

## February 2021

### 6<sup>th</sup> – ACT and ACT plus Writing

Juniors – Begin your college search utilizing college websites, virtual tours and information sessions

Juniors – Map out dates and prepare for spring SAT and/or ACT exams

Seniors – Contact colleges to be sure your applications are complete. Send mid-year grades if required. Update colleges with any new information that might influence admission

## March 2021

### 13<sup>th</sup> – SAT

(register by 2/12—late registration until 3/2)

9th, 10th and 11th grade students - Make plans for a productive summer. Investigate summer programs, jobs, internships

11th grade students – Create an initial list of colleges

## Considering a Gap Year?

Each year, an increasing number of US high school graduates opt to take a year off between the end of high school and the start of college. Members of the high school class of 2020 did so in record numbers, spurred on by the likelihood of online learning and a greatly altered college experience due to the COVID 19 pandemic. With the advent of effective vaccines and with colleges beginning to announce on campus programs for the fall of 2021, should you still consider a gap year?

Taking a year off between high school graduation and freshman year can be liberating and the perfect choice for the right student. Here are a variety of good reasons to consider a gap year.

**Get off the treadmill** – You really think you could benefit from some time off. High school has been stressful, the college admissions process has been incredibly anxiety-producing and you're finding yourself perhaps not as motivated or excited for the next chapter. So many high school students just feel exhausted, spent, and as if they're running on fumes. Who wants to pay the high price of college today if you're not fully invested in the experience?

Many students really benefit from doing something different for a year (community service, travel, work, internships, etc.) and then returning to an academic environment with their batteries fully-recharged. A number of colleges are now encouraging their accepted students to delay their

freshman year and start renewed, refreshed and reenergized the following year.

**Grow and mature** – Not everybody is ready for the independence of college and some parents and many students, when pressed, worry that they may not be college-ready. They may have never lived away from home for an extended period of time, they may still be a little too dependent on their parents or they may not quite have mastered self-discipline and solid decision-making skills. A gap year experience that allows them to take baby-steps, lets them mature at their own rate and validates their progress and maturity can be the perfect antidote.

Just ask any college student and they will tell you that balancing academics and a social life is tricky. Many parents of freshmen who were forced to drop out during or after their freshman year now wish they had considered a gap year option.

**Build your resume** – A gap year experience can be a great opportunity to focus on a social issue, academic interest or a pet project. Many colleges will be happy to defer your admission to the following year as long as they receive a detailed letter stating how you plan to spend your time off. Sometimes, students will use the gap year to dig deeper into something that interests them and then utilize that experience to gain entrance to a more selective college on the second go round. Some students have had the good fortune of reapplying and being accepted to a college where they had been previously denied.

## Career Paths for Foreign Language Majors

- Public relations director
- Journalist
- Television reporter
- Radio production
- Editorial assistant
- Speech writer
- Interpreter / translator
- Attorney
- FBI/NSA agent
- Legislative assistant
- International relations specialist
- Grant writer/fundraiser
- Peace Corps volunteer
- Community organizer
- Human rights worker
- Foreign service worker
- Advertiser
- Consultant
- Fashion industry worker
- International marketer
- Investment banker
- Electronic commerce worker
- Health care provider
- Teacher / professor



A strong foreign language program provides access to native speakers on the faculty, encourages social interaction through foreign language dorms or special clubs, and includes such facilities as language labs. Study abroad programs in regions where your language is spoken are an added plus.

## Majoring in Foreign Language

As the world becomes more and more interconnected, fluency in multiple languages is a highly desirable skill. A wide variety of companies and organizations require workers fluent in foreign languages. If you are fascinated by the study of language and culture, a major in a foreign language may be a fit.

The major provides students with a strong background in the language of study. They will study written and spoken applications, gain fluency in communication, and read and analyze literature from the culture. Language majors also study the culture or cultures the language stems from. Oftentimes, a semester abroad will be either required or strongly encouraged in a country where the language of study is spoken. Some examples of courses include the study of race and gender in French cultures, Spanish cinema, and storytelling in Italian cultures.

Students gain fluency in the language of choice as well as a variety of other skills. Through the study of another language, they will increase their oral communication skills, learn how to communicate with other cultures, and begin to read critically. They will also gain a sensitivity for cultural differences, and study politics, art and music from a different society. These abilities will prove useful in multiple fields of work.

Students interested in government may choose to work as a foreign consulate, aid military or intelligence agencies, or represent the United States in trade negotiations. Consulates issue visas and work with visiting tourists, students, or migrants from foreign countries. In an intelligence or military agency, students could work for the CIA or the NSA, where foreign language speakers are highly sought after. The CIA has a Corporate Language Hiring Bonus Program, which can add as much as \$36,000 in bonuses. The NSA hires

language analysts in research, transcription, and translation of materials that may be of national concern.

Students interested in education may work as school counselors or foreign language teachers. They may also work as teachers of bilingual students. This would require an additional degree in education. Students may also choose to work with children in families as a social worker.

Those interested in travel may work as a tour guide, travel agent, or staff member at a hotel where the use of a foreign language may be required. Airlines also seek multilingual people, so a student could become an airline employee.

The health field values language skills. Being able to communicate with non-native speakers is important for the health of those patients, so students could work as nurses, hospital receptionists, and ER staffers.

Furthermore, students with a passion for entertainment and media can find work in the entertainment industry. There is a wide market for book translators, journalists who speak multiple languages, and marketing designers who can cater to different languages and cultures. Since many brands have markets internationally, they need speakers of foreign languages to design content that will advertise to the language and cultural preferences of potential customers in foreign countries.

Finally, students may find their passion in NGOs, working towards the development of communities in need. Organizations such as the UN that work in foreign countries require the assistance of translators and program workers that understand how to communicate and address the needs of people from different cultures.

# Financial Matters: Changes Coming to the FAFSA



The FAFSA Simplification Act of 2021 brings a slew of changes to the FAFSA that will begin with the 2022-23 application cycle. Perhaps the biggest change is to the **EFC—Expected Family Contribution**. The EFC is the number that was calculated by the FAFSA and provided to colleges as a way for them to determine **demonstrated need**. (Total cost of attendance minus EFC = demonstrated need.) Because most colleges do not meet 100% of demonstrated need, the EFC misled families into thinking that this number was what they would actually pay for a year at a particular college. In practice, most families paid more than the EFC, and

were often expected to provide more funds from assets or through student/parent loans. Thus the new law is changing the name from Expected Family Contribution to **Student Aid Index** to better reflect this fact.

The new legislation also simplifies the FAFSA process by greatly shortening the number of questions asked. Accordingly, the form will be shortened from over 100 questions to about 35. The hope is that a shorter, less complicated form will encourage more families to complete the FAFSA.

Another big change is for families who have multiple students enrolled in college. Currently, a family's expected contribution is divided by the number of children in college. As of 2022, this benefit for families with multiple children will change, and families will no longer see a benefit from this provision. This loss will reduce the amount of need-based aid that middle and high

income families with multiple family members enrolled in college can expect.

Still another change is in regards to whose income is considered for the FAFSA. Currently, students whose parents live separately submit information for the parent with whom they live during the majority of the time. Once the new law goes into effect, the parent who contributes more financially to the student's upkeep will be the one whose income will be considered.

Pell Grant eligible students will see another change. Some lower-income students may find it easier to determine how much Pell money they can expect using the new FAFSA.

While changes will not take effect for another year, families should factor in these changes while considering the 4-year cost of college.

## Looking for a Way to Enhance Your Learning Experiences?

The chances are good that there's a MOOC in your future. MOOC stands for "Massive Open Online Course", and this technology has been impacting education. Although many of you are currently doing some or all of your learning online, you will find that MOOCs are different from traditional high school or college courses.

The hallmarks of MOOCs are reflected in their acronym—the enrollment is huge, they are open to whomever wishes to take part, and generally are free and carry no credit. Because faculty are unable to respond to students in a MOOC, the material must be more engaging and interactive, and fellow students rely on each other to provide support.

Although MOOCs have been around for several years, there has been a

huge increase in enrollment in these classes recently. edX, a non-profit MOOC operator from Harvard and MIT, is home to more than 20 million learners, while Coursera, a for-profit venture started by Stanford University professor Andrew Ng, has reached over 75 million students. Many of the most prestigious universities have jumped on the bandwagon, and now offer at least a few of their most popular courses through a MOOC.

The most successful courses use short video lectures followed by a quiz to make sure users understand the material. Many MOOCs require homework and some offer proctored exams. The instructor may be a renowned professor at the University offering the class, but some very successful classes are

simply taught by very engaging instructors who make learning the material fun. Study groups ("meet-ups") composed of fellow students in a particular area help to ensure that students get more out of the class.

Topics covered in a MOOC tend to center around science, math, computers and business, but course selection is expanding rapidly. For high school students, taking part in a MOOC can help you learn about a subject of interest that is not available at your school or in your area. Check out the offerings at edX, Coursera, or Udacity to follow your own passions! Learning isn't always about the credit!

[www.edx.org](http://www.edx.org)  
[www.coursera.org](http://www.coursera.org)  
[www.udacity.com](http://www.udacity.com)



**Elizabeth Levine**

[liz@SignatureCollege  
Counseling.com](mailto:liz@SignatureCollegeCounseling.com)

845.551.6946

[www.SignatureCollege  
Counseling.com](http://www.SignatureCollegeCounseling.com)

## To Test or Not To Test? That is the Question

With so much uncertainty about test requirements for the high school class of 2022, many juniors are torn as they try to decide if they should prepare for and take the SAT and or ACT this year. As of this time, many colleges have not announced their plans for remaining test optional or test blind next year. So how do you decide if you should invest both considerable time and money into test prep for the next admissions cycle?

This is really where a trusted advisor is very valuable. Your advisor will look objectively at your high school record, consider your past performance on standardized tests or have you take mock SAT/ACT exams, and review your profile in light of the colleges to which you aspire. Together, you can map out a testing plan that truly suits you. If you do decide to take the SAT/ACT, you will still have the option of applying test optional to a great many colleges next year. Because many test centers are still closed because of the pandemic, you might want to put off testing until late this spring or early summer. We expect more available test dates to

accommodate students who wish to test during the summer months.

Even with all the uncertainty, there are some things we do know. On January 19, 2021, the College Board announced the end of the optional SAT Writing Assessment. This test has become increasingly irrelevant in the college admission process, as colleges agreed that it was a poor measure of a student's grasp of essential writing skills. As of this date, the ACT is still offering this optional assessment, but the admission testing giants do tend to follow each other's lead, so we might expect changes to the ACT as well.

In addition, the College Board also just announced the end of the SAT Subject tests for US students. (Some foreign countries still use these so tests will be available for international students through the end of this academic year.) In lieu of the SAT Subject exams, College Board is encouraging students to prepare for and take AP subject exams as a way of demonstrating competency in specific subject areas. How will colleges respond? Stay tuned!