives to full-time early college entrance. The next section is designed to help identify a variety of options to assist you in finding an optimal match between your interests, expectations, and educational opportunities.



You and your parent(s) may wish to take some time to refer back to the potential rewards and challenges you each identified in Assessment 2.7 in the Student Version and the Parent Version of the Guidebook, respectively. Is there anything you would like to add, change or discuss before continuing?

## SECTION FOUR

# Alternatives to Early College Entrance

◆ Assessment 4.1: Which alternatives to early college entrance have I participated in or considered?

1. My experiences with alternatives to early college entrance
2. What choices do I have?
3. Adjust your classes and/or schooling environment
4. Consider distance learning and correspondence options
5. Participate in Talent Searches and/or engage in summer learning opportunities
6. Assess your abilities by taking out-of-level testing
7. Investigate summer options
8. Pursue a challenging activity or create a significant project
9. Resource summary of alternative options



## ASSESSMENT 4.1

### Which alternatives to early college entrance have I participated in or considered?

There are many opportunities to enrich one's learning experiences that do not involve actually entering college early as a full-time student, including some part-time college options. Most students who have been successful with full-time early college entrance have investigated at least some of the options listed below. (In-depth descriptions of many of these options are available directly following this assessment.)

Please circle the most appropriate response for the following options before proceeding:

Key: Y = Yes, I have done this. N = No, I have not done this. C = I have considered this.

#### Academic Opportunities at My Grade Level

Within classes that move too slowly, taking the initiative to deepen understanding by more advanced reading, independent projects.

Y N C

Opting for honors sections of classes

Y N C

Taking on-line or correspondence courses in subjects I like

Y N C

#### Acceleration Opportunities

Skipping a grade

Y N C

Taking one or more subjects at a higher grade level than mine

Y N C

Taking advantage of AP or IB classes in my school

Y N C

Taking on-line AP classes

Y N C

Taking fast-paced summer classes like those offered by talent-search programs (e.g., Johns Hopkins, Duke, Northwestern) or other academically advanced summer programs

Y N C

#### Dual Credit or College-Credit Opportunities

Taking AP or IB examinations (can take AP exams without course)

Y N C

Taking college classes on-line

Y N C

Taking college classes while still taking high school classes

Y N C

Taking college classes on a summer-only basis

Y N C

#### Other High-School Possibilities

Attending an academically advanced high school in my town (private or public)

Y N C

Attending a competitive, specialized math-science or other high school

Y N C

Attending a first-rate boarding school

Y N C



## ASSESSMENT 4.1 (CONT.)

### Other Activities

Seriously pursuing, on a long-term basis, a skill (such as dance, music, math computations, or a sport) that takes sustained practice and has a high standard of excellence toward which I can see myself move	Y	N	C
Working with a mentor in my primary area(s) of interest	Y	N	C
Studying a foreign language	Y	N	C
Competing in contests (e.g., math, science, debate, chess)	Y	N	C
Auditing a college level course at a community college or university	Y	N	C
Participating in a foreign-exchange program	Y	N	C
Participating in the local community: volunteering in a laboratory, office, or other career-related opportunity	Y	N	C
Participating in academic summer programs for advanced students	Y	N	C
Giving back to my community: tutoring younger children, volunteering in a hospital or food bank, or a museum	Y	N	C
Developing a small business of my own; working on an invention; writing short stories; collecting stamps or coins, etc.	Y	N	C

## **1. My experiences with alternatives to early college entrance**

If you answered “Yes” to any of the above questions, you have already begun to explore options for broadening your experiences and knowledge base. These experiences will likely be beneficial to you in an early college entrance situation. Are there experiences listed above that you have tried but did not enjoy? What factors contributed to any less-than-positive experiences with these options? Engaging in activities such as those listed above can help you put off entering college if there are things you are looking forward to doing in high school or college and you don’t want to miss such opportunities by accelerating too rapidly.

We recommend that you collect materials and information on all of the alternatives listed above in which you have participated. It may be a good idea to keep them in a file, binder or another central location so that you have them readily available when it comes time to complete college applications forms. You may want to include segments or all of this guidebook along with those papers. Some families who have been through early college enrollment found understanding from university admissions officers when they explained that alternative options have not provided appropriate academic challenge or a true peer group.

If you answered “No” or “Considered” to these questions, we strongly recommend that you engage in some of these or similar activities to diversify your academic acceleration experiences. If you have considered some of these options, but have not pursued them, take a few moments to identify factors involved in not participating in these programs or activities. We also recommend discussing your interests with your parents and other important adults in your life, since these decisions affect them as well.

If you have considered some of these options in the past or even if you’re just beginning to consider them, you may need additional information to decide if they are viable options for you. Please check out the following information on alternatives to early college entrance.

## **2. What choices do I have?**

Don’t rush into full-time college. Keep in mind that enrolling in a college class won’t necessarily guarantee that you won’t be bored. You may have more appropriate opportunities in secondary school, such as independent study and teacher support. Often, an AP class in high school is more challenging than the same course taught at a community college. Furthermore, most exceptionally bright students plan to eventually attend a first-rate graduate or professional school. A first-rate college experience is often the best preparation for post-college education. Waiting a year or so to enroll full-time may also give you a chance to develop your experience, skills, and social and emotional maturity.

You have a widening array of accelerative and enrichment choices, including an increasing number of on-line experiences to put you in touch with structured courses, tutors, community resources, and other students with similar interests. You may also choose to take just one or two college courses on a university campus as a “trial run.” Many of these options can also be used to introduce flexibility into your school program so that you can focus on areas of interest, take two courses in the same subject such as in foreign languages or band and orchestra, meet college prerequisites or requirements early, or simply enrich what you are learning at school.

The following sections provide some alternatives – short of full-time college enrollment - to get you thinking.

## **3. Adjust your classes and/or schooling environment**

- When choosing classes to take, opt for honors sections.

- Enroll in classes above your grade level in your area(s) of strength.
- Skip a grade, although this is more difficult to do in high school than elementary or middle school.
- Enroll concurrently in high school and a nearby college, thereby usually earning credit at both levels for college courses you take. Select courses carefully for challenge!
- If your classes seem slow, do something about it. The more knowledge you acquire about a subject, the less "boring" the class will be. Take responsibility! For example, try moving through the material quickly (but with mastery) to give you more time for independent work or reading a more advanced book, such as a biography of a key player in the field or original documents mentioned in the text. In addition, you can consult a college text on the subject, undertake a project that will deepen your understanding and interest, or participate in related contests (there are several in math, science, and writing – see information below on creating a significant project).
- If your district or state offers a special math-science or other selective high school relevant to your interests or talents, go for it!
- If you live in a community without strong public or private high schools, consider a first-rate boarding school.
- Arrange your high-school courses so that you can participate in foreign study during your junior year without worrying about high school credit. Programs often focus on particular areas of interest, such as language, science, art, or environmental studies, in addition to opportunities for cultural interactions. You may contact your local high schools and/or colleges and universities to inquire about study abroad programs. Other organizations in your community or nationwide may also provide opportunities. Study abroad databases are available at <https://www.petersons.com> and <https://www.studyabroad.com>. Make sure to check out any organization thoroughly, including a visit to the Better Business Bureau website at <https://www.bbb.org/>.
- Take the Advanced Placement (AP) credit courses your local high school offers. These courses provide a college-level experience that can also involve college credit or the opportunity to skip some undergraduate material, but only if you take the AP exam(s) and make a score of 3, 4, or 5. Courses are typically offered at local high schools and some classes are available on-line as well. In addition, you may take AP exams without taking the courses.

To find out more about your options for AP classes, contact your local high school or State Board of Education for further information on location and availability. You can also read about the AP program on the College Board website at <https://apstudent.collegeboard.org/home>. For on-line AP classes, access <https://www.apexlearning.com/>.

- Enroll in a high school offering an International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. This is a comprehensive offering of rigorous high-school courses in the junior and senior years. Lead-up programs often start as early as junior high. If, after the junior-senior classes, you do well on the related international examinations, credits may be awarded by the college you attend.

- See [www.ibo.org](http://www.ibo.org) and/or *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, 11, pp. 52-66. You may also contact your local school district or State Department of Education to find the IBO program nearest you.
- Not all colleges and universities accept IB credits. Check with the institutions you're interested in to find out about their policy on this.

#### **4. Consider distance learning and correspondence options**

Enroll in high-school correspondence, distance learning, or independent study classes.

- Distance Learning Options <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/topic/105271/entryType/2>
- Davidson Academy Online High School <http://www.davidsonacademy.unr.edu/Online>

Take distance-learning classes from a university, which may allow you to earn high school and college credit. See Peterson's <http://www.petersons.com> in addition to searching the Davidson Gifted Database at <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database> and the Internet.

#### **5. Participate in Talent Searches and/or engage in summer learning opportunities**

A number of Talent Search programs offer young students the chance to test themselves on challenging measures of academic aptitude and also offer summer programs. Application for the talent search exams is made in the fall. All of the Talent Searches are regional; they range from single-state searches to quite large ones. This article provides an updated list of the talent searches in the United States:

- Talent Search Opportunities across the United States; many have summer programs <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10260>

The [Davidson THINK Summer Institute](#) is one academic summer option. Additional summer learning opportunities can be found by searching the Internet and these pages:

- Davidson Gifted Database: Summer Programs <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10069> and <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/topic/105217/entryType/2>
- National Association for Gifted Children: Summer Programs <http://giftedandtalentedresourcesdirectory.com/>
- Hoagies': Saturday and Summer Programs <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/summer.htm>

Be sure that you select an academically serious program and not just an "enrichment" program that provides a bit of this and a bit of that. Often, you can gain one half to a full high school credit from your school by participating in a Talent Search summer program, but you need to arrange this with your high school before you get there. (Most summer students will still be in middle school.) Be sure to arrange with your school that you will have appropriate placement when you return from the summer; nothing could be worse for a bright student than repeating a required course like Algebra 2! Be sure to apply early because the good programs fill up very quickly.

## **6. Assess your abilities by taking out-of-level testing**

Just participating in the talent search aspects – taking the challenging, or “out-of-level,” tests meant for considerably older students – can be a very valuable experience for a number of reasons, but it is an especially appropriate thing to do if you are considering early college entrance. The major tests, the SAT and the ACT, are the same ones you will have to take when you actually apply for college. By taking these tests when you are in seventh or eighth grade (or with special permission, when you are even younger), you can get a decent idea of how your intellectual maturity currently stacks up against the students who are applying to the colleges you are considering. (Of course, when you take the tests once you are older, you will very likely attain higher scores.) Scores earned by students who are below ninth grade are typically not reported to colleges when you take the test later, unless you choose to do so.

Some of the Talent Searches also provide out-of-level testing (about eighth grade level) on other measures for even younger students. For example, the EXPLORE test of the American College Testing Program and the PLUS test of the Educational Testing Service are offered in some of the regional talent searches.

In addition to identifying and gauging your strengths, you may find that you need to improve your abilities in specific subject areas or skills that haven’t seemed as important in the past. For example, some students are very strong in math and can make significant changes in their verbal readiness for college by increasing the amount, depth, and breadth of their reading; those who are very strong verbally but have cared less about math, can do more work in that area.

These test scores may also provide objective evidence of your abilities to counselors and others who can help you find an appropriate educational match. If your scores are strong, they will be convincing when you ask for admission to a program ordinarily meant for older students. In any event, they will provide some important feedback to you and your parents, and will give you experience that will be helpful when you take the test “for real” later on.

High enough test scores will also provide eligibility for the summer programs offered by these talent search programs as well as a number of others built on the same model. This model was originally developed at Johns Hopkins University by Dr. Julian Stanley and spread nationally because it was such an effective way to meet the needs of bright young scholars who thought that a good way to spend part of the summer was in academically serious study, along with other young people of high ability and high motivation. The residential summer programs in this model (in three weeks, you complete the equivalent of a full year’s high school course at an honors level) provide not only academic challenge but also a chance to become friends with other like-minded students. This is a very special experience for all exceptionally bright students, but especially those who are being home schooled.

## **7. Pursue a challenging activity or create a significant project**

Do something else to creatively keep your interest, motivation, time management, and organization skills alive. Volunteer in a laboratory, office, or community service related to a career you are considering. Find an adult in an occupation or program of study you find attractive and ask them to “mentor” your efforts. Study a foreign language with a native-speaker in your community. Start a small business. Consider activities such as individual sports, chess, computer programming, collecting stamps or coins, writing, playing an instrument, composing music, dancing, and/or painting.

Pick a challenging activity in which you can see your own improvement as the result of sustained effort. Invest in yourself by becoming as skilled as you can. The more you stick with a challenging activity through the rough spots and see yourself getting a bit closer to a

standard of excellence, the more you'll know how to handle yourself when other barriers get in your way. Practice! Don't settle for being well rounded (a dilettante at many things) at the expense of expertise. You may interact with others who share your interests by getting involved in teams and competitions. This website has a list of some of these opportunities: <http://cty.jhu.edu/imagine/resources/index.html>

Pursue a subject in-depth and create a project of significance. The process of creating a significant project can function as a focused way to continue developing your interests. Working with a mentor in this capacity can also be a valuable experience. Consider submitting your project for a Davidson Fellows Award. Eligibility and details can be accessed at <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Fellows-Scholarship>.

You can also find links and information on a growing number of programs and resources by accessing our searchable database, Davidson Gifted Database. We welcome submissions of new resources as well as comments on existing resources listed on Davidson Gifted Database at <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database>.

## SECTION FIVE

# Preparation for Early College Entrance

1. How do I need to prepare myself for a college experience?
2. How are my study skills?
  - ◆ Assessment 5.1: How are my study skills?
  - ◆ Assessment 5.2: How's my writing?
  - ◆ Assessment 5.3: How are my mathematical skills?
3. Homeschooling to college – A guide for transition and documentation
4. Resources on homeschooling to college
5. Additional thoughts on preparation for early college entrance

## **1. How do I need to prepare myself for a college experience?**

Students who are successful in college aren't just smart; they are skilled, knowledgeable, organized, and highly motivated. They are also flexible and resourceful in seeking assistance. Especially if they have skipped some of the usual steps along the way, they need to be sure they are broadly prepared.

Remember that you will need to take courses in a variety of fields to fulfill the liberal arts requirements of undergraduate education, not just the courses in your area of interest. As a full-time college student, you do get to choose from a rich menu of courses, but you'll have to take some from "Column A, Column B, and Column C" before concentrating on your major. At the same time, if you think you are headed for eventual concentration in math, science, or engineering, you need to be prepared to take a healthy menu of college-level math and science courses right away while also fulfilling the other requirements. These are some recommendations to assist you in your preparation for early college entrance:

### **Priorities**

- You need to have developed time management skills and independence from your teachers and parents in handling the affairs of your life. Managing time well is the most significant way in which effective and ineffective students differ from one another. You'll have a good deal of what seems to be free time – typically, you'll only be in class 15 to 18 hours a week, even with a lab – but for each credit hour you are taking, you will be expected to do about two to three hours of independent work. If you need a parent to keep you organized, if you don't do your homework in a timely way or read assignments before they are discussed in class, you're not ready to benefit fully from a college experience. (Review time management information and suggested resources in Section 2 as needed.)
- Managing time well does not mean devoting all your time to your studies, and it does not mean secluding yourself from other students and doing everything on your own. You need to be able to make time for at least one outside activity, to keep yourself physically active, and to manage time to talk and study with fellow students in order to deepen your understanding and to become acquainted with different ways of looking at the same ideas.
- You also need to learn how to pick and choose among extra-curricular activities so that you can focus on a few you really enjoy. Often, you need to learn how to graciously turn down some interesting offers so that you can keep your life manageable. Many under-challenged secondary school students fill up their lives with a great many activities either to avoid boredom or because they think they need to be "well-rounded" for colleges to want them. If you continue such a pattern at college, you are likely to be too scattered to do quality work or to be an effective leader at any of the activities you do decide to undertake.

### **Stress management**

- You need to think about how you manage stress – both academic and otherwise – and to practice effective strategies to get through stressful periods. Often, students who are stressed begin to spin their wheels, use their time poorly, give up opportunities for pleasurable activities, and endure sleep deprivation that only worsens the situation. Whom do you talk with when you are stressed? How do you break the pattern? Are you able to prioritize? Are you able to break down tasks to do-able portions? Do you make plans and stick to them? Can you take a reasonable break and come back refreshed? Does listening to music or doing physical activity help you? What else gets you back in charge of your life?



- You need to learn how to ask for help! Often, very bright students have had practically no experience asking questions when they are stymied, because they seldom have that experience in regular school. You need to ask questions in a way that helps specify exactly where you are stuck. Be sure you learn where to find such help – during the office hours of your professor or his/her teaching assistant, homework hotlines, homework labs on campus, on-line materials, asking your fellow students (you're probably used to other students asking you), or talking to the professor after class. Be prepared with your questions and be sure that you've done the work expected of you.
- One of the best ways to prepare not only for college but also for productivity during the rest of your life is to have pursued a talent area over a period of time with perseverance and pleasure. If you play the violin, for example, you have the great advantage of having a concept of what constitutes excellence in performance, a sense of the payoff you get for disciplined practice, a pride in your own progress toward your goals, an ability to take your coach's criticism in a positive light, and an ability to encounter rough spots and figure out ways through or around them.

### **Diversity**

- You need to be prepared to meet and to respect people who have backgrounds and ideas very different from your own, and to be open to new ideas yourself. That may be the main thing that college is all about. Growth is change. Sometimes, when very young students attend college, they are not confident enough to examine their own beliefs and to let themselves modify those ideas in line with their new experiences. You need to be able to see your college studies in a broad context, valuing the increasingly complex ways in which you view the world and enriching your life beyond the classroom.

### **Academic skills**

- You need to consider how you present yourself in class. Learn to be succinct but clear in your class comments and questions – and respectful of others. Be sure that your contribution forwards the discourse and isn't just a matter of waiting until your turn to comment on something that was said ten minutes before.
- You need to have note-taking skills in situations you are unlikely to have encountered previously – 50-minute lectures, somewhat disorganized class discussions, class schedule changes, even videos. Skills at outlining help a great deal, but a lot of practice is essential. Develop a set of abbreviations for frequently used words or expressions. Give yourself a number of opportunities to practice these skills in the year or so before you go to college. Attend public lectures and take notes, take notes while watching television documentaries, take notes in your regular school classes, and so on. You might ask a parent or classmate to do the same thing and then compare what the two of you have gotten out of it. Once you've taken the notes, rewrite them right away (while you can still read your handwriting); doing this on the computer will be most helpful. Leave wide enough margins for additional notes when you use these materials to review for exams.
- You need excellent expository writing skills. This type of writing is more objective and factual in nature and is often used in explaining processes, definitions, concepts and ideas, such as in essays and business writing. For students of all ability levels, this is the area needing the most improvement. You need to be able to respond to assignments and examinations in a variety of styles, including:
  - Brief, succinct answers that express a full idea in a sentence or two

- Short essays (a few paragraphs)
  - Writing for 30-60 minutes on the same topic
  - Term papers that represent comprehensive coverage of a topic – 10-30 pages, developed over the course of several weeks
  - For much of your work, you will need to know how to cite evidence for your opinions; to take into account ideas that do not agree with yours; to compare and contrast authors, ideas, or arguments; and to be persuasive, not argumentative
- You need enough speed in keyboarding to make it a truly effective tool. A speed of 50 - 60 wpm is probably minimum for this purpose; faster is better. Eventually, you want not to be thinking about your typing at all. All your assignments should be typed, and many will eventually be revised.
  - At the same time, you need to develop legible handwriting and accurate spelling and English usage, both for your own notes and for exam questions. No professor should be expected to overlook the distraction of poorly written material.
  - Particularly if you have skipped some high school subjects, you should be sure to read a wide variety of literature of the kind usually covered in high-school language arts, to be generally well prepared to understand the scientific method, to tolerate some ambiguity in thinking about big questions (many important ideas have more than one possible answer), and to be as broadly educated as you can manage, so that you will have a rich network of ideas in which to locate the new concepts you will be exposed to in college.
  - You need more than a passive understanding of the math and science you have studied. Home-schooled students, especially, have too often read math and science books for understanding without practicing procedures sufficiently to “own” them, to be able to use them fluently and automatically as tools.
  - Finally, be prepared not to be the most competent student in your class all the time! Many of your classmates will also be going through an adjustment as they first encounter a class made up only of excellent students. Learn to take pleasure in the fact that you can seek help from some of your classmates. With your parents’ permission, you may want to get their phone numbers and e-mail addresses.

## **2. How are my study skills?**

Have you had the experience of studying for a test or a presentation? In accelerated academic settings, study skills are an absolute necessity. You will be expected to take classes out of your realm of experience. You will also be required to show that you have learned the material presented. This is often accomplished through written or verbal tests. You will need to prepare for these.



## ASSESSMENT 5.1

### How are my study skills?

Throughout your academic experiences, you may have had great success with little effort. You may not have had much need for studying in your earlier academic years. However, as you advance academically, it will become increasingly difficult to rely on your abilities to simply retain knowledge and apply it. Poor study skills can turn an otherwise exciting opportunity into a confusing mess.

Ask yourself these questions related to your current level of study skills:  
*Please circle the more correct answer for each of the following questions.*

- |  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| 1. Have I had the opportunity to take notes? | Yes | No |
| 2. Have I reviewed material before a test?   | Yes | No |
| 3. Do I have good organizational skills?     | Yes | No |
| 4. Do I have good time management skills?    | Yes | No |

If you answered “No” to any of these questions, we highly recommend that you take time to work through a text called [\*Becoming a Master Student\*](#). Topics covered in the text include time, memory, reading, notes, tests, diversity, thinking, writing, relationships, money, and health. All of these topics have implications for skills development that will enhance your experiences in a college setting.

Think back to the characteristics you identified as consistent with an effective learner and an excellent student (Section 2). You probably had some difference in the lists of characteristics you created. Good learners are not always good students, and good students are not always good learners. Because of the diversity of related topics covered, we recommend that anyone who is considering early college entrance work through [\*Becoming a Master Student\*](#) by Dave Ellis.

Additional study and related skills information can be accessed via many websites, including How to Study Study Skills resources <https://www.howtostudy.org/>, Study Guides and Strategies <http://www.studygs.net/index.htm>, a Learning Skills Course <http://www.glendon.yorku.ca/academic-services/courses-and-enrolment/university-learning-skills-course/>, and Study Skills Workshops <https://uwaterloo.ca/student-success/students/academic-and-personal-development/workshops> to name a few.



## ASSESSMENT 5.2

### How's my writing?

Writing skills are essential to a successful college experience. You will be expected to express your thoughts and ideas clearly in written forms ranging from admission applications to essay exams. Have you done expository writing? How about technical writing? We recommend that you collect diverse examples of your writing. Share your work with your parent(s), teacher(s), mentor(s), or other important adults in your life. Ask them for specific feedback. Are you writing at or above your expected level? Has anyone else examined your writing to give you feedback about the level of maturity it shows? If you've taken the new SAT I, how did you score on the writing section?

As you advance academically, you will be expected to write frequently and independently on a variety of subjects. You will be writing for assignments that include short paragraphs as well as longer essays and term papers. Much of this work will require revisions. Revising your work effectively requires practice. It also requires solid grammar and spelling skills, as well as keyboarding (typing) skills. Skill and efficiency are essential to making your writing work for you in a college setting.

Some important questions to ask yourself are:

*Please circle the most correct answer for each question.*

- |                                     |             |              |            |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| 1. Do I enjoy revising my work?     | Yes         | No           | Sometimes  |
| 2. Do I revise my work regularly?   | Yes         | No           | Sometimes  |
| 3. How is my spelling?              | Good        | Fair         | Poor       |
| 4. How is my English grammar usage? | Good        | Fair         | Poor       |
| 5. How fast can I type (keyboard)?  | < 40<br>wpm | 40-60<br>wpm | 60+<br>wpm |

If you have not had significant experience revising your written work, we recommend that you begin to practice revising your work. This will involve writing a number of drafts. This process usually begins with the creation of an outline of what you plan to write about. Then you write each of the intended sections. In tying the sections together into a coherent whole, you are likely to find yourself making some changes along the way. As your work comes together, begin reading through it and correcting any mistakes in grammar or spelling. Don't rely on your computer to do your final checking for you! Reading through your work in its entirety (not just once, but several times!) will help you make sure you're sending the intended message to your reader. Reading through and revising your writing will also help you to clarify important points, reduce redundancy, and improve the flow of your work.

Practicing spelling and grammar skills will greatly benefit you. You will not always have access to a computer to do these checks for you. Often, exams in the classroom will require that you write clear concise essay responses. No dictionaries allowed! For those times that you have assignments that may be completed on a computer, your keyboarding skills need to be good enough that they facilitate rather than hinder your writing ability. If you don't feel confident about your abilities in one or more of these areas, now is the time to begin practicing.



### **ASSESSMENT 5.3**

#### **How are my mathematical skills?**

Whether you enjoy math or struggle with it, you will need to take math courses as you advance into secondary school and college. We recommend that you gather the records you and your parents have that show evidence of your mathematical abilities and courses/levels completed. You may be asked to take a math placement test to determine your level of ability before being placed in an accelerated math situation.

These are some important questions to ask yourself about what you have done in this area:

1. What level of math have I completed so far?
2. Do I have records that include test scores from ability tests in this area?
3. Do I have records that include my math grades to date?
4. Have I correctly practiced and mastered math concepts or do I only have an understanding when I read about it or have it explained?
5. Do I do enough math problems to learn procedures at an automatic level?

### 3. Homeschooling to college – A guide for transition and documentation

While homeschooling does not necessarily limit your opportunities for early college entrance, it does require that you have detailed records of your coursework and that you meet or exceed admission requirements.

One of the challenges of transitioning from homeschool to college is the potential for fewer interactions with college admission counselors and personnel that are typically available to students in secondary school. The National Association of College Admission Counseling (NACAC) website <https://www.nacacnet.org/> has information available for parents and students, including free on-line college fairs that allow interactive participation.

Another challenge is presenting the homeschooling experience to your advantage in the application materials. While homeschooling has likely been a unique enriching experience that resulted in your being able to learn much more than you would have in a traditional schooling environment, most colleges and universities will ask you questions about why you chose to home school. Since colleges and universities are firmly planted in the larger academic institutional system, admissions officers will want to know about your history and the decisions involved in withdrawing from more “traditional” educational options. When writing and talking about your educational experiences in the application process, make sure you are emphasizing the positive proactive aspects of your decision to homeschool, such as broadening your learning opportunities and allowing you to go into depth in particular areas of interest. Many colleges and universities have developed admissions criteria specifically for homeschoolers. We suggest investigating the schools that interest you for more information.

Most colleges and universities, but particularly the more selective ones, are looking for students who are likely to add to the richness and diversity of their student body. They want students who evidence enthusiasm and independence in their learning. This is why it is important to be prepared for college not just in terms of being accelerated in subject matter, but also in terms of being invested in actively contributing to the learning environment.

If you have not had the opportunity to interact with other students in a classroom setting, we recommend that you take at least one high school course, summer talent search course, or a course at a community college or local university prior to enrolling in full-time college (see Section 4). We recommend that you choose a seminar or small-enrollment course that is designed to promote student discussion. A large lecture course might be interesting, but would not provide an opportunity for you to further develop your participation and discussion skills.

Also please take time to work through *Becoming a Master Student* (Ellis, 2002). It is essential that you develop independent skills in studying and managing your time in order to have a successful college experience. Some of the materials and activities associated with the text are available at <https://www.cengage.com/>.



### 4. Resources on homeschooling to college

The following text and Internet resources can assist you and your parents in the transition process:

- Cohen, C. (2000). *And What About College? How Homeschooling Leads To Admissions to The Best Colleges and Universities*.  
<http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/R11523>
- McKee, A. (1998). *From Homeschool to College and Work*.  
<http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/R13022>

- The National Association of College Admission Counseling (NACAC):  
<https://www.nacacnet.org/>

You can find additional links and information on topics covered in this section by accessing our searchable database, Davidson Gifted Database. We welcome submissions of new resources as well as comments on existing resources listed on Davidson Gifted Database at [www.DavidsonGifted.org/Search-Database](http://www.DavidsonGifted.org/Search-Database).

### **5. Additional thoughts on preparation for early college entrance**

Successful early college entrance does not just happen. It takes planning and preparation. This is the most significant and time-consuming part of the process. In fact, this part of the process is never really completed. The skills addressed above can always be improved upon and must be practiced in order to be retained over time.

Documentation of your skills and accomplishments will need to be collected prior to starting the application process. Section 9 offers a suggested timeline in regards to planning for your early entrance into college.

## SECTION SIX

# Investigating Colleges

1. How can I pick a college that will suit me?
  - ◆ Assessment 6.1: General investigation: Basic facts
  - ◆ Assessment 6.2: Specifics for young students
  - ◆ Assessment 6.3: Quality issues
  - ◆ Assessment 6.4: Safety issues
  - ◆ Assessment 6.5: Transportation issues
2. Get to know a number of campuses
3. Visit the campus
4. Realize that there is no perfect solution
5. Resources on investigating colleges



## 1. How can I pick a college that will suit me?

A very young student is often more limited in his/her choices of a college than an older student who is prepared to live away from home and, therefore, has more flexibility in choosing from a wide variety of schools.

*Don't rush into full-time college.* Keep in mind that enrolling in a college class won't necessarily guarantee that you won't be bored. You may have more appropriate opportunities in secondary school, such as independent study and teacher support. Often, an AP class in high school is more challenging than the same course taught at a community college. Furthermore, most exceptionally bright students plan to eventually attend a first-rate graduate or professional school. A first-rate college experience is often the best preparation for post-college education. Waiting a year or so to enroll full-time may also give you a chance to develop your experience, skills, and social and emotional maturity.

Remember that a college education involves not only classroom instruction and homework, but also a rich array of opportunities to learn outside of class. Make these as much a part of your investigation as the "purely" academic aspects. It might be helpful to look up course information to find out what learning opportunities are offered outside of the classroom; for example, does one of your required classes offer chances to view campus theater productions for credit or are there assignments that require you visit an art museum?

Considerations to keep in mind:

**Environment:** It is important to look at colleges in the areas where you and your family are most comfortable. Choosing particular geographic areas can depend on numerous factors, such as:

- Proximity to home
- Size of town or city
- Safety, crime statistics
- Climate

It is also important to consider the environment on campus as well. Looking at the size of the college may give you an idea of how many students might enroll in each of your courses. For example, smaller colleges in rural areas are more likely to have smaller classes, whereas larger urban colleges will most likely have more students and large class sizes. Larger schools may provide more opportunities for cultural activities.

You may want to take diversity into account when considering a college. Does the college embrace diversity in its students and faculty, as well in the surrounding community? If you can, avoid a college situation where everyone seems to have come from the same background and is the same age. The more diversity there is on campus, the less likely you are to stick out as "different" and the more likely it is that the other students will be genuinely friendly to you.

It is important to explore living situations if the college is far from home. You may opt for a college in a safer neighborhood if you will be living on campus or away from parents.

**Campus life:** Several aspects of campus life need to be scrutinized in order to find a college that best fits your needs. What type of environment would best support your situation? An appropriate social environment is essential in determining the best fit for a college. It is especially important to look at how seriously students are committed to academic excellence and how well the environment supports not just solitary study but formal and informal study

groups, non-academic activities (including service opportunities), and diversity of ideas and backgrounds.

- Campus reputation - Is the campus known for its academics or for its sports team? Is the college known to be a “party school”? If so, it might be helpful to look at policies regarding alcohol and drugs or consider how this may be reflected in other students’ goals and values.
- Conditions of the buildings, such as classrooms, library, labs, etc.- is the campus run-down or are the buildings updated? Also, it is important to look at the quality of the facilities you will be using, such as the labs and recreation center.
- Mentors - does the college offer the opportunity for incoming students to have mentors or tutors? This may be a bonus for a student who is new to college thus needing social and academic support.
- Social events - is the school dominated by sororities and fraternities? Are there structured and safe social events sponsored by the college? Also investigate opportunities for social and academic clubs where you can socialize and develop friendships with students who share similar interests. If you are to live at home, to what extent will you be able to participate in the rest of college life?

**Academics:** The academic reputation and features of a school are key factors to consider.

- Is the school highly research-based?
- Do the faculty members have impressive and diverse backgrounds?
- What is the use of graduate assistants in courses and what is the availability of instructors?
- What is your area of study? It is crucial to look at your area of study to see if the program is strong and to identify which aspects of it appeal to you. For example, do the program’s course descriptions sound like a good fit for what you want in a class? Does the program sound challenging enough or maybe too challenging? What are the backgrounds of the instructors in the program?
- Look at the college in its entirety. What is the academic rigor of the institution?

**Safety & Transportation:** Safety was briefly mentioned above, but it is important that we touch on it more in depth. Look into the safety on campus and in the surrounding areas of campus, including neighborhoods and even the whole town. You may want to investigate the town and college’s crime statistics. You will probably not want to walk to the library at night, especially if the chances of a crime occurring are high. It is also important to see how crime is handled on campus. Are there police and security officers that help maintain safety on campus? It is also important to look at transportation. How will the student get to and from class safely? Does the campus offer late-night transportation or escort service? Consider the lighting and spacing. Is the campus lit well enough at night? Are there wide-open spaces between buildings, or are there alleys or back ways that must be traveled?

**Financial:** When investigating colleges, the cost of attending is a factor to consider. Cost can include many things such as tuition, books, room and board, meals, recreation, and transportation. Of course, the cost of the college should not deter you from applying if it is a great fit otherwise. Section 7 will go into depth regarding financial assistance.

**Other Considerations:**

- If your local college isn't one you would otherwise choose, you may want to take a few courses, and only from those special professors who are, indeed, demanding in their expectations and whose teaching approach focuses on understanding complex ideas. Otherwise, ask yourself some serious questions before considering full-time enrollment, such as:
  - “Even though this isn't my first choice, is the school a good enough fit? Are there sufficient opportunities to make it a positive experience?”
  - “Will attending this college hurt or enhance my career and personal goals?”
  - “What is the success rate of graduates from this college – what graduate schools do they attend or what jobs do they obtain?”
  
- See if it is possible for you and your family, or one parent, to establish a residence near a first-rank college to which you apply (and at which you are accepted). Or find a relative or other family with whom you can stay during the week. If you're not going to be living with your own family, try the situation out first, and get the rules clarified as to how much you are to be considered a kid and how much a college student – and who does the chores!
  
- Look for a residential college that is specifically designed for very early entrance to college. Such an arrangement may be close to ideal, since your fellow classmates will match your age as well as being bright and interesting themselves – you are just the kind of student they are designed for. An increasing number of states now offer residential college programs for students who skip their junior and senior year of high school and some do not require state residence. For the most comprehensive listing of early college entrance programs, please see [http://ctv.jhu.edu/imagine/resources/college\\_entrance.html](http://ctv.jhu.edu/imagine/resources/college_entrance.html). You can also look through Early Entrance Programs in the Davidson Gifted Database <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/topic/105241/entryType/2> (see Schools & Programs: College Affiliated) and at <http://www.earlyentrancefoundation.org>.



## **ASSESSMENT 6.1**

### **General investigation: Basic facts**

We encourage you to use this and following assessments in this section to help you gather and consider useful information to apply to your search for the best fit among the available programs and schools that interest you.

1. What are the colleges within commuting radius?
2. If you are to move away from home to attend a residential college, is the geographical location right for you?
3. What are the costs, financial aid availability, etc., especially for students younger than 18 years?
4. What are the programs, departments, and areas of specialization and/or research?
5. What are the strengths that characterize the school and/or faculty?
6. What are the admission procedures and requirements?
7. Are there any policies about deferring enrollment after a student has been admitted?
8. What are the characteristics of student body (Size, SAT and ACT scores, diversity in age and ethnicity)?
9. Who are the contact people?



## **ASSESSMENT 6.2**

### **Specifics for young students**

1. Has the school established admissions procedures for considering younger students?
2. Are special provisions made for advising young students?
3. Are other young students present, and if so, do they constitute a group or do they “hide”?
4. Are there dormitory provisions? What are potential arrangements for younger students?
5. Are there dormitory requirements?
6. How are roommates assigned?
7. Are there “quiet” dorms or “quiet” floors where studying is encouraged and is the norm?
8. If I am to be a commuter student, are there good places on campus to “hang out,” either to study or to socialize?
9. Is this a campus dominated by sororities and fraternities? (Younger students are less likely to be well served in such an environment, or well accepted.)
10. Are there campus-sponsored events in which all students can participate?
11. Is this an urban campus, or does it provide a more protected, focused environment?



## **ASSESSMENT 6.3**

### **Quality issues**

1. What is the evidence that faculty members are engaged in active pursuit of knowledge through research or other forms of scholarship?
2. How easy is it for undergraduates to find mentors and/or research opportunities?
3. Are faculty members generally on campus full-time or part-time?
4. Are there small group provisions (e.g., freshman interest groups) that create a “home base” within the campus?
5. Are there provisions for tutoring students who need extra help?
6. Does the institution encourage student study groups?
7. What is the quality of the department(s) for any major(s) I might want to pursue?
8. What proportion of freshman graduate from this institution?
9. Do non-graduates transfer or drop out?
10. What proportion of graduates go to graduate schools, and where?



## **ASSESSMENT 6.4**

### **Safety issues**

1. How are safety concerns addressed?
2. Are walkways and buildings well lit?
3. Are there isolated areas that are not well traveled?
4. How populated is the campus at different times of day (including evening hours)?
5. What is the neighborhood surrounding the campus like?
6. What are the crime statistics on campus and safety in the surrounding the area?



## **ASSESSMENT 6.5**

### **Transportation issues**

1. How will I get there and back?
2. How easy will it be to come home on weekends if living on campus?
3. What access will I have to conveniences and services on and off campus (restaurants, stores, medical facilities, etc.)?
4. Does the college offer bus-service around campus? Is there late-night and safety transportation?

## 2. Get to know a number of campuses

For each of the colleges that interest you, we recommend taking the following steps to learn more about each of them.

- Contact students who have attended that college recently.
- Study the campus website carefully.
- Obtain copies for syllabi from previous courses
- Gather written information on the school, its programs, and professors.
- Organize the information so that you can keep track of it easily and compare your options. The College Board provides a free online tool, My Organizer, for organizing the information you've gathered on various colleges, dates and deadlines, online applications, and reminders. Explore their college planning tools at <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges>.
- Look in college guides. Check out online guides and books for investigating college options listed in the Resource Section. Be sure to read through the introductory section of these guides to become familiar with the rating system, as they often differ. Some of the more current and informative guides that are available include:
  - *Cool colleges for the hyper-intelligent, self-directed, late blooming, and just plain different* by Donald Asher
  - *The Fiske guide to colleges* by Edward B. Fiske  
<http://www.sourcebooks.com/spotlight/fiske-guide-to-colleges.html>
  - *Making it into a top college* by Howard Greene and Mathew Greene
  - *The hidden ivies: Thirty colleges of excellence* by Howard Greene and Mathew Greene

## 3. Visit the campus

- Make an appointment with an admissions representative.
- You as a student applicant, rather than your parents, should take the lead although your parents should also have an opportunity for questions.
- Don't be overwhelmed by a friendly admissions person or put off by an unfriendly one, but try to get a feel for the campus.
- Find out if there is an honors program, or an honors college, and what it takes to be eligible. (It may be worth preparing for another year to gain entry to such a program.)
- Arrange to take a campus tour with a student, if possible.
- Visit the campus coffee shop and other campus hangouts, and eavesdrop on several conversations among undergraduates.
- Visit the bookstore and view textbooks and other materials.



- Visit the library and investigate the scope and depth of their resources. Also note if the library is conducive to studying.
- Check in on the student services center. Find out what services are available, including tutoring and study skills help.
- Look at the computer labs. How many are there? Are they always full?
- Sit in on a few classes.
- If you are headed for dorm life, try to arrange an overnight visit.

#### **4. Realize that there is no perfect solution.**

You've probably already discovered that you and your parents have had to make compromises all along to find challenges that come close to matching the pace and level of your learning, and to locate friends with whom you feel compatible. This situation is no different. With a few exceptions such as admission to one of the handful of college programs that are designed for very young gifted students, going to college early is going to be one more compromise. You'll be making the best fit you can between the setting (or combination of settings) you choose and your own needs and readiness. Think of all the other people whose differences also get in the way of their fitting in – students with disabilities, for example, or students coming here from other countries – and make the best of it.

The decision to go to college very early is not one you should make just on the advice of others – be sure that it's what you want to try. Some young students haven't had much experience in making decisions for themselves and have a hard time sorting out their parents' ideas from their own. Going to college requires hard work with a lot less personal support than you may have been used to in your previous academic settings. It means giving up some other choices, and it may launch you into being conspicuously "young" for the rest of your educational trajectory and the beginning of your career. Especially if your family has made some sacrifices to make this happen – moving to a new city, for example, or paying high tuition – be sure it's what you think you want.



#### **5. Resources on investigating colleges**

- Early Entrance, Acceleration Institute  
[http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/Resources/early\\_college.aspx](http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/Resources/early_college.aspx)
- Davidson Gifted Database Early College Resources  
<http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/topic/105241/entryType/2>
- John Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth – List of Early College Entrance Programs  
[https://cty.jhu.edu/imagine/resources/college\\_entrance.html](https://cty.jhu.edu/imagine/resources/college_entrance.html)
- Hoagies' Gifted Education Page list of Early Entrance College Programs  
[http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/early\\_college.htm](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/early_college.htm)
- Asher, D. (2000). *Cool colleges for the hyper-intelligent, self-directed, late blooming, and just plain different*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.
- Berger, S. (1990). "College Planning for Gifted and Talented Youth". ERIC EC Digest #E490, ED321495 1990 <https://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9216/college.htm>

- College Confidential <http://www.collegeconfidential.com/>
- *The Fiske Guide to Colleges* <http://www.sourcebooks.com/spotlight/fiske-guide-to-colleges.html>
- Greene, H., & Greene, M. (2000). *Making it into a top college*. New York: HarperCollins
- Greene, H., & Greene, M. (2000). *The hidden ivies: Thirty colleges of excellence*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Harvard Student Agencies. (2002). *The guide to getting in: Winning the college admissions game without losing your mind*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.
- Springer, S. P., Reider, J. & Franck, M. R. (2009). *Admission matters: What students and parents need to know about getting into college*.
- U.S. News & World Report "America's Best Colleges" <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges>

## SECTION SEVEN

# **Financial Assistance**

1. Definitions
2. Scholarships: Needs-based vs. Merit-based
3. Where to find the money
4. General Tips
5. Resources on scholarship searches and related information

Financial aid is a question for all students, and younger students will find that most colleges treat you just like other students with a few important exceptions. The student financial aid offices at the colleges you are considering will be one of your key sources for information. It's important to keep in mind that assistance is usually available only to students who are enrolled full-time. Also, some scholarships specify that recipients must be a high-school senior or high school graduate. Unfortunately, unless these qualifications apply to you, you may simply be ineligible for such scholarships.

Applying for financial aid may not be a straightforward process, especially when you are younger than traditional college age students. However, we hope to provide some information here that can help you in navigating your way. We encourage you to do some reading on your own to learn about helpful hints and tactics for financial assistance.

## **1. Definitions**

First, let's tackle the common financial aid lingo you will repeatedly come across. Scholarships, grants, and loans are just a few of the terms of which you need to know the definitions. One main difference is whether you will be responsible for paying back the money you receive: the recipient of a scholarship or grant does not have to pay for the awarded money, whereas a loan recipient does have to pay the money back, with interest. Yes, there are different ways that loans accumulate interest (subsidized or unsubsidized), but at the very least, all the money you initially borrowed has to be refunded. The main point of this section of the guidebook is to encourage you to find opportunities for scholarships and grants, rather than relying on loans.

## **2. Scholarships: Needs-based vs. Merit-based**

Now that you have the main difference between scholarships and loans down, let's take a look at need-based scholarships versus merit-based scholarships.

- Need-based awards:
  - Awarded on the basis of demonstrated financial need.
    - Interested parties don't take your word for it. You must submit personal family financial information to prove your need.
- Merit-based awards:
  - Awarded on varied measures of ability, potential, and achievement.
  - Merit-based awards are seemingly targeted at every kind of student:
    - All different ages, races, experiences, backgrounds, etc.
  - Because younger students have likely had fewer opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities or volunteering, these types of awards may be more difficult to compete for. Remember, your application will be considered next to traditionally aged candidates who may have more experience than you in these areas.
  - Unlike need-based awards, there is no set formula for merit-based awards. They usually include an ever-changing list of criteria.

## **3. Where to find the money**

There are numerous sources for finding scholarships, grants, and other financial aid. The U.S. Department of Education administers a number of federal student aid programs including both grants and loans. You may have heard of some of these programs before: Federal Pell Grants, Federal Stafford Loans, Federal PLUS Loans, Campus-Based Programs, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, Federal Work Study, and Perkins Loans. Definitions of each of these programs can be found on the FAFSA website at <https://fafsa.ed.gov/>. Pell Grants are the largest need-based grant program.

- **Tip:** Colleges are often not aware that young students can be given federal grants like those given to older students. You can suggest that they call the federal office for clarification.

If you are interested in applying for federal aid, your first step is to complete the FAFSA form, which is available online at <https://fafsa.ed.gov/> or through the financial aid office at any college or university.

Awards are offered not only by the government, but also by individual schools, nonprofit groups, foundations, clubs, associations, corporations, and organizations. In addition to the resources we list later in this section, you may want to check out the free information available in your local library's reference section, research online, look into organizations in your field of interest, and even check with your parents' employers to find out about scholarship programs or tuition payment plans.

As this is a guidebook for early college entrance, the obvious questions need to be addressed. For instance, you might be asking yourself if you can qualify as a student who is much younger than the traditional college student, or if you can qualify for scholarships as a homeschooler. The answer is yes to both questions, but there are some important guidelines to keep in mind:

- While you might simply be ineligible for some scholarships due to age, you might be able to tweak a lot of application requirements to your advantage – it's pretty impressive when a 15-year-old is applying to college!
- If you homeschool, you might have to make some transcripts. Different schools have different ways of making these, so you don't have to subscribe to a specific layout or look. Just try to make them look official, and be sure to include all curriculum and grade-specific academics that you have completed. If you want outside assistance, some umbrella homeschool programs will create a transcript for you.
  - If some applications require certified high school transcripts (no exceptions!), be sure to call the agency offering the scholarship and ask about their policy for homeschoolers.

#### **4. General Tips**

- For students less than 18 years of age, there may need to be special provisions for loans to your parents, rather than to you, because you cannot legally sign contracts.
- Depending on your age, you may have to get special permission to participate in work-study programs. Some universities may distinguish between federally subsidized work-study programs (often more need-based) and non work-study jobs (not federally funded and more merit-based).
- You will need to take the Preliminary SAT (PSAT) in early October the year before you go to college if you want to be considered for a National Merit Scholarship (see <http://www.nationalmerit.org/>). Even if you are not enrolled in a high school, you can make arrangements to take it at your local school. Information on this test can be accessed at <https://www.collegeboard.org/>.
- Remind your parents that, if you go to college early, you'll be financially dependent on them for fewer years in the long run!

- On the other hand, there may be more opportunities for financial assistance if you wait a few years. But the trade-off of holding off on college may not be worth it.
- Speak with financial aid officers at the school throughout your decision process.
- Research and read financial aid books.
- Review these financial aid [Articles](#) and [Resources](#) in the Davidson Gifted Database.



## 5. Resources on scholarship searches and related information

There are many other places to locate information on financial assistance for college via the Internet. Many sites allow users to search for scholarships with filters for age, grade level, state and other relevant information.

Be wary of any scholarships or related services that request a fee, and be sure to check out the company with the Better Business Bureau before proceeding: <https://www.bbb.org/>.

- College Confidential <http://www.collegeconfidential.com/>
- College Board <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college>
- College Greenlight <https://www.collegegreenlight.com/>
- CollegeNET at <https://www.collegenet.com/mach25/app>
- College Board Scholarship Search at <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/scholarship-search>
- Davidson Fellows Award [www.DavidsonGifted.org/Fellows-Scholarship](http://www.DavidsonGifted.org/Fellows-Scholarship)
- Fastweb.com <https://www.fastweb.com/>
- FinAid <http://www.finaid.org/>
  - FinAid! Parents Guide at <http://www.finaid.org/parents/> is an online resource to assist with financial planning for college.
- National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) <http://www.nasfaa.org/>
- Scholarships.com <https://www.scholarships.com/>
- Scholarships360.com <https://scholarships360.org/>
- Scholarship Junkies <https://scholarshipjunkies.org/>
- Student Scholarship Search <https://www.studentscholarshipsearch.com/>

Text resources:

- *How to go to College Almost for Free* by Ben Kaplan
- [Tips for Parents: Secrets to Becoming a Scholarship Junkie: Learn About College Funding Resources... And How To Win Them](#)

## SECTION EIGHT

# What If Early College Entrance Isn't the Best Option for Me at This Time?

- ◆ Assessment 8.1: What were the most positive aspects of my early college entrance experiment?
- ◆ Assessment 8.2: What options will I have in place if my first plan doesn't work out?
- ◆ Assessment 8.3: Additional questions to consider

What if your experiment with early college entry doesn't prove to be a good match for you? Or if you work through this guidebook and decide it's best not to try early college entrance just yet? You need to remember that this is only one of several options you might have chosen, and that it's perfectly honorable (and mature) to choose another one if this doesn't work out or it's not the right time. You'll know a lot more about yourself for having given this a good try, and will be better prepared to plan what to do next.



### **ASSESSMENT 8.1**

#### **What were the most positive aspects of my early college entrance experiment?**

What did I learn about myself?

What new information can I apply to other decisions I will make about my educational options?





## **ASSESSMENT 8.2**

### **What options will I have in place if my first plan doesn't work out?**

Look back over the early college entrance alternatives listed in Section 4, and identify at least three that may be of interest to you in the event that your plans change.

1.

2.

3.

If you have selected a first choice for a college and/or an early entrance program, list at least two other options that would be acceptable.

1.

2.

If, after working through this guidebook, you have decided to wait to pursue early college entrance options, we recommend that you review the guidebook periodically in preparation for entrance into college at a later date.



### **ASSESSMENT 8.3**

#### **Additional questions to consider**

How can I further develop my strengths?

If I decide to pursue early college entrance again, what do I need to work on in the next month? Three months? Six months? The next year?

Remember that life is a series of experiments; some work out as we expect and some result in surprises, but all experiments provide useful information that we can incorporate in future experiments.

SECTION NINE

## **A Suggested Timeline**

1. In general
2. Two years before you plan to enter college as a full-time student
3. During the summer before your last pre-college year
4. During the fall of your last pre-college year

Early college entrance requires as much, if not more, step-by-step preparation as traditional college entrance. Following are some special steps you may want to take if you are considering this option for advanced education.

### **1. In general:**

- As you advance in your studies, draft an educational plan that incorporates short and long-term goals. Initially, these goals may be more general and flexible than those that develop over the next few years.
- Work with parents and instructors to get a clear picture of your academic strengths and challenges. In what areas do you excel? In what areas might you need some additional support?
- As you proceed through your secondary studies, keep careful records of what you have accomplished. This is particularly important if you are pursuing homeschooling, secondary program courses on the Internet, and or independent studies. Be sure that you include these records as part of your early college entrance application.
- During your seventh grade year, or the equivalent, enroll in the talent search for your region. This requires application by October or November and taking the SAT or ACT in January. This will give you excellent feedback about your intellectual readiness to attack college-level work.
- If your region allows enrollment for a talent search at the eighth grade level, or the equivalent, you may wish to repeat your participation.

### **2. Two years before you plan to enter college as a full-time student:**

- Begin working through this *Early College Entrance Guidebook*.
- In October, take the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (also know as the Preliminary SAT/PSAT) to try to qualify for a National Merit Scholarship. If you qualify as a semi-finalist, you will take the SAT the following fall. You can take the PSAT again the following year unless you are a high-school senior. If you qualify as a National Merit semi-finalist during your senior year, you will take the SAT as a college freshman and may lose a year of eligibility.
- Begin intensive study of the possible colleges you are considering, following the guidelines we have described.
- Arrange to visit campuses this year and find out whether you might be considered. If so, find out what specific arrangements might be required if you have not graduated from high school.
- Chart your courses so that you will be able to complete as many of the requirements for the colleges of your choice as possible. For example, you should include math through the beginning year of calculus, at least two laboratory sciences, several years of foreign language study, and as much English and history as possible.
- If you have taken any AP or IB classes, take the associated exams in May.
- Develop a financial plan. Consider all potential options and begin investigating them. Keep detailed information on your findings in a central location so that you can compare and contrast options as needed.

### **3. During the summer before your last pre-college year:**

Accumulate and organize college applications by due dates. Also, you may want to devise a system to prioritize applications based on your interest and goodness of fit.

Become familiar with the information required in the applications. Start thinking about how you can best answer any essay or personal information questions. Collect any additional information that will be needed, such as transcripts, community service hours, etc.

- Arrange to take a college class at an institution near you, or enroll if possible in a summer program on a college campus, preferably one of the colleges you are considering (even if it is a pre-college class) or
- Spend the summer engaged in a distinctive job or project that will not only help you mature but help to highlight your special interests and personal qualifications.

### **4. During the fall of your last pre-college year:**

- Take the SAT or ACT as required by the college(s) you are considering, as well as any subject-matter achievement tests required.
- Start the application process early. Begin the first drafts of the required essays in October or earlier, so that you will have plenty of time to revise them.
- If any of your applications require references, contact the people you have in mind early in the process so that they have time to write an excellent and thoughtful reference for you.
- Prepare information required of other applicants, along with whatever else the admissions office has asked you to provide to substantiate your special requests.
- If you are missing any of the required courses or qualifications for admission, submit your application well before the deadline so that it may be reviewed by any special committees that consider exceptions.
- Consider some form of dual enrollment during this year – taking one course at a time at the college level, for example, in addition to your secondary-level studies.
- Again, in May, take AP or IB exams associated with the courses you have taken.

## SECTION TEN

# Resource Appendix

1. Alternative Schooling
2. College Guides
3. Distance Learning and Correspondence Options
4. Early Entrance Programs
5. Financial Assistance
6. Homeschool to College
7. Study Abroad
8. Study Skills
9. Styles of Thinking and Learning
10. Talent Searches and Summer Learning Opportunities
11. Time Management
12. Additional Reading on Early College Entrance

### **1. Alternative Schooling**

- International Baccalaureate (IB) program <http://www.ibo.org/>

### **2. College Guides**

- Asher, D. (2000). *Cool colleges for the hyper-intelligent, self-directed, late blooming, and just plain different*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.
- Berger, S. (1990). "College Planning for Gifted and Talented Youth". ERIC EC Digest #E490, ED321495 1990 <https://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9216/college.htm>
- College Confidential <http://www.collegeconfidential.com/>
- *The Fiske Guide to Colleges* <http://www.sourcebooks.com/spotlight/fiske-guide-to-colleges.html>
- Greene, H., & Greene, M. (2000). *Making it into a top college*. New York: HarperCollins
- Greene, H., & Greene, M. (2000). *The hidden ivies: Thirty colleges of excellence*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Harvard Student Agencies. (2002). *The guide to getting in: Winning the college admissions game without losing your mind*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.
- Springer, S. P., Reider, J. & Franck, M. R. (2009). *Admission matters: What students and parents need to know about getting into college*.
- U.S. News & World Report "America's Best Colleges" <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges>

### **3. Distance Learning and Correspondence Options**

- Distance Learning Options <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/topic/105271/entryType/2>
- Davidson Academy Online High School <http://www.davidsonacademy.unr.edu/Online>

### **4. Early Entrance Programs**

- Early Entrance, Acceleration Institute [http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/Resources/early\\_college.aspx](http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/Resources/early_college.aspx)
- Davidson Gifted Database Early College Resources <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/topic/105241/entryType/2>
- John Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth – List of Early College Entrance Programs [https://cty.jhu.edu/imagine/resources/college\\_entrance.html](https://cty.jhu.edu/imagine/resources/college_entrance.html)
- Hoagies' Gifted Education Page list of Early Entrance College Programs [http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/early\\_college.htm](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/early_college.htm)

## 5. Financial Assistance

- College Confidential <http://www.collegeconfidential.com/>
- College Board <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college>
- College Greenlight <https://www.collegegreenlight.com/>
- CollegeNET at <https://www.collegenet.com/mach25/app>
- College Board Scholarship Search at <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/scholarship-search>
- Davidson Fellows Award [www.DavidsonGifted.org/Fellows-Scholarship](http://www.DavidsonGifted.org/Fellows-Scholarship)
- Fastweb.com <https://www.fastweb.com/>
- FinAid <http://www.finaid.org/>
  - FinAid! Parents Guide at <http://www.finaid.org/parents/> is an online resource to assist with financial planning for college.
- National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) <http://www.nasfaa.org/>
- Scholarships.com <https://www.scholarships.com/>
- Scholarships360.com <https://scholarships360.org/>
- Scholarship Junkies <https://scholarshipjunkies.org/>
- Student Scholarship Search <https://www.studentscholarshipsearch.com/>

## 6. Homeschool to College

- Cohen, C. (2000). *And What About College? How Homeschooling Leads To Admissions to The Best Colleges and Universities.* <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/R11523>
- McKee, A. (1998). *From Homeschool to College and Work.* <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/R13022>
- The National Association of College Admission Counseling (NACAC): <https://www.nacacnet.org/>

## 7. Study Abroad

- Peterson's <https://www.petersons.com/>
- StudyAbroad.com <https://www.studyabroad.com/>



## 8. Study Skills

- Ellis, D. (2017). *Becoming a master student, 16th edition*. ISBN 1337097101. <https://www.amazon.com/Becoming-Master-Student-Textbook-specific-CSFI/dp/1337097101>
- Study Skills resources <https://www.howtostudy.org/>
- Study Guides and Strategies <http://www.studygs.net/index.htm>
- Learning Skills Course <http://www.glendon.yorku.ca/academic-services/courses-and-enrolment/university-learning-skills-course/>
- Study Skills Workshops <https://uwaterloo.ca/student-success/students/academic-and-personal-development/workshops>

## 9. Styles of Thinking and Learning

- Browne, M.N., & Keeley, S.M. (2003). *Asking the right questions: a guide to critical thinking, 7<sup>th</sup> edition*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. ISBN 0131829939
- DeBono, E. (1999 revised and updated). *Six thinking hats*. Boston: First Bay Back Books ISBN 031617831
- Dietsler, S. (2004). *Becoming a critical thinker: a user-friendly manual, 4<sup>th</sup> edition*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. ISBN 0131779982
- Ellis, D. (2002). *Becoming a master student, 10<sup>th</sup> edition*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. ISBN 0618206787 (Chapter 8 specifically addresses thinking)
- Sternberg, R.J. (1999). *Thinking Styles*. New York: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 052165713X
- Wadsworth, B.J. (1996). *Piaget's theory of cognitive and affective development, 5<sup>th</sup> edition*. White Plains, NY: Allyn & Bacon. ISBN 0-8013-0773-2
- Study Guides and Strategies <http://www.studygs.net/index.htm>
- The Critical Thinking website <http://www.criticalthinking.org> and this library of critical thinking resources <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/index-of-articles/1021>

## 10. Talent Searches and Summer Learning Opportunities

- Talent Search Opportunities across the United States; many have summer programs <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10260>
- DeLong, M.R. (1994). University based talent searches for the gifted. <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10063>
- Davidson Gifted Database: Summer Programs <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10069> and <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/topic/105217/entryType/2>
- Davidson THINK Summer Institute <http://www.davidsongifted.org/THINK-Summer>

- National Association for Gifted Children: Summer Programs <http://giftedandtalentedresourcesdirectory.com/>
- Hoagies': Saturday and Summer Programs <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/summer.htm>

## 11. Time Management

- Ellis, D. (2002). *Becoming a master student, 10<sup>th</sup> edition*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. ISBN 0618206787 (Chapter 2 specifically addresses time)
- Learning Strategies, The University of Kansas <https://sim.drupal.ku.edu/learning-strategies>
- Managing Your Time, Dartmouth <https://students.dartmouth.edu/academic-skills/learning-resources/time-management-tips>
- Time Management Tips, University of Minnesota Duluth Student Handbook [http://www.d.umn.edu/kmc/student/loon/acad/strat/time\\_manage.html](http://www.d.umn.edu/kmc/student/loon/acad/strat/time_manage.html)

## 12. Additional Reading on Early College Entrance

- Assouline, S. G., & Lupkowski-Shoplik, A. (1997). Talent searches: A model for the discovery and development of academic talent. In N. Colangelo & G. A. Davis (Eds.). *Handbook of gifted education, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (pp. 170-179). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Brody, L. E. (1998, Nov/Dec). Planning ahead for college: Early college entrance. *Imagine*, 6, p. 25.
- Brody, L. E., & Stanley, J. C. (1991). Young college students: Assessing factors that contribute to success. In W. T. Southern & E. D. Jones (Eds.). *The academic acceleration of gifted children*. (102-132). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Charlton, J.C., Marolf, D. M., Stanley, J. C., & Ng, L. Follow-up insights on rapid educational acceleration. *Roeper Review*, 17, 123-130. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02783199409553639?journalCode=uror20>
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- Featherstone, B. D., & Reilly, J. M. (1991). *College comes sooner than you think! The essential college planning guide 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.
- Giddan, N., & Vallongo, S. (1988). *Parenting through the college years*. Charlotte, VT: Williamson Publishing.
- Greene, R. (2000). *The teenagers' guide to school outside the box*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit.
- Janos, P. M., Robinson, N. M., et al. (1988). A cross-sectional developmental study of the social relations of students who enter college early. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 32, 211-215. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/001698628803200105?journalCode=gcqb>

- McCarthy, C. R. (1999). Dual-enrollment programs: Legislation helps high school students enroll in college courses. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, 11, 24-32. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.4219/jsge-1999-610?journalCode=joab>
- Mills, C. J., & Ablard, K. E. (1993). Credit and placement for academically talented students following special summer courses in math and science. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 17, 4-25. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/001698629003400106?journalCode=gcqb>
- Muratori, M. C. (2007). *Early Entrance to College: A Guide to Success*. Austin, TX: Prufrock Press. <https://www.prufrock.com/Early-Entrance-to-College-A-Guide-to-Success-P1587.aspx>
- Noble, K. D., & Drummond, J. E. (1992). But what about the prom? Students' perceptions of early college entrance. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 36, 106-111. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/001698629203600209>
- Noble, K. D., Arndt, T., Nicholson, T., Sletten, T., & Zamora, A. (1998-99). Different strokes: Perceptions of social and emotional development among early college entrants. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, 10, 77-84. <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10149>
- Noble, K.D., Robinson, N. M., & Gunderson, S. A. (1993). All rivers lead to the sea. *Roeper Review*, 15, 124-130. <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10183>
- Olszewski-Kubilius, P. (1995). Early entrance to college: A summary of research regarding early entrance to college. *Roeper Review*, 18, 121-126. <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10177>
- Olszewski-Kubilius, P. (1995). Thinking through early entrance to college. *American Association for Gifted Children Newsletter*, 2 (2), 1, 4-7. <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10096>
- Robinson, N. M. (1999). Necessity is the mother of invention: The roots of our "system" of providing educational alternatives for gifted students. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, 10, 120-128. <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10148>
- Robinson, N. M. (2001). Food for thought: Is early college entrance an appropriate alternative for you? Davidson Institute for Talent Development. <https://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10160>
- Robinson, N. M. (1997). The role of universities and colleges in educating gifted undergraduates. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 72, 217-236. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/1493046?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/1493046?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)
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- Solow, R. (2012). *College at 13: Young, Gifted and Purposeful*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.  
<http://www.greatpotentialpress.com/gifted-books/titles-beginning-with-c/college-at-13>
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<http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10217>