

**Minutes from the General Membership Meeting**  
**CHAT Southwest Montana (“CHAT”)**  
**September 19, 2017**

This meeting took the form of a seminar with featured speaker Stephen Michaud, independent college counselor from Family Pathways College Counseling, who spoke about the college application process. Stephen has been a college counselor for 28 years – 20 in the Boston area, and 8 in Bozeman. He is moving to Big Fork in December, but will continue to work with Bozeman students remotely. These minutes reflect the key takeaways / notes from a member of the CHAT Leadership Team. The handouts provided by Stephen are attached at the end.

- 1) One of the most important parts of the college application process is that your child learns to being to take charge of the process & take responsibility for his/her future. It is very important to get your “ducks in a row” sooner rather than later. Stephen suggests mapping out a plan for your child in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, including what courses to take, what tests (like SAT Subject Tests) to take and when, when to start visiting college campuses, and ultimately folding in the application process itself. Acceptance rates are higher the earlier that you apply (e.g. Early Decision acceptance rates are highest, then Early Action, then regular admission); Early Decision & Early Action may not be for everyone, but if you have a clear top pick, it may be worth taking this route.
  - a. Early Action – usually a Nov 1 or Nov 15 application deadline, you have until May 1 to decide whether to accept or not (not binding)
  - b. Early Decision – same early deadlines as Early Action but you have to let the college know if you are accepting or not and it is binding
  - c. Regular – Deadline is Jan 1- Feb/March depending on the school (but he recommends having the application done by Thanksgiving)
  - d. Restricted Early Action – only 21-22 schools allow it – can only apply early action to that one school.
- 2) There are many pieces of information that must be submitted to a college in order for an admissions decision to be made, and this information is due at different times – and many students do not understand this. The pieces of information & who is responsible for submitting them are:
  - a. Application (the student)
  - b. Essays (the student)
  - c. Test scores – either the ACT or the SAT (the student has to request that they be sent to a specific school; [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org) maintains a list of colleges that do not require the ACT/SATs)
  - d. Transcript (the student requests it to be sent from his/her high school, allow 2+ weeks for the high school to process the request)
  - e. Letters of recommendation (the student requests these from teachers, but the student’s Senior Profile has to be complete before any teacher or guidance counselor can write a letter of recommendation; also need to allow 3-4 weeks for a teacher to complete the letter of recommendation)
    - i. The “Senior Profile” is a list of around 20 questions that the student must complete – it typically includes broad questions such as “what has been a defining moment of your life?” It requires some time & thought to complete
    - ii. You should try to obtain 2 letters of recommendation – one from a “core” teacher and one from another teacher. More than two will not be read by the college, so don’t send more than two.
  - f. Recommendation from Guidance Counselor (the student requests this, need to allow 3-4 weeks for the Guidance Counselor to complete it, and the Senior Profile has to be done first)
  - g. Interview – (the student requests this) - more and more schools are dropping this requirement/option because it is expensive. However, students should always ask if they can interview. If the school won’t

grant one, the student can ask if it is possible to meet with an alum. You want the opportunity to put your best foot forward if possible.

- 3) How do you / your child find the “Best Fit” for them? Your child should be looking for a college where they can live and thrive for 4 years. How do you determine the Best Fit? Visit a bunch of college campuses if at all possible; if it isn’t possible, then do as much research as you can online using websites such as [www.cappex.com](http://www.cappex.com). In any event, think about the following categories when evaluating a college:
  - a. Academic Life – is it a place where relationships between faculty and students are a norm, or is that something that rarely happens? How rigorous is the academic environment?
  - b. Cultural Life – it is important to experience diversity, it pushes kids to think outside the box
  - c. Social Life – extracurricular / clubs – the more engaged the child is at the school, the more successful they will be because they will feel part of a community
  - d. Athletic Life – big league sports vs clubs
  - e. Collaborative Environment? Is it collaborative or competitive? How “fun” is it?
  - f. Academic Support Services – college could be the place where your gifted child gets a B for the first time, and doesn’t know how to deal with that. Support services are paramount to student success.
- 4) How do you distinguish yourself outside of the “data” that is submitted about you?
  - a. Essay – colleges will look at how well it is written, what it says about you, and how unique it is. Essentially, what portrait does it paint visually about you and your life? Cannot stress enough the importance of the essays, and they will take a lot of time to write. If your child is an introvert and/or has a hard time writing, they will need to start working on the essays as early as possible. A counselor can help with what tends to be long, deep rooted discussions about what makes them tick.
  - b. Geographic diversity – this is becoming a little less important, but it still is a factor especially when a college has a lot of students applying who look the same on paper.
  - c. Quality of involvement – you need to have 1 or 2 things in the community that you love to do. It shouldn’t be 20 that you are peripherally involved in. It should be 1 or 2 things that mean a lot to you & illustrate who you are.
  - d. Enthusiasm Factor
    - i. Check if the college has a regional or state representative for MT – and email that person & introduce yourself. You don’t have to be pushy, but politely register your interest with them. Everything will go into your file.
    - ii. There is a question at the end of the common application – is there anything else we should know? Perfect opportunity to distinguish yourself.
- 5) GAP Year – deferring admission for 1 year to the college to which you have been accepted is usually seen as a “Win/Win” for the college and the student
  - a. Students are usually more ready for college when they ultimately arrive on campus.
  - b. However, the student does have to submit a plan, in writing, to the school to explain what they will be doing during their GAP year. Examples of what they can do: travel, teach in a foreign country, run a small business, do a study abroad program, work.
  - c. If your application is on the fence, notifying the school in Nov/Dec that you’d like to take a GAP year may have a positive impact on the admissions decision

6) ACT / SATs – you can take these as many times as you want. Many schools are now “super-scoring” where they take the highest score from each section of the test and re-compute the aggregate score. Note the below table excludes the timing of these exams that your child may have taken earlier for a special purpose. For college applications, generally schools want test results anytime from 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, but not before.

	ACT	SAT
Junior Year	<p>February (should take it now if you like math &amp; reading)</p> <p>April – the whole high school class takes it together</p> <p>June</p> <p>Note: Stephen recommends taking the ACT 2x <u>before</u> you enter your senior year</p>	<p>January (doesn't recommend)</p> <p>March (this is usually during spring break)</p> <p>May</p> <p>June (you can't take the ACT and SAT at the same time)</p>
Senior Year	<p>Sept</p> <p>Oct (this year the date is Oct 28 which is too late if you are applying Early Action or Early Decision; some schools have announced they won't accept results from this test date at all)</p>	<p>August</p> <p>October</p> <p>Note: SAT score reports show your full history of results on the test provided it was taken <u>as a high school student</u></p>

Two important notes:

- For gifted children who took (or will take) Geometry in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, they will need to do a reasonable amount of review of that subject prior to taking the ACT/SAT as it will have been over 2 years since they looked at it (this advice came from a Bozeman parent whose child was in this situation)
- The SAT has “Subject Tests”, which Stephen recommends taking as soon as you finish your class on the subject (so in June of your sophomore or junior year, as applicable for the class). Note you cannot take the SAT on the same date that you take the Subject Test, so you do need to plan these out a bit & make sure it works for your child. Approximately 35-40 schools require SAT Subject Tests. The tests are offered in the following subjects:
  - Foreign languages
  - Bio/chem/physics
  - Math 1 (up to Algebra II) & Math 2 (Algebra II, pre-calc, calculus)
  - History
  - Literature

College Planning  
with  
Family Pathways College Counseling

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Stephen Michaud

Phone: (406) 570-1178

Email: [stevemichaud73@gmail.com](mailto:stevemichaud73@gmail.com)

Website: [www.familypathways.com](http://www.familypathways.com)

Presentation Agenda for:  
6:30pm – 8:00pm  
September 19, 2017

- Introduction and Quick Survey
- Top 11 Strengths and Experiences (what colleges look for in a student)
- Timeline for Students: (a quick overview – including deadlines)
- A few words about financial aid
- The ACT, SAT, and SAT Subject Tests
- How the application process works or how schools receive your information
- Important websites:

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

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

[www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)

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

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

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

[www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)

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

[www.ctcl.org](http://www.ctcl.org)

[www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org)

[www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

[www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org)

**What Colleges Look For In A Student  
as of September 15, 2017  
Result Of The Most Recent Polling Of College Admissions Counselors**

1. A rigorous high school curriculum that challenges the student and may include Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB).
2. Grades that represent a strong effort and an upward trend. However, slightly lower grades in a rigorous program are preferred to all A's in less challenging coursework.
3. Solid scores on standardized tests including the ACT or the SAT. These should be consistent with high school performances.
4. A well-written essay that provides insight into the student's unique personality, values, and goals. The application essay should be thoughtful and highly-personal. It should demonstrate careful and well-constructed writing.
5. Passionate involvement in a few in or out of school activities. Commitment and depth are valued over minimal involvement in a large number of activities.
6. Demonstrated leadership and initiative in extracurricular activities. Students who arrive on campus prepared to lead/and or join clubs and activities are highly desirable.
7. Personal characteristics that will contribute to a diverse and interesting student body. Many colleges seek to develop a freshman class that is diverse: geographically, culturally, ethnically, economically and politically.
8. Demonstrated intellectual curiosity through reading, school, leisure pursuits, and more.
9. Demonstrated enthusiasm to attend, often exhibited by campus visits and an interview, showing an interest toward attending the college if offered admission.
10. Letters of recommendation from teachers and guidance counselors that give evidence of integrity, special skills, positive character traits and an interest in learning.
11. Out of school experiences including work, community service, youth organizations, religious groups, etc. Again, passionate involvement is meaningful to the admissions office – casual membership at the last minute is not.