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Fiske Countdown to College: 41 To-Do Lists and a Plan for Every Year of High School

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SATs, admissions forms, campus visits. The tasks necessary to secure acceptance into a good college sometimes feel overwhelming. *Fiske Countdown to College* relieves the pressure on parents and students through simple check-lists and straightforward advice.

This collection of checklists guides parents and students through the college selection and admission process. These lists clearly outline the tasks to be completed each year of high school. Parents and students receive separate information tailored to their unique concerns. Along the way, helpful quotes from college students, their parents, and school counselors provide additional insights.

One college student advises teens to “Give yourself enough time to do the Common App supplements because they take much longer than you expect.”

Guidance for parents covers issues such as whether paying for college test preparation courses is worthwhile (it rarely is), and whether a teen should be involved in several extracurricular activities or just a few (leadership roles in a few is best). The lists offer timely, insightful information on topics such as selecting an honors program and finding financial aid. Parents also are advised on which steps toward college admission should be their responsibilities and which should be their child’s. For example, Fiske and Hammond recommend that for college essays, “Make plenty of comments and flag errors, but avoid writing anything yourself.”

Students will find sage advice on concerns such as choosing a college, visiting schools, completing applications, and handling interviews. They will learn when to take the SAT and ACT, how to prepare for these exams, and how to evaluate test scores. Along the way, common worries are addressed: “Few people plan a career; instead, it unfolds as you go from one thing you like to another.” The lists, which emphasize deadlines, allow students to successfully take charge of the college admission process.

The authors, Fiske and Hammond, drew from years of experience and research. Fiske served for seventeen years as the education editor for the *New York Times* and authored *Fiske Guide to Colleges*. He and Hammond have co-written several guides on college admission, college essays, and similar subjects.

Fiske Countdown to College is an easy read; the lists make intimidating tasks simple and manageable. The students’ lists have a warm tone that teens will find relevant, relatable, and authoritative. The parents’ lists relieve anxiety and clarify confusing issues. Overall, the advice is priceless. This book is essential to any family or student looking toward college.

DIANE GARDNER (September / October 2009)

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