

As summer winds down and back to school plans begin many high school seniors are starting their college application process. The Common App officially opened on August 1st and is used to apply to over 1000 schools. The application can be found at commonapp.com. To apply to schools that are not on the Common App it is easy to find the online application on each school's website.

The college application process helps schools determine which students would be a good fit for their school. The most common question students and parents ask is what exactly schools are looking for when they make this decision.

Each school looks at the following academic and non-academic factors when determining first time, first year degree seeking admission. The academic factors that are considered include academic record, class rank, GPA – weighed and unweighted, standardized test score (ACT and/or SAT), application essay(s) and letters of recommendation.

The non-academic factors may include interview, extra-curricular activities, talent/ability, character/personal qualities, first generation college student, alumni/ae relation, geographical residence, state residency, religious affiliation, racial/ethnic status, volunteer work, work experience and level of interest.

If you would like to see how the college you are applying to ranks these items you will want to review their Common Data Set. The individual school Common Data Set can be found by searching Common Data Set followed by the school name you are looking for. The Basis for Selection begins in Section C6. Along with factors for selection the Common Data Set provides other items that can be used to help students find a school that is a good fit for them.

The Common App Essay prompts are announced at the beginning of each year. The seven prompts for this year are:

Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?

Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

The essay is limited to a maximum of 650 words and is an important part of the selection process since it allows the school to learn more about the applicant. Many schools will require additional essays that are more school specific.

Make sure you track the application deadlines for each school. Many set November 1st as their deadline.

Please contact our office with any questions you may have. We will be hosting college planning workshops at the local schools again this Fall. In the meantime, we have put together other resources to help families virtually. Contact our office for more details! Take advantage of Michigan College Planning's College Planning workshops to learn more about how to reduce stress, save time and potentially money during the college planning process.

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