

oakmeadow College Guide

Let's get
started!

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Homeschooled students offer a unique perspective and skill set that more colleges are understanding and appreciating as they seek to diversify their college communities. According to one study, homeschooled students are also demonstrating higher college success and graduation rates than their peers.

Our online guide shows you how to optimize your distinctive experience so you'll stand out in the college application pool. Oak Meadow also offers professional college counseling service at an hourly rate for homeschoolers who would like more personalized guidance.





1 Choosing the College That is Right For You

- **LOCATION:** In which region of the country would you like to live? What type of climate?
- **SETTING:** Are you looking for a rural, suburban, or urban campus? Proximity to public transportation?
- **SIZE OF STUDENT BODY:**
Are you more comfortable in a small setting (fewer than 2000 students), a medium-sized school (2,000 to 10,000 students), or a large school?

FOR OAK MEADOW ENROLLED STUDENTS:

Course Selection and Advanced Placement (AP) Courses

Colleges have gotten to know Oak Meadow, our creative and rigorous curriculum, and our superb faculty, and they are impressed with our creative, independent, motivated learners.

Identifying your strengths and interests early can help you decide on which subject areas to focus. Oak Meadow only requires a minimum of 21 credits in order to graduate, but most college-bound

- **AVERAGE NUMBER OF STUDENTS PER FACULTY MEMBER:** Are you looking for lots of one-on-one interaction with professors? Or do you envision large lecture halls with hundreds of students in each class?
- **AREAS OF STUDY:** Is there an area of study that you are interested in? Are there certain schools that specialize in this major? Is there academic support?
- **PHILOSOPHY:** Liberal Arts school? Large research institution? How are the career services?
- **ACTIVITIES/ATHLETICS:** Does the school have your activities? Are you interested in a school that has a strong athletic program and many opportunities for competition? A place where you can be a fan?
- **CAMPUS LIFE:** Are you looking for a school with fraternities and sororities? Do you want a school that offers plenty of cultural or community service opportunities?
- **COST/FINANCIAL AID**
 - How much will it cost? Include tuition, room and board, application fees, deposits, books, additional fees, travel costs to home.
 - Consider In-State vs. Out-of-State tuition.
 - How important is the availability of financial aid?
 - Do they have need-based and merit-based scholarships? Aid for international students?

students graduate with 22 to 26 credits. Taking additional classes allows you the chance to customize your transcript and show your strengths. If you intend to apply to highly selective colleges, pursue upper level courses in your area of interest and plan to graduate with 26 credits. As an Oak Meadow student, you are in a unique position to direct the course of your studies and individualize your education. Check with our educational staff to help plan your course selection.

For juniors and seniors with strong academic skills and a high level of motivation, we offer a wide range of Advanced Placement courses through Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth (**CTYOnline**). These courses provide an interactive online experience along with excellent teacher support. Our AP courses earn full Oak Meadow credit and help prepare students

for the College Board AP exams. Colleges view candidates with AP course credits as strong, engaged learners with advanced academic skills. Although most colleges and universities require standardized admissions tests (such as the SAT and ACT), test scores are just one method of estimating a student's academic potential. They do not measure work habits, enthusiasm, study skills, responsibility, creativity, musical talent or artistic ability, leadership skills, motivation, perseverance, initiative or character. The best academic predictor for most college admissions offices is the student's high school record. Taking a full course load and challenging classes in high school will indicate your determination and commitment to your education. The teachers at Oak Meadow will inspire your learning and support your academic achievement.

2

Getting Started

There are many steps to the college admissions process. **Most students begin the process before their junior (or junior-equivalent) year.** Narrowing down school choices, requesting and reviewing college materials, scheduling and taking admissions exams, and keeping track of the deadlines and paperwork required of each prospective college can be time consuming and challenging. However, it is also an exciting time to explore possibilities and dream of what's to come. Preparation is the key to managing this phase of your education successfully and efficiently.

Most schools will ask for a **personal essay, high school transcript, letters of recommendation from teachers or employers, standardized test scores (SAT/ACT), and any awards or special recognition earned.** These admissions materials are designed to give a well-rounded picture of who you are as a student and member of your community. As a homeschooled student who has benefited from years of focused, one-on-one attention from your teachers, your admissions materials will show a distinctive depth and quality.

As you begin researching college options, you will want to **set up a good record keeping system.** Download our "[College Application Worksheet](#)" to help you get organized. Take your time to keep this chart updated so you don't miss any important deadlines or requirements. To be really organized, you might also want to open an email account specifically for your college admission process. For example, you can give this email address to the colleges, SAT and ACT, and financial services. If you are enrolled at Oak Meadow, you can use your oakmeadow account.

Confidential **letters of recommendation** will be sent directly from teachers to the colleges. Request these from your teacher, coach, fine arts instructor, community service mentor, or any adult who knows you well and can provide a good reference for you. You will want to request these at the end of your "junior" year so each reference can take the time to produce a high-quality letter. Most colleges require two letters that reflect academic subjects, including someone who is very familiar with your writing.

You will likely fill out the **Common Application**, available after August 1 at www.commonapp.org. Hundreds of colleges use this online application, which significantly simplifies the process for you. Carefully complete the Common App or other applications, and print out a copy of each for your files.

Consider keeping an **organized portfolio** to present your best work during an admissions interview. This type of academic portfolio is used to present your skills, talents, and accomplishments in a visual way and can make a real difference in the admissions process. Portfolios can include drawings, writing samples, photographs, musical recordings, athletic awards, short films, journals, independent study projects, and other personal highlights from your homeschooling journey. In addition to being a real advantage in college admissions, the process of creating your portfolio is an excellent way to review all that you have learned and accomplished during your high school education.



FOR OAK MEADOW ENROLLED STUDENTS:

Electives & Advanced Study Project

Oak Meadow requires a minimum of five elective credits. Electives and our required Advanced Study Projects are great ways to learn more about topics that interest you and gain skill in particular subject areas. College admissions committees are often looking for evidence that a student has been goal-oriented and focused throughout the high school years. In addition to taking elective courses through Oak Meadow, many students receive credit for courses taken through dual enrollment at high schools, online schools, community colleges, and the local community.

A well-designed [Advanced Study Project](#) enhances your transcript and helps you stand out as a strong, independent learner. You can pursue your interests in the form of performing arts lessons, community service, and job experiences. Credit is earned by submitting a detailed log of your activities and hours. Oak Meadow students have earned credit in such fields as martial arts, figure skating, writing, fencing, swimming, skiing, web design, tennis, horseback riding, art, dance, music, and theater. ASP forms are included in the Welcome Packet students receive at the beginning of the year.



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Admission Tests

Most colleges ask applicants to provide them with **standardized test scores**. For an increasingly long list of colleges that do not require admission tests (“test optional” schools), visit www.fairtest.org. Although homeschooled students may not have had much experience with standardized tests, studies have shown that their unique education often gives them an advantage, and many score considerably higher than the national average.

The most common tests are the **SAT** (and subject tests) and **ACT**. Often students will take the SAT twice, once as a junior and again as a senior. Many students also take the **PSAT/NMSQT** (Preliminary SAT and National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test) during their junior year. Oak Meadow provides enrolled students with information on the SAT and ACT, along with study guides and practice tests (this service is available to non-enrolled homeschoolers through our [College Counseling Service](#)). College Board and ACT.org offer free practice tests as well. It is recommended that sophomores get an SAT prep book and begin working with the material early, particularly the vocabulary words and math skills.

There are set dates, sites, and registration deadlines for all standardized tests. You will want to **register and take your tests well in advance** to ensure your scores are received before any college application deadlines. You may need to contact a high school near you to see if they can accommodate you for the test.

FOR OAK MEADOW ENROLLED STUDENTS:

Internships, Volunteering and Travel Opportunities

Internships, volunteering and travel experiences are also ways to enrich your life and strengthen your resumé and college application. Serving as an intern or volunteering in a field you are interested in is an excellent way to demonstrate your initiative and motivation while getting practical experience. It is also a good way to explore different interests that you might want to pursue in college or as a career choice.

There are many outstanding organizations that provide services to students who are seeking exciting travel and learning opportunities. Well-known programs such as Habitat for Humanity, The Putney School Summer Programs, The Experiment in International Living, and Marlboro College Summer Program for Teens are good examples. Traveling and learning about other cultures, challenging yourself in new ways, studying languages and local economics, doing community service projects, and assisting host communities are all ways to gain valuable skills and show college admissions boards that you are dedicated to learning and growth.

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Writing an Admission Essay

Your admissions essay is often the best piece of information a college has to help them understand who you are as a student and as a person. It will reflect your writing skills and the depth of insight you have about yourself. It will demonstrate your creativity and originality: it's an excellent chance to portray yourself as someone whose unique perspective and talents will enhance the academic and social life of the college.

Your essay can compliment your portfolio and can also provide a chance to describe your work, travel and volunteering experiences, particularly ones relevant to the degree or career you wish to pursue. As a homeschooled distance learning student, your list of experiences is likely to be varied, extensive, impressive and will indicate a distinct sense of delight in and passion for learning.

You will be writing one main essay that you can use for all of your college applications; many colleges also include shorter supplemental questions. Your writing should be in your own authentic voice and clearly express your goals, views, and personal perspective. Before you start, it's helpful to write one or two sentences summarizing what you want an admission staff to know about you when they finish reading your essay.

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Campus Visits

Once you have narrowed down your list of potential colleges, **schedule visits with the schools you are most interested in.** Spring of your junior year is an excellent time to start visiting prospective colleges. Ideally, visits should be arranged to allow you the opportunity to attend some classes and spend the night in a dorm. Many schools have developed specific programs for prospective students.

Give yourself some time to **explore the campus, and visit the cafeteria, library, athletic facilities, and bookstore.** Talk to students on campus, and if possible make an appointment with a faculty member in your area of interest. Talk to everyone you



and Interviews

meet so you can begin to get a clear picture of the social and academic atmosphere of the school. You may be living there for four years—don't be shy about asking questions! If you're visiting during the summer, you may not see many students on campus, but you still get an idea of how the campus feels and what the facilities are like.

Some colleges will offer an interview. As a student of a non-traditional program, **the college interview presents an exceptional opportunity for you to express yourself** and share your experiences in ways which distinguish you from the many other candidates for admission. Colleges and universities take a serious look at engaged learners who have shown initiative in their education, are independent workers and thinkers, and are involved in their communities.

In your interview, take the time to describe the ways in which your homeschooling experience has shaped the way you learn and how you approach your studies. College life demands a great deal of independence and self-motivation, and as a homeschooler, you have spent years cultivating these qualities. You have benefited from a 1:1 student/teacher ratio, and this focused mentorship enabled you to develop your own skills and strengths to a high degree, often giving you a distinct edge. Spend some time thinking about (and practicing) how to best describe your experiences so that in your college interviews you can convey with enthusiasm and sincerity the richness of your educational background.

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Year-by-Year Checklist



Sophomore

- ☐ Begin taking as demanding a course load as you can manage successfully.
- ☐ Get involved in activities, sports and extracurricular programs that interest you.
- ☐ Seek out volunteer opportunities in your community.
- ☐ Take the PSAT/NMSQT, though you can't actually qualify for scholarships until junior year.

Junior

- ☐ Continue taking a rigorous course load and, if you qualify, begin taking AP classes.
- ☐ Continue with your leadership responsibilities, extracurricular and volunteer activities.
- ☐ Research financial aid, student loans and scholarships, and speak to your family about paying for college. You can find out your estimated family contribution on websites like www.fastweb.com and the college's own website.
- ☐ Take the PSAT
- ☐ Study for the SAT and ACT, and SAT subject tests if appropriate. Contact Oak Meadow's college counselor if you have any questions about testing.
- ☐ Research colleges you are interested in, and request printed materials. Plan college visits.
- ☐ Take the SAT and ACT.
- ☐ Make a list of questions you have for each school.
- ☐ Practice your college interview.
- ☐ Request letters of recommendation from your teachers.
- ☐ Narrow your college search down and visit each school on your final list. If you can't visit in person, at least take virtual tours.

Senior

- ☐ Review admissions requirements for each school on their website.
- ☐ Make a checklist for deadlines.
- ☐ Take the SAT a second time, if desired.
- ☐ Write a personal essay and supplements
- ☐ Fill out financial aid forms at www.fafsa.ed.gov and possibly the CSS Profile through the College Board.

Please be in touch with us with any questions throughout the complicated college admission process. We're here to help! Non-enrolled students may [consult with our college counselor](#) at an hourly rate.



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Additional Resources

Oak Meadow College Counseling Services

Support and guidance from our experienced college counselor. With years of experience in the field, College Counselor [Sarah Hoffman](#) helps you think ahead, prepare, and navigate the college admission process. This service is included in the tuition cost for enrolled students and offered at an hourly rate to all homeschoolers, whether they use Oak Meadow's curriculum or not. Please call our office for more information.

PRINTED MATERIALS

- *Colleges That Change Lives: 40 Schools That Will Change the Way You Think About Colleges*
Loren Pope
- *25 Months Until College*
Judy McNeely
- *Cool Colleges: For the Hyper-Intelligent, Self-Directed, Late Blooming, and Just Plain Different*
Donald Asher
- *The College Application Essay: Revised Edition*
Sarah Myers McGinty
- *Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Steps: Crafting a Winning Personal Statement*
Alan Gelb
- *On Writing the College Application Essay: The Key to Acceptance at the College of Your Choice*
Harry Bauld

ONLINE MATERIALS

- www.collegeview.com
- www.collegeboard.com
- www.commonapp.org
- www.studentedge.com
- www.princetonreview.com
- www.fairtest.org
- www.fafsa.ed.gov
- www.usnews.com/features/education/best-colleges/guide-to-admissions.html
- www.homeschool.com/articles/college/default.asp



PO Box 1346 • 132 Main Street • Suite 235 • Brattleboro, Vermont 05302
802-251-7250 • info@oakmeadow.com • oakmeadow.com