College Resources for Graduating Seniors and Rising Seniors....

Start with this online event this Thursday (4/16/20) at 7pm. College Success Night is a free event for students and parents. Click here to learn more. The event promoter (CollegeAVE a college loan provider) is also offering a $5000 scholarship to those who complete a separate registration on the site. Please note: in exchange for your personal information, they will enter your name and use your data to contact you in the future.

Trying to get a deeper sense of what a college may be like without going on campus? Try CampusReel home of over 15,000 videos designed to give you the student’s perspective. To date, only 300 campuses are available on this site, but the number is growing. The website is free for students and parents to use and can be a great tool to compare types of schools or learn more generally about schools in a certain region.
Here’s How College Admissions Are Changing This Year — and What High School Seniors Need to Know
BY JOANNA NESBIT
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From MONEY.com (editor notes): With hundreds of college campuses closed by COVID-19, high school seniors and rising seniors and their families are wondering how they’re supposed to make a decision about where to attend if they can’t visit in person. Or if they can afford college at all with abrupt changes to their family’s finances. Colleges, meanwhile, are scrambling to help enrolled students adjust to online learning while fielding concerns from prospective students. On top of that, a new rule change taking effect this spring—that has nothing to do with the novel coronavirus—could also extend the college decision process for families. In short, we’re in stressful, uncharted territory. Here’s what families of seniors and rising seniors should know.

Postponed Deadlines for Deciding Where to Enroll
Historically, the college decision deadline has been May 1, but this spring with COVID-19 shuttering campuses, some colleges have extended theirs to June 1 or beyond to give families time to regroup. Some will maintain a May 1 deadline, but many could extend theirs in the coming weeks, experts say. It’s going to be a fluid time. Don’t be afraid to ask for an extension if a college hasn’t changed its deadline, says Rick Clark, director of undergraduate admission at Georgia Institute of Technology and co-author of The Truth about College Admission. Admissions directors say families can expect a greater level of flexibility from colleges during this unprecedented time. “I see colleges tripping over themselves trying to reduce the bureaucracy wherever they can, and that’s what they should be doing,” says David Burge, vice president for enrollment management at George Mason University. Schools discourage “double depositing,” but with different deadlines, it’s possible your family might need to submit deposits to two different schools—one with a May 1 deadline and one with a June 1 deadline—to make sure you have enough time to decide. Yet Burge suggests asking first for an extension from the May 1 school and explaining your circumstances.

Changes to When Colleges Can Reach Out to Students
Traditionally, colleges made a practice of not marketing to a student after the family had put down a deposit at another school. But last fall, the National Association of College Admissions Counselors (NACAC) rescinded the policy, after the Department of Justice said it violated antitrust rules. That means colleges are free to reach out to your student well after decision days and even in the fall, unrelated to COVID-19. It’s possible students could receive a better financial aid package from another school after they’ve committed to their first choice. But don’t expect that from public universities or private schools that meet 100 percent of need, Clark says. “I think where you might see that is with mid-tier private schools. You could see some repackaging occurring.” College experts also anticipate more students will land on waitlists this year with COVID-19 making student attendance less predictable. Combined with extended deadlines, family decision-making could occur much later this summer, even into July, compressing the schedule between decision and start-time. But that also means unexpected opportunities could open up, such as coming off a waitlist at a desired school or receiving a better financial package, Clark says. “Families should stay patient, stay open to the extent they’re comfortable deeper in the summer,” he says. (Of course, there’s no guarantee of coming off a waitlist, so be prepared to deposit on a school your student was accepted to.) For some, that extended timeline might be difficult when students are ready for closure. Elizabeth Heaton, vice president of Bright Horizons College Coach, encourages families to talk now about how they’ll make a decision. “Do you want to continue to consider offers after the May or June 1 deadline? Is there a date by which you need to be done? Is there a group of schools you’d be open to entertaining offers from but not others?” she says. She suggests families talk about money openly as they discuss what colleges will cost.

Tours Without Stepping Foot on Campus
Colleges are rolling out tools to host virtual admitted students’ days, virtual campus tours, video series and webcasts. Georgia Tech, for example, recently launched a GT YouTube channel for admissions, where prospective students can hear from current students about topics like studying business administration or going to football games in the fall. Of course, there’s no way to replace the experience of a tour or admitted students’ day in person, but you can still search for a personalized experience in this new reality. “I hat might come down to something as simple as an email exchange or a video conference,” Burge says. “And if a campus doesn’t provide good one-on-one attention, that might be a good gauge for whether it’s right for you.” Colleges are also being flexible about test scores and final semester grades. Ask about your intended schools’ policies. Many have already gone to a test optional policy, and this spring’s pandemic is driving more to do the same. Some colleges plan to go test optional for several years or permanently. Heaton recommends taking advantage of social media channels and anything else campuses are able to offer, such as a local gathering on Google Hangout. Also, consider reaching out to current or past students of a college to ask what it’s like to go there.

Updating Financial Aid Awards
The federal tax deadline has been extended to July 15, but the extension doesn’t change your FAFSA, which is based on your 2018 tax return (2019 for rising seniors). However, families who have experienced a recent drop in income or assets should contact their student’s schools to file a change in circumstance and ask for financial aid to be recalculated. (This statement is true for every year of college not just this year.) Be prepared to show documentation of how your finances have changed. Policies and ability to award aid vary from school to school, and with many students likely in the same boat, there’s no guarantee a school can offer more. But you should try, Heaton says. The worst colleges can say is no. Bottom line, families should advocate for themselves as candidly and directly as possible. Pick up the phone and call the financial aid office or the admissions office, and tell them what you need, experts say. In a possible silver lining, colleges say they are trying to be more transparent and student-friendly than ever before.