

Over the High School and Through the Home . . . It's Off to College We Go!

By Renee Janzen

Stop! Read on only if (a) you currently, or someday will, have a homeschool high schooler; (b) you want your high schooler to have a college education but have plaguing thoughts that you can't guide your child through high school and into college; (c) you believe the maze of transcripts, applications, and assorted forms needed for high school and college will require you to hire a professional "worker-of-paper"; (d) contemplating the staggering cost of a four-year college induces within you strange physical symptoms such as loss of breath; or (e) any or all of the above.

If this describes you, take courage. Studies show that "Homeschoolers are academically, emotionally, and socially prepared to succeed in college" (*Homeschooling on the Threshold: A Survey of Research at the Dawn of the New Millennium* (1999), p.17, Brian D. Ray, Ph.D, quoting Irene M. Pure (1997). *A nationwide survey of admissions personnel's knowledge, attitudes and experiences with homeschooled applicants*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, Athens.) and that "several colleges think so well of the home educated that they have been actively recruiting them for several years." (Ray 1999, p. 17.)

That's heartening, you say, but where is the path that will successfully lead my child from home to the campus gateway? Uncharted courses can appear daunting, but there is a roadway that will take you and your high schooler through choosing the best college, a marketable degree, and a fitting career path. So, put on your walking shoes and let's go!

Making Choices

The first step is actually to begin at the end and proceed backwards. It is easier to map a course when you know the destination. Help your high schooler choose a career or, if he is not yet ready to make that weighty decision, help point him in a life direction. God has a perfect plan for your young adult, and that plan includes a life work. You, as that child's parent, are the best person to guide him in choosing his career or path. We have been a student of our child since his birth, observing his gifts, talents, and passions.

At age 3, my son Micah was intrigued with the drainage system in our neighborhood park. When he was older, I provided him with plenty of building toys and books about how things worked. Now, at age 18, he is pursuing a college degree in engineering. You can help your young adult discern his life's work by observing his talents, discussing his interests, and providing varied curricular and extracurricular opportunities.

A tangible step in helping your young adult choose a career path is to take advantage of personality profile and career counseling resources. One such resource is www.collegeboard.myroad.com. It provides high schoolers with individualized personality profiles, career options, and appropriate college majors. Seek to provide your future collegiate with opportunities to interview, shadow, or apprentice in his field of interest. By tenth grade Micah had narrowed his career choices to engineering and dentistry. He interviewed several

engineers and spent a day shadowing our family dentist, and he was able to choose the career that most intrigued him.

Discuss with your child the practical considerations of his career choice. How many hours will he be required to work each week? Could he support a family on the salary? How much travel would be involved? What about the job forecast? Are there any religious or moral issues to consider? An important step in choosing a career is to seek the counsel of others who know and love your child. Most importantly, seek the Lord's direction through prayer. Once you and your high schooler have taken the first step of choosing a career or direction, you are ready to choose a college major.

What major area of study will best prepare him for his chosen field and make him marketable to future employers? My daughter Grace is currently a high school senior and enjoys art. She is researching careers in art and is considering a degree in graphic design. This major would allow her to earn a marketable degree while using her artistic abilities.

Explore more about college majors through resources such as www.collegeboard.myroad.com, national magazines that evaluate colleges, such as *U.S. News and World Report* (www.usnews.com) and *The Princeton Review* (www.princetonreview.com), professional organizations, and college advisors. Once you and your high schooler have narrowed your career choice and college studies, you are ready to select the college that will be the perfect fit for your child.

Begin the process of choosing a university when the student is in his final two years of high school. Consider these important questions: Would my child best thrive in a public or private college? Is a private or Christian school important to us? Would he flourish at larger university with many diverse opportunities, or would a small, personal college be the place where he would best grow? Would my youth be more comfortable in a metropolis, suburban, or rural setting? What about the distance from home? My son and I agreed that he would not attend a college farther than one day's drive from home; even though this meant that he would not consider some very appealing universities.

Explore the admission requirements, and don't forget the cost and available financial aid. After you have determined your parameters, select 6 to 8 schools that fit within those guidelines and request general college information and specific departmental information from them. Spend time with your student browsing through materials with the goal of limiting your selection to the top 3 or 4 schools.

Colleges are academically ranked in three tiers. Unless your student rests soundly on one extreme of the academic continuum, he should consider selecting a tier I university, one to three tier II schools, and one tier III college. Next, visit as many of these universities as possible. Take a list of questions, be sure to visit the admissions and financial aid offices, take a campus tour, check out the housing options, and make an appointment with a faculty member. If campus visits are not possible, find college fairs in your area where you and your potential collegiate can speak with a representative from the university.

Once you have completed the steps of choosing a career, deciding upon a major, and selecting a college, you and your student will have completed the first leg of your path from high school to college. You can now confidently select the best high school course of study.

Planning High School

Now that your student knows where he is headed, the next stretch of the course is to map out a high school curriculum. High school transcripts must meet the mandates of (1) your state's high school graduation requirements; (2) the admission requisites of prospective universities; (3) the recommendations of the college or department major within the university; and most importantly, (4) your desires as a parent.

The demands of these four entities often differ. Our state does not mandate foreign language for high school graduation. However, all of the universities to which my son applied required two years of foreign language in high school. Similarly, our state required only three years of math and science and several universities had the same regulations, but the colleges of engineering wanted four years of both high school math and science. While none of Micah's prospective universities made Bible or worldview essential, these subjects were important to me as a parent. The assorted requirements may be obtained through your state educational organization, the admissions department of your prospective university, and the department or "college" of your child's prospective major.

To identify your parental requirements, ask yourself these questions: What do I want my child to know spiritually and biblically before he leaves home? What does he need to learn emotionally and mentally before he launches into the world? Are there any physical skills I would like him to acquire? Once you have these sundry requirements in hand, compile them into a list and then map out a four-year high school plan. This "map" will serve as one of your first high school records.

Getting into College

College admissions application will require high school transcripts, scores from college entrance exams, academic honors, community involvement, leadership experiences, letters of recommendation, work, and extracurricular experiences. Transcripts should include the course title, the number of credit hours based on your state's system of recording credit hours, the numerical and letter grade, and the grade point average (GPA).

College applications are designed with traditional high school education and extracurricular activities in mind. If the application includes a long list of extracurricular activities but your student can check only one or two, don't be discouraged. Be creative. Remember, the college admissions committee wants to know your child's background. Create your own attachment and organize his extracurricular activities in a way that puts him in the best light.

While my son could not check the leadership options of student council or class president, his positions in Boy Scouts and within our church proved that he had leadership experience. My daughter evidenced her involvement in community service by recording her time as vacation Bible school teacher, mission trip volunteer, and afternoons spent helping a young mother.

Academic honors can be awarded through you as a parent-teacher, through homeschool co-ops, and by tutors. National academic honor organizations available to homeschoolers include Who's Who Among American High School Students (www.whoswho-highschool.com), National Honor Society (www.nhs.us), and National Honor Roll (www.nationalhonorroll.org). Your student should begin requesting letters of recommendation when he begins high school. These outside recommendations lend credibility to homeschool students whose parents have served as teacher, principal, and guidance counselor. Consider seeking recommendations from other academic instructors, coaches, and teachers of extracurricular experiences, pastors, youth leaders, community leaders, and family friends. Ask for three or four signed originals and set up a filing system for your transcripts, entrance exam scores, extracurricular involvements, honors, letters of recommendation, and information about each college.

Paying for College

Financing higher education is the home stretch of your journey from high school to college. Knowing the course in this area can help you finish strong and save dollars. One of the most common ways to cut costs is to attend a local community college. Some community colleges offer concurrent enrollment programs whereby students can receive both high school and college credit for the same course. As much as two years of undergraduate work can be completed at a community college, saving money on tuition, room, and board.

If you choose this route, beware of a few potential pitfalls. First, not all credits earned through a community college will transfer to your chosen four-year university. Second, too many credit hours earned through a community college may disqualify your pupil from scholarships, grants, and other money offered only to incoming freshmen. Ignorance of these potential snares may ultimately cost you more than you save.

You can bypass thousands of college dollars by taking the right tests in high school. The PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test) is used as a college scholarship indicator as well as a qualifier for the National Merit Scholarship Program. The PSAT is taken in the fall of the student's junior year. A National Merit Scholar may receive a tuition waiver from his prospective college. Many universities offer handsome scholarships to those who score high enough to be named a commendable scholar, semi-finalist, or finalist.

Even if your high schooler's score does not qualify him for these awards, it can be used to identify weak areas before taking the SAT. Most colleges require scores from the ACT or SAT as part of the admission process. However, sufficiently high scores on these tests can also qualify your student for merit-based scholarships. The best time to take the ACT or SAT is the end of the high school junior year, although taking prior practice tests at home is recommended. Scores from tests taken in the fall of the senior year will still be received in time for college admission applications.

Two other tests can help you save money by testing out of college classes while still in high school. If your high schooler takes the Advanced Placement (AP) exams and scores high enough, he can apply these course credits toward freshman year at college. Approximately 23 subject exams are offered, costing \$70 to \$80 each and scored on a 1-5 scale. The CLEP (College Level Examination Program) may also give advanced standing or college credit. These exams cost \$50

each and cover various subjects. Scores range from 20 to 80, and many colleges require students to score a 50 to 60 for advanced standing.

You can save time and money by understanding how the AP and CLEP exams differ. The greatest variance is in content. The CLEP is designed for any student with a proper understanding of the subject. AP exams are fashioned from the AP course outline, and achieving the desired score may be challenging without first taking an AP course. This can be overcome by using the AP outline along with your high school course or by obtaining an AP subject prep book from your local bookstore. A second difference is that while both tests have multiple-choice questions, most AP exams also include essay questions. Many colleges will award advanced standing through AP, but fewer will do so through CLEP. Finally, AP exams are offered only in May and only through local high schools. CLEP exams are offered on more than 2,900 college campuses and can be taken at any time. My son took three AP exams his senior year and achieved the desired score on only one. Although we spent \$240 on three AP tests, by passing one test he saved \$5,000 in college tuition. It is possible to test out of an entire year of courses through AP and CLEP tests.

Financial assistance in the form of merit scholarships, need-based scholarships, grants, work-study, and loans can be obtained through federal, state, and local programs, as well as from your prospective college. The U.S. Department of Education will award approximately 70 billion dollars in federal aid this year to help families afford the towering cost of higher education. Completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the first step in receiving federal financial aid. The initial FAFSA is submitted after January 1 and before June 30 during your student's high school senior year. Federal Pell Grants and Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG) are both calculated from the information provided on the FAFSA.

Pell Grants are designed for undergraduate students who have not yet received a college degree. If you have an extreme need, you may also be eligible for a FSEOG. Neither grant needs to be repaid. The FAFSA determines your eligibility for other need-based financial aid programs.

Federal work-study is a campus-based program that provides on-campus jobs for students with demonstrated financial need. Typically the wage is minimum. A Stafford Loan is a loan to the student, while PLUS Loans are loans to the parents of dependent college children. Federal Perkins Loans are campus-based, low-interest loans available to undergraduate and graduate students. Not only is the FAFSA a requirement for all federal aid, but it is also mandatory for most state and college aid, and state deadlines for submitting FAFSA may be earlier than the federal deadline.

Individual states can provide great benefits. Every state offers money for college through various state-sponsored scholarship programs, grants, and prepaid tuition plans. In our home state of Oklahoma, for instance, the State Regents for Higher Education offers merit scholarships from \$1,000 per year up to a full four-year college ride. Find the information relevant to your state by contacting the state higher education office.

Nearly every college has its own scholarship and grant programs. Some awards are determined by the FAFSA; others require separate application. Ask your prospective college for a financial

aid brochure. After the freshman year, numerous departmental scholarships are also available for the asking.

Don't ignore smaller awards offered locally. "Smaller" can mean any amount between \$100 and \$10,000. To locate these scholarships, contact your local government representative, your public library, or search the Internet. You may not think to turn to organizations for help with college costs, even though they are some of the best sources. These magnanimous organizations include service groups such as the Elks Club and Boy Scouts of America. They also include foundations formed by corporations or individuals that give away roughly 7,000 scholarships annually worth \$45 million. Professional organizations, trade unions, and military service organizations also fall under this category. Don't forget to inquire about scholarships offered by your church, employer, or trade organization.

Other places you may not think to look are military colleges and ROTC. All three branches of the Armed Services operate their own degree-granting academies where a student can receive a "free" academically superior college education in exchange for the opportunity to serve his country after graduation.

Athletic scholarships are another possibility. However, you and your child might want to consider the negative aspects of this avenue before he invests the colossal amount of time required to win an athletic scholarship. First, consider the possibility of physical injury that can take your student out of the running for an athletic scholarship. Second, remember your athlete is being compared to the best in the country. Be realistic about his chances of winning a full athletic scholarship. Finally, assuming your sportsman lands that full scholarship; consider the time commitment required for playing college sports. Remember, the purpose of an athletic scholarship is to get a free education--a purpose that will be defeated if he fails in college.

Ladies and gentlemen, we've now come to the end of our guided tour from career choice to major to college, from applications to activities to aid. I hope you've enjoyed your stroll and that it has helped to prepare you for the real promenade with your homeschool high schooler. Have a pleasant journey!

Important Websites:

- **ACT (American College Testing)**
 - www.actstudent.org
 - www.act.org
- **AP (Advanced Placement)**
 - collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/about.html--Time and location available through collegeboard.com. Sign up through your local high school.
- **CLEP Test (College-Level Examination Program)**
 - www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/clep/about.html--Find testing center, then contact testing center to arrange to sit for exam.

- **College Entrance Examination Board**
 - www.CollegeBoard.com
- Tests (SAT, PSAT/NMSQT, AP, CLEP): how to study, what is included on the tests, and more
- Tips on how to prepare for college during high school
- College search
- Financial aid advice and scholarship search
 - Tips on how to find and choose a college, and how to apply www.CollegeBoard.MyRoad.com
- Tips on academic programs, how to plan for college, etc.
- Personality test
- Careers test and majors test
- College major descriptions, applicable careers, etc.
- Career descriptions, college majors, and education needed for career
- Some include average salary and outlook
- College search--set criteria
- Online "journal" of goals, resume, interests, information, schools, etc.
- **FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)**
 - www.fafsa.ed.gov
- **PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test)**
 - www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/psat/about.html
- **SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test)**
 - www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/about.html

Biographical Information

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Renee Janzen resides in Tulsa, Oklahoma, with her four teenagers. Micah studies engineering at Baylor University, having earned 85% of his college expenses in scholarships. Grace is a

homeschooled senior and a candidate for National Merit Scholar. Samuel aspires to be a pilot via the U.S. Air Force Academy, and Natalie is considering medicine, but really wants to be a mommy. Renee operates a home business teaching junior and senior high homeschoolers, advising homeschool families concerning college, and writing. You may contact Renee at janzen5@sbcglobal.net.