



Applying to 4-Year Colleges – A Step by Step Guide for SENIORS *Class of 2024*



Seniors,

Applying to 4-year colleges is a part-time job that begins in June following junior year. The process will last through graduation. While I'm here to help you every step of the way, here is some information to help get you started with the process, as well as help you stay on track!

You can do this! Do not procrastinate. Always reach out with questions, whether it be on Remind, through email (danielle.malfara@osceolaschools.net), by scheduling appointments (www.calendly.com/malfarad), or stopping by during your lunch.

You ARE college material! Don't give up!

-Mrs. Malfara

The most competitive 4-year college applications, regardless of deadline posted on the school's website, are submitted and completed by October 31st! This is how you can be sure you've applied by the financial aid priority deadline.

This means, you should have your counselor letters of recommendation (Common Application/Xello), transcripts requested, and counselor forms requested by September 30th.

HOW COLLEGES EVALUATE YOUR APPLICATION

It's not just about earning a college acceptance. You need to make sure you are academically prepared to be successful at a 4-year institution.

All schools will evaluate your admission based on:

1. Unweighted & weighted GPA
2. Rigor of your course load
3. SAT/ACT scores
4. Leadership & life experience – co-curriculars and paid work experience
5. Project-oriented community service

Admission committees will also consider:

1. Strength of your letters of recommendation (if the school takes letters of recommendation)
2. Strength of your personal statement/essay

Important Deadlines:

- You have until **October** of your senior year to get the SAT or ACT score you want for your college applications. Most colleges will not accept a score after October.

- You have until **May/June** of your senior year to get the ACT or SAT score you need for Bright Futures. **DO NOT PUT THAT OFF UNTIL THEN.** You want the highest score you're capable of on your college application.
- You have until the **last day of your senior year** to submit work hours or service hours to your SCHOOL COUNSELOR for Bright Futures. **DO NOT PUT THAT OFF UNTIL THEN.** You want as many hours as possible on your transcript when you apply to college.

General Tips:

- You cannot do all of this in one day, or even one week. Do not put these steps off.
- Not sure? Ask Mrs. Malfara! *Don't guess!*
- Save all usernames and passwords for Common Application, College Board, ACT, FAFSA, SSAR, Spark, scholarships, FAFSA, financial aid, and more in one place.
- Treat every college communication like an interview (text, email, phone call)
 - Be sure to use proper grammar (proper capitalizations in pronouns, complete sentences, etc.)
- Use your full name (even if you hate it, even if you have a nickname, and even if your teachers/family do not use it) on all documentation.
 - **Your full name is what is on your birth certificate**
 - Check Focus – if your name is wrong, talk to guidance about correcting it
 - Not doing so can delay the processing of your application and your financial aid
- Check your work – *did you type your email in correctly? Are there typos in your application?*
- Do not wait until you have the perfect ACT or SAT score to apply to college. *It is better to apply early and send updated test scores later than wait to apply.*
- Check application portals and email weekly AT LEAST after submitting
 - It is not uncommon to ask for grade reports, updated class schedule, mid-year transcript, etc. before an admission decision is made
 - It is not uncommon for schools to have you complete financial aid verification before awarding scholarship money
- Your applications will neither be complete nor reviewed for admission until the school has received your:
 - Application
 - Application fee (or fee waiver)
 - SAT and ACT scores
 - Academic record

APPLYING TO 4-YEAR COLLEGES

Step 1: Get organized and connected.

- Join Mrs. Malfara's **Class of 2024** Remind
 - You will be updated on scholarship deadlines, field trips, appointments, financial aid resources, application fee waivers, testing fee waivers, graduation requirements and updates, and more.
 - You can also "text" Mrs. Malfara using the Remind application. Mrs. Malfara gets your Remind messages on her phone **AND** email
 - To join...
 - Text **@2024-eagle** to **81010** OR
 - Click **Join Existing Class** on the Remind application or website, and type in code **2024-eagle**
- Make a new, personal professional email account through Yahoo or Gmail
 - Examples: Jane.Foster2@gmail.com, jfoster23@gmail.com

- **DO NOT** use your birthday or graduate year as part of your email address (that makes your accounts easier to hack)
- Make this email the email account connected **ONLY** to college things –
 - ACT
 - College Board
 - Common Application (if you are using it)
 - College applications and communication
 - FAFSA, FFAA, financial aid, and scholarships
- **DO NOT** use this email account for anything other than college-related tasks
 - This will make it easier to both check and keep up with your email. *Colleges will contact you for additional application materials through your email. If you miss it, you will miss the chance to be accepted. You will also miss out on scholarship money.*
 - Check this email account **AT LEAST** weekly
- Make note of your passwords. Your passwords for your ACT, College Board, Common Application, and FAFSA accounts are your personal accounts. The school cannot unlock your account for you if you forget your password.
 - *It is important that you do not create duplicate accounts if you forget your username or password.*
- Check in with your College & Career Counselor (Mrs. Malfara) to see if you are eligible for college application fee waivers and ACT/SAT Saturday test fee waivers - <https://www.osceolaschools.net/Page/9030>
- Identify your School Counselor if you do not know who it is already
 - Last name A-C & Ascend Academy students: Mr. Donald Petrella, donald.petrella@osceolaschools.net
 - Last name D-F & Osceola Business Academy students: Mrs. Wilmarie Rivera-Sierra, wilmarie.riverasierra@osceolaschools.net
 - Last name G-J & Dual Enrollment students: Mrs. Taylor Donovan, taylor.donovan@osceolaschools.net
 - Last name K-Martin & AVID Students: Mrs. Mariellie Ruiz, mariellie.ruiz@osceolaschools.net
 - Last name Martinez-Rivera: Mrs. Girany Pillot-Osorio, girany.pillotosorio@osceolaschools.net
 - Last name Rivers-Z: Ms. Dana High, dana.high@osceolaschools.net

Step 2: Set yourself up for success.

- Create your college list. You should apply to at least 6 4-year colleges (*if you are serious about attending a 4-year school*)
 - Do a little research and find out if your school is a *reach*, *match*, or *safety* school for YOU
 - *Reach* - test scores and GPA encouraged for admission are higher than yours
 - *Match* - test scores and GPA encouraged for admission match yours
 - *Safety* - test scores and GPA encouraged for admission are lower than yours
 - Average GPAs for students accepted to schools, as well as average ACT/SAT scores for students accepted to schools can be found on Xello. Just search the school you are interested in and view the profile.
 - You can also use the *public* and *private* school links on the PHS College & Career Center webpage to help you with your research! *Focus on the GPA, SAT, and ACT data on those links.*
 - <https://www.osceolaschools.net/Page/9027>

- Decide if you need to take the ACT or SAT again to help make your college applications more competitive.
- Decide which semester you'll apply for at each school. *Applying to start in summer can help your application be more competitive.*
- Ask at least 1 academic teacher you feel connected to (math, science, ELA, history) and at least 1 other teacher if they can write you a **STRONG** letter of recommendation for college
 - If they say yes, provide them with a completed brag sheet and deadline to write your letter. You must give your letter writers at least 1 month to write your letter.
 - You can find a copy of the brag sheet on the PHS College and Career Center webpage - <https://www.osceolaschools.net/Page/9027>
- Make sure you have the classes required for admission to the schools you are interested in.
 - Most schools will require at least the following classes: *(It always makes you more competitive to have more.)*
 - 3+ years of history
 - 4+ years of math (highest math class needs to be **at least** Algebra 2)
 - 4+ years of ELA
 - 4+ years of science *(recommended – biology, chemistry, physics, and 1 additional science class)*
 - 2 consecutive years of the same foreign language *(for example - Spanish I and II, AP Spanish Language and AP Spanish Literature, French 3 & 4, etc)*
 - Most 4-year colleges will want to see successful completion of 4-6 AP or DE classes. *The rigor of AP and DE show schools that you are ready to take on the rigor found in classes at 4-year colleges.*
- Check to see what you are missing to be eligible for the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program - <https://www.osceolaschools.net/Page/8207>

Step 3: Start your applications.

- If a school requires or recommends an essay, apply on Common App.
- If the school does NOT require or recommend an essay, apply directly to the institution on that school's website.
- Common App website - create an account using the professional email you created in **Step 1** above - <https://www.commonapp.org/>
 - The only school on Common App you **SHOULD NOT** use Common App for is the University of Central Florida. Always apply to UCF directly through the school's website: <https://www.ucf.edu/>
 - You'll need to connect your Common App account to your Xello account for your letters of recommendation and to request transcripts.
 - Instructions for connecting Common Application to Xello:
 - Click on *ClassLink*
 - Open *Xello*
 - Click on *College Planning*
 - Click *View My Applications* (under *College Applications*)
 - Click *Connect*
 - You only have to enter your SCHOOL counselor for one school. **NOT the College & Career Counselor.** *The counselor will then automatically show up for the rest of your schools.*
 - Make sure your counselor has a brag sheet for you to write you the best letter of recommendation possible!
<https://www.osceolaschools.net/Page/9027>

- You will need to type in who will write your letters of recommendation for each school in your list. (*This is because different schools can require different types of letters.*)
 - Be sure you've asked your letter writers for a letter via email or in person before entering their names in as a letter writer
 - If your letter writer does not show up on Xello, add them under "external letter writers" on Common App.
- You **ONLY** apply to a college once – either through Common App or directly to the school.
 - NEVER apply to a college more than once. This may prevent a school from evaluating you for admission. At the very least, it will absolutely delay your application review.
- You always apply as an undergraduate, freshmen, first-time-in-college student (even if you finished your AA)

Step 4: Submit your academic record.

- Colleges require you to submit your academic record in one of 3 ways. That is usually done through sending a transcript, completing the SSAR - Self-Reported Student Academic Record, or completing the Spark form (UCF only).
- As of right now, the following schools will have you complete the SSAR in the place of sending a transcript.
 - **DO NOT REQUEST A TRANSCRIPT FOR THESE SCHOOLS. YOU MUST COMPLETE THE SSAR FOR YOUR APPLICATION TO BE CONSIDERED COMPLETE.**
 - Visit the school's website to verify whether they want the SSAR or transcript sent.
 - Schools that required the SSAR last year were...
 - Florida A&M University (FAMU)
 - Florida Atlantic University (FAU)
 - University of South Florida (USF)
 - University of North Florida (UNF)
 - University of West Florida (UWF)
 - New College of Florida
 - Florida Polytechnic University
 - University of Florida (UF)
 - Florida State University (FSU)
 - You can learn more about the SSAR at <https://ssar.selfreportedtranscript.com/login.aspx>
- UCF requires the Spark form – check your student applicant portal on UCF's website after applying to learn more about how to complete the Spark form.
 - **UCF WILL NOT ACCEPT A TRANSCRIPT IN THE PLACE OF YOUR SPARK.**
 - You can learn more about eh Spark at <https://www.ucf.edu/admissions/undergraduate/spark/>
- For schools requesting a transcript and **NOT** on Common App – request a transcript on Xello
 - Click on *ClassLink*
 - Open *Xello*
 - Click on *College Planning*
 - Click on *Create your First Application* or *Add New Application*
 - Add your school
 - Then click *Request Transcript*
- You must update your SSAR, Spark, and send updated transcripts to schools you apply to if your senior schedule changes

Step 5: Submit your official SAT and ACT test scores.

- Each college has specific deadlines for receiving ACT/SAT scores
- If you put on your college applications that you are taking the ACT or SAT any time during your senior year, the schools will likely hold your application until they receive your new scores.
 - If your updated scores are not received by the schools by the college's final deadline, the college will evaluate your application with whatever scores have already been submitted.
 - You need to send all of your ACT and SAT scores. Colleges will *superscore*.
 - *Superscoring* is when they take your highest score of each section.
 - Some colleges do not superscore the ACT, but take the highest Composite score instead.
- You must send your official test scores from your College Board (SAT) and/or ACT accounts. Your high school cannot send scores for you. It is best to simply bubble in where you want your scores sent on test day.

Step 6: Wrapping up your application cycle

- Keep track of your application portals and email to be sure your schools aren't requesting any additional materials.
- Let's celebrate your success! *Be sure to share each acceptance and financial aid award letter with Mrs. Malfara via email, by stopping by the office, or by forwarding me your acceptance email.*
- You will fill out a Senior Survey at the end of senior year to tell Mrs. Malfara where you are choosing to enroll. Mrs. Malfara will send your final transcript to that school following graduation.

PAYING FOR COLLEGE

- Complete FAFSA in October – visit the CCC website for more information on this - <https://www.osceolaschools.net/Page/8204>
 - Students planning to start school in summer 2024 will complete both the 2023-2024 FAFSA and the 2024-2025 FAFSA
 - Students planning to start school in Fall 2024 will complete the 2024-2025 FAFSA
- Apply to scholarships – at least 2 a month. You can find scholarship resources in the Scholarship newsletter - <https://www.osceolaschools.net/Page/9030>
- Bring your financial aid award letters to Mrs. Malfara for review – they can be tricky to interpret!

HELPFUL RESOURCES

- Senior month-by-month checklist for 4-year college applications: [https://www.osceolaschools.net/cms/lib/FL50000609/Centricity/Domain/5179/Senior College Application Checklist.pdf](https://www.osceolaschools.net/cms/lib/FL50000609/Centricity/Domain/5179/Senior%20College%20Application%20Checklist.pdf)
- Senior College & Career website page: <https://www.osceolaschools.net/Page/9030>
 - Has links to the scholarship newsletter, senior newsletter, and other information you'll need throughout your senior year
- ACT: www.myact.org
- College Board (SAT): www.collegeboard.org
- The PHS College & Career website: <https://www.osceolaschools.net/Page/7607>