



# IVY BOUND

www.ivybound.net | 877-975-1600 | info@ivybound.net

*Helping students enhance their academic futures*

## What Professional Students Figure Out Early About Success

By Mark Greenstein, Test Prep Advisor

Founder and Lead Instructor of Ivy Bound, December 2011

Contact: Thomas Poirot, Ivy Bound Parent Liaison. Thomas@ivybound.net

Publication permission granted so long as the name and URL are included.

This is a heads-up to the many students and their parents, who might be complacent about college prospects. Even in the past five years, admissions to the most competitive U.S. colleges have tightened further. Many a strong student (good GPA, high SAT scores, good extra-curricular activities) is shocked when a guidance counselor looks at her/his record come 11<sup>th</sup> grade and puts the student's longed-for college into the "distant-reach" category. So while this IS meant to scare the people who've been complacent, its highest use is to give ALL students in 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grade a start to putting their best credentials forward.

First, why has college admission become even more competitive? In short, it's because the value of a college degree has never been higher. America is now an economy that runs largely on "brainpower". Rightly or wrongly, the college experience is perceived as the best training ground for almost any job requiring intellect. Top students know this. Thus, even though the population of American 17 year-olds peaked in 2008, and even with the worst economy since the 1930s, applications to U.S. 4-year colleges continued to rise in 2009 and again 2010.

The *very best students* are the ones who prime themselves for admission to the top tier colleges. They know that even within the "4-year" category, college rankings produce very stratified salaries. I have come to call a salient group of strong students the "APT" students, for Already-Professional & Tenacious. These are the students who have resumes at age 16; these are the students who bring laptops to school for more efficient note-taking. These are the students who will often do after-school academic enrichment when they don't have band, sports, theatre, or club meetings.

These are often the students of Indian-Americans, Chinese-Americans, and Korean-Americans, for whom education has been instilled as the right occupation for a majority of each youth's day. The U.S. school day from 7:30 – 2:25 is just HALF an education day for the APT student. New York City hogwans (private Korean academies) offer middle-school students English, Math, Science, and SAT instruction up to 45 hours a week.

The APT student is undaunted by taking classes with older students. For middle-school APT students, it means learning among 15 – 17 year-olds; for high school APT students, it means taking college courses during the school day or on weekends. For APT students of all ages, it typically means devoting most of the summer to expanding the mind, not loafing.

College thus becomes relatively *easy* for the APT student; the learning and the polishing that traditional students often begin in college is well under way for the APT student. Getting into a choice college is much smoother for APT students, and their admissions offers often come with high scholarship awards.

Finally, the APT student makes the college admissions process less difficult for her / himself. Many immigrant children get through the college admissions process with zero help from parents. They go about assessing colleges well before meeting with their assigned guidance counselors. Traditionally, guidance counselors meet students in January or February of junior year (usually after the seniors have finished their January applications). By this time many students have **messed out** on taking courses that could burnish their college resumes. In those winter meetings, traditional students also find they missed out on taking an early SAT prep course, and totally missed the boat on the possibility of earning National Merit Scholarship recognition. The APT students have worked for months at test prep and often come to these first meetings already holding an SAT score that ranks at National Merit levels.\*

APT students know things about early college admissions planning that many high school guidance counselors don't recognize, among them:

- 1) Starting early means more chances for success. The SAT is not a one-shot deal, and multiple chances mean on SOME occasion a student fires on all “24 cylinders” and gets a super-charged score.
- 2) The ACT may provide a more promising score. The APT student figures out as a sophomore (or early in the junior year) which test is best for her or him, and studies for ACT, SAT or both.
- 3) Being done early allows smart assessment of colleges. When sitting on a solid SAT or ACT score by January of junior year, one can make intelligent college visits over the next few months (February and April breaks are the best times to visit colleges).
- 4) A good SAT score means one need not visit so many “back-up” colleges.
- 5) Being done early is a relief (APT students are human too). The junior spring is often crowded with AP exams, SAT IIs, finals, sports banquets, proms, awards ceremonies, college visits, plays, driver education, spring fundraisers, volunteer events. Keeping SAT study out of that mix is wise.
- 6) Being done early means you can apply more strategically. While colleges accept October and even November scores for ED (Early Decision), CHOOSING that one college for an ED application is best done based on knowing your SAT / ACT score rather than guessing what it

will be. ED continues to be advantageous in college admissions and EA (Early Action) helps with merit scholarship awards.

- 7) Relying on your high school guidance counselor often means good input comes too late, if at all. APT students seek out private counselors\*\*, or use resources from students who have navigated successfully the channels to top colleges.

As I've written elsewhere, nothing in the junior year curriculum directly helps SAT success (unless your school gives a dedicated for-credit SAT course). Thus early preparation has no downside. And since SAT scores have never been more important, students choosing to wait should have a **very** good reason for the delay. APT students know this (and are probably no longer reading this piece).

To the rest of you who seek success in the "brain-powered" world of modern America, please know that APT does not mean dissatisfaction. My APT students enjoy life; they get more done and they simultaneously know they are going places. Work hard; play hard; eschew frivolities. That's how any student can become an APT student.

\*National Merit awards are based on the PSAT, but on a scale similar to the SAT. Students can take the SAT for real or for practice well before the PSAT is given. APT students will practice as sophomores in order to nail their junior year standardized tests.

\*\* The value of private admissions counselors for certain students is tremendous. For a list of many good private counselors in the U.S. and abroad, visit [www.ivybound.net](http://www.ivybound.net) or [www.iecaonline.com](http://www.iecaonline.com).

*Ivy Bound offers SAT "Boot Camps" throughout the Northeast and on 8 college campuses. This is to get students to build SAT reading skills, to build SAT essay skills, to perfect their grammar, and to begin "reasoning" the SAT way. Each "Boot Camp" is open to students in grades 7 – 11. They include 7 hours of daily teaching and a mandatory 2 hours of daily self-study. Parents who lack a private admissions counselor have the option to attend a one hour "Know the SAT / Understanding College Admissions" seminar the first Sunday of every month at 9:15pm eastern. Parents seeking to enroll their children for an upcoming class or for private tutoring, with the instructor coming to the home (or conducting tutoring by phone), can e-mail [info@ivybound.net](mailto:info@ivybound.net).*