

Surviving  
Your Senior Year  
2016-2017

*Info-booklet for College-bound Seniors*

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Several items in this booklet first appeared in Points to Ponder or “How to Survive Your Senior Year” which was written and compiled by Katherine Shultz, former Guidance Counselor at San Marcos Academy, and distributed to the Class of 1995. It is an honor to share some of her insights with you.

-LR

## Introduction

This info-booklet is one resource designed to assist Seniors with the final steps in the college admissions process. It contains general information as well as information unique to San Marcos Academy.

Filling out college applications is just one of many activities you will be involved in this year. Hopefully, you have a pretty good idea of where you would like to attend college and we would like to help you get there; however, you don't want to let all this "college stuff" interfere with the excitement of your last year of high school because these days will never come again.

Colleges and universities are too numerous and complex to be chosen by chance. To make an intelligent decision you must consider the following:

- Know yourself (strengths and weaknesses).
- Know your goals.
- Know the realistic options open to you.

This booklet will not answer all of your question, but it will assist you in knowing where to go to get those questions answered.

Do not hesitate to seek advice from your parents/guardians, grandparents, and teachers. Please understand, however, that universities and colleges are interested in you. Even when I contact an institution for you by phone in the college room, the representative from that school will want to talk with you, not me. As the year progresses, your ability to express yourself with confidence and clarity will improve.

I am here to "guide" you in your college and career choices; you are the one who has to search the websites, fill out the forms, put forth the effort, fill out the forms, do the real work, fill out the forms, meet the deadlines, fill out the forms, and make the hard decisions.

Have a great Senior Year; May 14, 2017 will be here sooner than you think!

-Mrs. R

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\*\*\*WATCH DEADLINES\*\*\*

## Surviving Your Senior Year

### **First things first!**

Graduating from high school is the first goal. Check the student handbook for the SMA graduation requirements. Then, early in your senior year carefully check your transcript to make sure you have the necessary credits to meet the requirements.

Visit with Mrs. Ritchie or Ms. Jannett to see your transcript and class schedule. Take care of this early; look over it carefully. It is your responsibility to know for sure that you have the necessary credits and that you are on track for graduation.

If you think you have a problem you can talk with Mrs. Ritchie or Ms. Jannett; however, the principal, Mr. Bryant, is the only person at the school who can authorize a senior's schedule change or certify credits from other secondary schools.

If you need to enroll in a distance learning course or CBE (Credit by Exam), see Mrs. Ritchie, Guidance Counselor. Any Distance Learning course you take for credit must be from an accredited online school and meet SMA graduation requirements; therefore, be sure you have received approval from the principal before enrolling and paying for a course.

**Start early.** You should have your college application forms submitted and your application fees paid before Thanksgiving!

What about spring?

If you do not finish the college application process during the fall semester, check with the guidance counselor early in the spring semester. Even though you may have missed some university deadlines, you will still have other options. However, try not to add any additional stress to your spring semester; it will have sufficient stress of its own.

**Apply before Thanksgiving!**

\*\*\*Take a deep breath, then go to the next page.\*\*\*

## **Application Process**

### Step 1 - Fill out the form:

Most colleges and universities prefer that you apply online. Some will provide a form that you can download, print, fill out, and return to them by mail.

Many institutions in Texas are linked to the Apply Texas Application ([www.applytexas.org](http://www.applytexas.org)). Using this resource allows you to fill out the majority of your information only once, then you can send it to more than one university in Texas.

You can find information at the website for your particular college or university of interest. Some colleges and universities are linked to the Common Application ([www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org)).

Filling out a college application is time consuming; it will take several hours. University officials want to know what you have been involved in during your high school years. Sections of the application form will ask for the following types of information:

- personal and family
- scholastic
- extracurricular involvement
- honors, awards, achievements
- community service
- essays (not required by all colleges)

### Step 2 - Pay application fee:

Most schools will require an application fee and the application form is not considered completed until this fee has been received. You can usually pay online with a credit card.

### Step 3 - Request your scores be sent:

Refer to “College Entrance Exams” section of this booklet (p.5). In most cases, scores must be sent directly from the testing company.

### Step 4 - Request your transcript:

College applications require an Official Transcript. You will order all transcripts through the Parchment Exchange. Your transcript contains confidential information such as your address and social security number along with a list of all high school courses you have attempted and the grade for each course. When you make your request through Parchment, you are giving SMA permission to share that information with a college or university. If you have not created an account yet, you will find instructions to "sign up" under the Family Resources tab at <https://smabears.org> by choosing Senior Class. (Look to the left for the blue "order my transcript" icon.) For international students, a copy of transcripts from schools attended in your home country will be required as well.

After you have submitted the application form and paid the fee, you may request your transcript. Here's how: Go to [www.smabears.org](http://www.smabears.org) and select the “Students” tab, then choose “Student's Home.” Next look in the Options Column on the left side of the screen, click on the blue icon “Request My Transcript” and follow the instructions. If you have never created an account you will need to “sign up.”

**WARNING #1: It may take 3-5 days to process a request. It is your responsibility to know and observe the deadlines posted by a college or university; therefore, make your request in plenty of time to meet the deadline.**

**WARNING #2: Colleges and universities will require your final transcript.**

The one item that cannot be sent until you graduate is your Official Final Transcript. Even though you receive an acceptance letter from a university early on, you are still required to send your final transcript. University officials look carefully at the final transcript to see if you maintained your reported GPA (grade point average) and if you continued to challenge yourself academically. Whereas your first request may be for several transcripts, by May you will probably know where you plan to attend in the fall of 2015. So, before you leave for the summer, you will need to request that your Official Final Transcript be sent to the college or university where you have been accepted and have decided to enroll.

If you took Dual Credit classes at SMA you will need to follow these steps to request your college transcript from Hardin-Simmons University:

1. Successfully graduate from San Marcos Academy.
2. Go to: [www.hsutx.edu/offices/registrar](http://www.hsutx.edu/offices/registrar)
3. Select: "Transcript Request Information" (to the right).
4. Find "Request a Transcript" then "former students" and select "click here to order a transcript."
5. Click on "login or create new account."
6. Click "create account" button and fill in all required fields on the form (The last four digits of your social security number is required. International students who do not have a social security number should type in "1234.")
7. Submit and follow instructions for payment.

Hardin-Simmons University contact number: (325) 670-1000.

For information concerning "request for transcript" fees, please refer to the SMA Student Handbook.

**\*Fill out the forms\***

**\*Pay fees\***

**\*Request Transcripts\***

**\*\*\*WATCH DEADLINES\*\*\***

## College Entrance Exams

Colleges and universities require some form of entrance exam. Each college or university has its own requirements regarding which test to take. Some universities require additional subject tests. **Taking the exam and having your scores sent to the school of your choice is only one part of the application process.**

### FAQs

#### **Do all colleges require the SAT or ACT?**

- Most four-year colleges require one of these tests. Some also require certain subject tests.
- Junior colleges and community colleges will most likely require a different entrance exam. Some of the most common ones are the TSI, Compass, Accuplacer.
- You must check with each institution to know for sure which college entrance exam is required.

#### **SAT or ACT, which test should I take?**

- The newly redesigned SAT no longer penalizes for wrong answers and the essay is optional
- ACT is a curriculum-based assessment, the essay is optional. Be sure to check with the university to know its essay policies

#### **How can I prepare for one of these tests?**

- The best way to prepare for the test is to put forth your best effort in the classroom.
- Familiarize yourself with the format of the test before the test date.
- Sign up to receive the Official SAT Question of the Day.
- Go to [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org) for information regarding the SAT.
- Go to [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org) for information regarding the ACT.
- Enroll in a college prep or online course (fees vary).
- Purchase books that contain practice tests and hints for taking a particular test. (Books can be found at the websites listed above, the Sabre, college bookstores, and Hastings.)
- Search the web to find numerous free resources such as practice tests (example: [www.number2.com](http://www.number2.com) and Kahn Academy).
- Form a student study group to meet regularly and practice.

#### **When should I take the test?**

- Seniors who are taking the test for the first time, or who are taking the test to try to improve their score should take the test in the fall semester.
- If you took one of these tests your Junior year and you are not satisfied with the score, you can take it again in fall of your Senior year.

#### **How do I register for the test?**

- Register online for the SAT at [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org), for the ACT at [actstudent.org](http://actstudent.org)
- Check the Senior Bulletin Board for deadlines or see the guidance counselor.
- Register for a test that will be administered here at the SMA campus (see p.7)

### **How many times should I take the test?**

- This is an individual decision.
- There is no guarantee that scores will get better the more times you take the test. As a general rule, scores increase with the second test, but sometimes scores decline. The second test often has a higher score than the third one.

### **Can I choose which scores I want to send to colleges and universities?**

- Both ACT and SAT allow you to designate which scores to send; however, designated scores must be sent from one test date.
- Some universities prefer you send scores for all tests.
- Check the websites for more information regarding the sending of test scores. Go to : [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org) or [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org).

### **What is the PSAT and when should I take it?**

- Seniors do not take the PSAT. At SMA, all Juniors and Sophomores are required to take the PSAT.
- Taking the PSAT will give you an experience similar to taking the SAT. You can also obtain useful information regarding your strengths and weaknesses before attempting the SAT.
- It is an excellent preparation tool for the SAT.
- It is offered one time each year in October.

### **What is the TOEFL?**

[Test Of English as a Foreign Language](#) measures the ability of nonnative speakers of English to communicate in English in the college or university classroom. Test scores are used in the admissions process at more than 7,000 academic institutions throughout the world. Those international (ESL) students required to take this test should contact Mr. Nave. SMA is an official TOEFL testing site. All tests will be offered in room 201. Students will need to be ready and in room 201 by 7:30 a.m. on the day of the test. We have 10 places available for each test.

### **Have other questions?**

- Search the web.
- Talk to the Guidance Counselor.

**Register for the Test\***

**\*Prepare for the Test\***

**\*Get plenty of rest the night before the Test\***

**\*\*\*WATCH DEADLINES\*\*\***

## **2016-2017 Testing Schedule**

The deadline for registering for the tests is approximately five weeks before the dates listed below. Registration is done online and requires payment with a credit card at the time of registration.

The dates listed below are when these tests will be given here at SMA. If you register for a different date, you are responsible for obtaining and paying for your transportation to and from the testing site. Testing on dates other than these must be approved by your parent/guardian, the principal, and dorm director.

ACT September 10, 2016

SAT October 1, 2016

SAT December 3, 2016

ACT February 11, 2017

SAT May 6, 2017

\*If you are planning to take or retake either the SAT or ACT – do it before Thanksgiving!

Go to [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org) for more information regarding the SAT.

Go to [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org) for more information regarding the ACT.

**\*Send Scores\***

**\*\*\*Ask the Guidance Counselor\*\*\***

## Scholarships, Grants, Financial Aid

Applying for a scholarship or a grant is separate from the application for admission. Each institution has different scholarships to offer. To help you get started, a short list of internet site searches for scholarships, foundations, grants, sweepstakes and contests is included on page 11 of this booklet.

Financial aid applications require that you fill out a FAFSA form and you will need assistance from your parents/guardians. One portion cannot be completed until your parents/guardians have filed their income tax for 201 (after January 1, 2015).

Information is available in the college room.

**NOTE: The vast majority of institutions consider (1) application of admissions, (2) housing, and (3) financial aid as three separate processes handled by three different offices.**

## Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are usually **not** required with an application for admission and should only be sent if requested by the school to which you are applying. They will, however, be required when applying for scholarships.

Even though you may feel uncomfortable asking one of your teachers, an employer, pastor or other adult to write a letter of recommendation for you, most adults will be happy to assist you if you use the right approach.

Here are a few tips:

- Be polite. Remember you are making a request, not demanding a service.
- Be clear. People need to know what they are being asked to do.
- Be informative. Provide some written information about yourself. (Refer to page 9 in this booklet). Fill out the form (make a few copies for later) and leave one with them.
- Be considerate. Give the person plenty of time; one or two days is not sufficient.
- Be helpful. If you are asking them to mail the letter, provide a stamped envelope that has been addressed to the university or college.
- Be appreciative. Say "Thank You" with a note, phone call or e-mail.

Institutions usually request that letters be sent directly from the person making the recommendation. Sometimes institutions prefer your counselor send all the letters together. You may be asked to bring letters with you when you go for an interview.

Whatever the case, follow the instructions you receive from the specific institution regarding its policy.

**\*\*\*WATCH DEADLINES\*\*\***

Full Name (include nickname or American name): \_\_\_\_\_

My hometown is: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Grade Level: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of years/semesters at SMA: \_\_\_\_\_

I am requesting this letter to support a:

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. college application \_\_\_\_\_ 2. scholarship application \_\_\_\_\_ 3. other \_\_\_\_\_

My extra-curricular activities include: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

My community service projects include: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Work experience: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Honors/Awards I have received while in high school: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Future plans: \_\_\_\_\_

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Other interesting information about me or my family: \_\_\_\_\_

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What one thing do I want the selection committee to know about me: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Please send your letter by this date: \_\_\_\_\_ to the address on the stamped envelope provided.

\_\_\_\_ Please submit the Recommender Form online by this date \_\_\_\_\_ to: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Please give to Mrs. Ritchie by this date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Future plans: \_\_\_\_\_

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Other interesting information about me or my family: \_\_\_\_\_

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What one thing do I want the selection committee to know about me: \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_ Please send by \_\_\_\_\_(date) to the address on the stamped envelope provided.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please give to Mrs. Ritchie by \_\_\_\_\_(date)

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

## Resources

- College Room - Located in the library. Contains college brochures and other information pertinent to college and career choices. Provides one computer designated for college/career search and filling out college applications. Each senior will have a folder in the filing cabinet inside the college room to keep copies of important information.
- Scholarship Table - Located in the library along with the financial aid bulletin board.
- SMA website ([www.smabears.org](http://www.smabears.org)) contains information about standardized testing. From the SMA homepage access General Information, then select Standardized Testing. The E-Bears Newsletter will often contain information for seniors about upcoming events and deadlines. Access it from the home page by going to “Publications” beneath the “Information” tab.
- Senior Bulletin Board - Located in the hall near the high school office. Contains postings of important deadlines along with other information.
- Hill Country College Fair - Hosted by Texas State University at San Marcos High School. This college fair usually occurs in September or October. Check the Senior Bulletin Board for date, time, and sign-up process. This is a great place to get pamphlets and talk to representatives from numerous colleges.
- College Days - Seniors are allowed four college days to visit colleges and universities. **Arrangements to take a “college day” must be made with and approved in advance by the principal.**
- College Representatives - Throughout the year representatives will be on our campus to bring information to students. For dates and times of presentations, check the Senior Bulletin Board and listen for announcements.
- Websites. Go to the websites of the colleges and universities. There you can find answers to specific questions related to that particular school. Many offer virtual tours of their campus, classrooms, and housing facilities

- More websites - Use these to access information about specific colleges and universities, prepare for college entrance exams, and fill out applications.

Some good places to begin for scholarship searches are:

[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)

[www.schoolsoup.com](http://www.schoolsoup.com)

[www.collegeforalltexans.com](http://www.collegeforalltexans.com)

Many more are listed on our website inside the Class of 2015 page under the "SMA Family Resources" Tab. Look to the left just above the "Request My Transcript" icon.

These are only a few of the hundreds of websites out there. Research. Google.

- People - Talk with people about the college or university they attended. This includes parents, family members, former students, coaches, teachers and other professionals. If you already have a definite career objective, visit with people who are doing now what you want to do in the future.
- Principal - Mr. Bryant in the high school office area. He has the final say about course changes, schedule changes, and college days (just to name a few).
- Ms. Jannett in the high school office can assist you with questions regarding graduation requirements and requests for unofficial and official transcripts.
- Guidance Counselor - Mrs. Ritchie is in the college room daily to help you with all aspects of the college application process. She is there to help you find answers to your questions regarding colleges and careers.
- The Counselor – Ms. Cotnam can assist you in coping with your fears, anxiety, and frustrations about college admissions.

**\*USE RESOURCES\***

**\*\*\*WATCH DEADLINES\*\*\***

1. It is your responsibility to visit the college room and meet with the guidance counselor as often as necessary to complete the college application process.
2. Keep your grades up your senior year at SMA. Acceptance to college is conditional on the successful completion of your second semester transcript.
3. Remember, the published “average SAT or ACT scores” are just that - average. If you feel your academic record is solid, do not let fear of rejection stop you from applying to the school of your choice. In short, go for it!
4. If you are dissatisfied with your SAT or ACT score, try again. Resources and counseling are available. Colleges usually accept your highest score.
5. Remember - If you enroll in a Dual-Credit Course, D's do not transfer from one college to another!
6. Notify all other colleges as soon as you know you will not be accepting their offer of enrollment. Thank them for considering you. All such letters are placed in a file; you never know when you might like to transfer.
7. Investigate the possibility of attending community colleges as a preliminary step to your educational career.
8. If you intend to seek sorority or fraternity affiliation, know in advance how much time you will be expected to devote to non-academic requirements.
9. If you wish to visit or contact a school and you want to know if an SMA graduate is on campus, contact the Guidance Office at that college or university for a possible list of names.
10. Before you head off to college, you might want to discuss some of the following matters with your family.
  - a. Medical Insurance - Are you still covered on family policy? If you are a part-time student, are you covered?
  - b. If you take your car away to school, is your insurance in effect?
  - c. Should items of value be “ripped off” from your dorm, are you covered on a personal property floater?
11. Do not expect anyone to do your college preparatory work for you. Fill out the forms carefully, double check on test scores and transcripts sent, keep a record of extracurricular activities, and make copies and file recommendations.
12. Remember, the name of the institution written on the diploma will be the name of the college or university where you finish!