

MHS Class of 2016

Senior Survival Guide

Step 1: Get organized.

- Finish your “Student Activities Sheet.” Turn it in to Mrs. Harris **ASAP** if you haven’t already. If you would prefer, you may type up your own “Activities Sheet” and save it on your computer. Just be sure to print off a copy for Mrs. Harris.
- Please update your “Student Activities Sheet” throughout the year anytime you join a new club, play a new sport, become an officer of an organization, etc.
- Each time you need a teacher to write a letter of recommendation for you; you must come to the counseling office and ask Mrs. Harris to make a copy of your “Student Activities Sheet.” The teacher will need a copy of it in order to write a letter for you. Please also give the teacher the name of the scholarship and the deadline of the scholarship. **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE TO ASK TEACHERS FOR LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION.** If you wait too late, the teacher may not have time to write a letter, and you may be out of luck. You should ask a teacher to write a letter at least two weeks in advance of the deadline. Please remember that your teachers do not have to write a letter for you just because you ask. Please ask the teachers nicely and do not demand a letter! After all, the point of the letter is for the teacher to write nice things about you. So, please treat your teachers with respect and don’t ask them at the last minute. It would also be a nice thing if you would write a quick “Thank You” note to teachers or anyone who writes letters for you.
- If you don’t own a calendar or planner, **GET ONE!** It doesn’t have to be anything fancy. You just need something that you can keep up with all of your deadlines this year because there will be so many! Use your resources. There is a calendar on the school website (www.mcewenhighschool.org) Also be sure to sign up for all the Remind groups so you can get reminders about deadlines by text msg.
- You might want to purchase some folders or some way to keep all of your college and scholarship information organized. Some people like the expandable files so they can keep everything in one place.
- If you don’t have an email account, you will need one. If you need help setting up an email account, get with one of your friends or see Mrs. Harris.
- If you have an inappropriate email address, get a new one. You will be giving your email address to each college to which you apply and to each scholarship organization to which you apply. Your email address should be simple and appropriate. For example, if your email address is wildandcrazy@yahoo.com, you should change it to something like JohnDoe@yahoo.com. First impressions are really important.
- Ringback Tones are another detail to consider. If you just can’t live without your favorite song playing when someone is trying to reach you on the phone, I strongly suggest that you be very careful when selecting a song that could be your first impression to a potential employer or college recruiter.
- With the strong impact of social media and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter these days, be mindful of what others are able to see about you. You may give a poor first impression to those who don’t know you without even realizing it. Consider making your page private to only friends and/or be selective about what you post online.
- Get into the habit of checking your email every day. Like it or not, email is how colleges and scholarship organizations will be communicating with you most of the time. You do **NOT** want to miss something important! If you receive something you don’t understand, ask Mrs. Harris!
- Read your mail you receive at home. Even though most colleges and scholarship organizations will communicate with you via email, it is still important to read the mail you receive. Again, you don’t want to miss something important!

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Step 2: Select a career path, if possible.

- It is in your best interest to figure out what career you would like to have in your future.
- Some of the best career information is available online at www.bls.gov/oco. This is the Occupational Outlook Handbook.
- www.collegefortn.org is an excellent resource for career & college planning.

Step 3: Choose the right school or training for you.

- There are several different types of schools and training programs:
 - 4-Year Colleges and Universities (Examples include MTSU, Belmont, UTK, UTC, UTM, Freed Hardeman, Bethel, Union, etc.) (Students graduate with a Bachelor's Degree.)
 - 2-Year Colleges (Examples include Nashville State, Columbia State, Jackson State, etc.) (Students graduate with an Associate's Degree.)
 - Vocational and Technical Schools (Examples include Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) in Dickson, Nashville Auto Diesel College, etc.) (Students graduate with certificates or diplomas.)
 - Armed Forces Service Academies (Examples include US Naval Academy, US Coast Guard Academy, etc.) (Students graduate with a Bachelor's Degree.)
 - Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard, National Guard, Reserves)
 - Apprenticeship Programs (IBEW, Boilermakers, etc.)
- The Occupational Outlook Handbook (www.bls.gov/oco) will tell you what type of education and/or training you need.
- The "Book of Majors" in the Counseling Office will tell you which schools offer the programs you need.
- The "College Handbook" is also available in the Counseling Office. This book will give you detailed information about each college including the number of students, location, cost, etc.
- If you have decided on a career, it is important to choose a school that offers your program.
- If you have not decided on a career, you might want to consider a community college or a 4-year college that offers a wide variety of programs.
- When selecting colleges, it is best to visit the colleges in person. Each senior has **one** "College Day" to use to visit the college(s) of your choice. The day will not count as an absence. To use a "college day," you must ask Mrs. Harris in advance. You must make an appointment at the college. You **must** bring back a letter from the college to Mrs. Harris on the next school day. If you do not bring back a letter, you will be counted absent. If you need to miss more than one day to visit schools, you must clear it with Dr. Honea first. More than likely, he will approve it. However, you will be counted absent for the other day(s) but the other day(s) can be excused.
- If you are unable to visit a college in person, you can take a virtual tour online (www.ecampustours.com).
- Most colleges also offer Saturday events for prospective students called "preview days" or "visit days." These are wonderful events to attend. You usually get to take a tour of the campus, meet students, learn about admissions and financial aid, etc. Often, they also give you tickets to campus events like a football game or basketball game!
- Basic things to consider when selecting a college: (1) Do they offer the program I need?; (2) How much does it cost?; (3) How many people go to school there?; (4) What is student life like?; (5) What are the dorms like?; and (6) How far away from home is it?

Step 4: Apply to at least 3 schools.

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- When thinking about how many schools to apply to, a good rule of thumb is **4 or more!** One safety school (a college you're confident that you can get into), Two good fits (colleges you feel are a good fit for you and offer the major(s) you are interested in and that you are pretty sure you can get into), and one reach school (a college that you have a chance of getting into but feel it might be a stretch/your "dream school"). This helps keep your options open.
- The application is called the "Admissions Application." You can usually find the application under "Admissions" on the school's website.
- Applying online is preferred in most cases. Your application usually processes faster this way although some schools still have paper applications available too. If you choose to apply online, you usually have to pay the admissions application fee online. So, be prepared to pay the fee with a credit card.
- Most admissions application will require a fee. Each school is a different amount. If you do not have the money to pay for an application you would like to complete, please talk to Mrs. Harris. Sometimes the college will waive the admissions application fee in special circumstances.
- Paper applications for many local colleges will be available on the table outside the Counseling Office if the school still accepts paper applications.
- Each time you apply to a college, you must tell Mrs. Harris. She will send a copy of your transcript to the college. You cannot be accepted if they do not have your transcript.
- Make sure you meet the requirements to get into the colleges you have selected. If you do not, you may not be accepted, or you may be "conditionally" admitted. Only a few students are "conditionally" admitted to certain schools. This means that you do not meet the requirements. However, the college believes that you may be a good candidate for their college, and they are willing to give you a chance. If you are "conditionally" admitted, the college will be watching your grades in college closely. So, you will need to study and make the best grades possible. If not, the college may not permit you to attend any longer.
- If you need to improve your ACT scores to be accepted to a college or to qualify for a certain scholarship, you have several opportunities to retake the test this year. (See the handout with the ACT registration dates.) You can register for the test by picking up a registration packet in the counseling office, or you can register online (www.actstudent.org). Online registration is recommended if possible.
- If you are considering an out-of-state college or a selective Tennessee college, such as Vanderbilt, you may also need to take the SAT. You should check with the college to find out if you need the SAT. You can pick up an SAT registration packet in the counseling office, or you can register online (www.sat.org).
- www.FreeTestPrep.com is a new, FREE online resource for students to prepare for the ACT & SAT. It features over 700 practice questions all with video solutions, over 1100 flashcards, over 1500 real college admissions essays, and over 100 articles and guides. I strongly encourage you to utilize resources like this that are available to you!
- Remember: If you choose an out-of-state college, you must pay out-of-state tuition. (One exception to that rule is Murray State in Kentucky. They have a special deal with Humphreys County. They will match APSU's tuition.) Choosing to go to school out of state can also limit your scholarship opportunities.
- Even if your Admissions Application does not require Letters of Recommendation, you may still send them (unless the application specifically states not to send them). The general rule is to send no more than 3 letters along with your Admissions Application. The more selective the college, the more helpful the letters are.
- Admissions Application tips:

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- Follow the rules.
- Pay attention to deadlines
- Don't procrastinate.
- Include everything they ask for. Don't leave anything out.

Step 5: Learn about the different types of financial aid.

- Grants are awards typically based on financial need that do not have to be paid back. The Federal Pell Grant is one example.
- Scholarships are awards usually based on achievement or talent that also do not have to be paid back. Examples include the Coca-Cola Scholarship and HOPE Scholarship.
- Loans are funds that must be paid back. Examples include Stafford Loans and Perkins Loans.
- Work-Study is a program that provides part-time jobs for students with financial need. Jobs are available on campus.

Step 6: Watch out for scholarship scams.

- Scholarship applications are FREE. You should **never** have to pay for scholarship applications.
- If you are contacted by someone who says you have won a scholarship for which you didn't apply or who guarantees you a scholarship, beware!
- Never give out personal information such as credit card numbers or checking account numbers.
- Never pay to attend a "Financial Aid Workshop" or "Scholarship Workshop."
- Never pay for someone to do a scholarship search for you.
- If you think you have been scammed, please report it to the National Fraud Information Center (NFIC) (www.fraud.org) and/or the Better Business Bureau (BBB) (www.bbb.org).

Step 7: Follow these scholarship guidelines.

- Follow directions. There are different directions for each scholarship. If it asks you to use black ink, do so. If it asks you to staple all of the pages together, do so. You must follow the directions EXACTLY. If you do not, your application may not be considered.
- Be as neat as possible. If you do not have neat, legible handwriting, you might want to consider finding a friend or family member that has neat handwriting. You can fill out one application yourself, and have another person rewrite your answers on another application for you to turn in.
- Meet the deadline. You cannot turn in scholarships late. If a scholarship is late, it is not considered. Turn scholarships in EARLY!
- Check your spelling and grammar.
- Have someone proofread your application.
- Make sure you have all of the attachments needed. For example, some scholarships require you to attach copies of your transcript, student activities sheet, parents' income taxes, etc. Don't forget anything!
- First impressions are important. Your scholarship should look neat and professional. It should not look like you threw it together at the last minute. If your application looks like you spent a lot of time and care, then your application says, "I really want this scholarship. It means a lot to me. Please consider me. Thanks!"

Step 8: Apply for the scholarships at each school.

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- In general, every college has their own scholarship programs. However, the application process is different at every college.
- Some schools do not require you to complete a separate scholarship application. Some do.
- It is very important for you to check with every college to which you are applying to see if they require a separate scholarship application.
- In addition to a “general” scholarship application, many schools also have “departmental” scholarships. Departmental scholarships are scholarships available in specific majors. For example, if you want to major in Biology at MTSU, you should check with the Biology Department at MTSU to find out if there is a scholarship for incoming freshmen to complete.

Step 9: Apply for scholarships available from your employer or your parents’ employer(s).

- Find out if your employer or your parents’ employer(s) offer scholarships. If so, be sure to complete those. These are a great opportunity for you.

Step 10: Apply for scholarships available from your family members’ organizations.

- Check with your parents and grandparents to find out what clubs and organizations they belong. Many of those organizations offer scholarships to their members’ children and grandchildren. For example, if you have a grandfather who is a member of the Elks Club, there is a scholarship you can complete.

Step 11: Apply for scholarships available on the internet.

- Browsing the internet is a great way to find scholarships. There are several websites with scholarship searches.
- The most popular site is www.fastweb.com. It will take some time to setup your account there, but it can be worth it.
- Other good websites are www.finaid.org and www.cappex.com

Step 12: Apply for scholarships available from your School Counselor.

- A list of scholarships will be available from Mrs. Harris as soon as possible. The list will include local, state, and national scholarships.
- The “Scholarship Handbook” is available in the Counseling Office. This book must remain in the Counseling Office. However, you may go through the book any time. You may take notes from the book, or Mrs. Harris can make copies for you.

Step 13: Complete the FAFSA.

- The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the main application that all Americans complete in order to receive financial aid.
- The FAFSA should be done as soon as possible after January 1 each year you plan to attend college.
- You **MUST** complete the FAFSA application by February 15 if you are in the TN Promise Program.
- The FAFSA can be completed online at www.fafsa.gov.
- Paper applications of the FAFSA will be available in the Counseling Office after January 1 each year.
- Your FAFSA will be processed much faster if you complete it online.
- The FAFSA is the application for all of the Tennessee Lottery Scholarships, all state grants, all federal grants, student loans, and the work study program.
- Most colleges also require students to complete a FAFSA for some of their scholarship programs.
- There will be a **Financial Aid Workshop held on Thursday, December 3rd at 6:00pm** to tell seniors and parents about the FAFSA. This year’s workshop will be held at Waverly Central High School in

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their auditorium. I encourage you ALL to attend. The FAFSA can be complicated and this is a very informative workshop!

- There will be an event in February called “College Goal Sunday.” This event is held at colleges across the state on the same day. This event is held to help seniors and parents fill out the FAFSA. Nashville State Community College in Waverly normally participates each year.
- The FAFSA must be completed by February 15 each year. The sooner the better!
- Some of the money available from the FAFSA is “first come, first served.”

Step 14: Check your Student Aid Report.

- Your Student Aid Report (SAR) is what you will receive after you complete the FAFSA.
- If you provide your email address on the FAFSA, you will receive your SAR via email.
- If you do not provide your email address on the FAFSA, you will receive your SAR via regular mail.
- You can also print a copy of your SAR from www.fafsa.gov.
- Checking your SAR is your opportunity to make corrections.
- You can make your corrections online, or you can make your corrections on a printed copy and mail back.
- You should always keep a copy of your SAR each year.

Step 15: Complete Housing Application, if needed.

- Most housing applications are expensive.
- Do not wait later than March 1st to complete a housing application at the school of your choice.
- At this point in the year, if you do not know where you want to go to school, you can complete housing applications for more than one school. But, it is best to have your final school decision first.

Step 16: Compare your Award Letters.

- Eventually, each college to which you apply will create some sort of Award Letter or Award List for you. This letter or list will tell you all of the money you are being offered, and will tell you exactly how much it will cost you to attend that school.
- Some colleges send these to you in the mail.
- Some colleges send these to you via email.
- Other colleges require you to login to their website.
- Some colleges will not give you this information until May or even later. Don't expect this to come soon.

Step 17: Make your final school choice.

- By May 1, you should make your final decision about where you want to go to school.
- By May 1, please contact all of the schools who accepted you but do not plan to attend. Doing this may open up a spot for another student who may be on the waiting list to get into a school.

Step 18: Attend summer orientation/pre-registration at your school of choice.

- Almost every college has some sort of summer orientation or pre-registration for incoming freshmen.
- You should most definitely go! Most colleges will require you to register for this event.
- Normally, these events include registering for freshmen classes, meeting fellow students and professors, and learning more about the college.

Step 19: Maintain a good GPA in college.

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- Almost all financial aid programs require you to maintain a specific GPA.
- If you allow your GPA to drop, you could lose some or all of your financial aid.
- For example, the HOPE Scholarship (Lottery Scholarship) requires you to maintain a specific GPA while you are in college.
- Half of all Tennessee students lose their HOPE Scholarships after the first year.
- You must study in college to keep your financial aid!

Step 20: Keep your eyes and ears open for other scholarship opportunities.

- After you begin college, there may be other opportunities for you to apply for new scholarships.
- Many colleges open departmental scholarships to Juniors and Seniors in college.
- You may re-apply for the Goodlark Educational Foundation Scholarship each year.
- The Workforce Essentials program in Waverly (next door to the community college) may be able to help you pay for college.

Info you will need when completing applications:

There are currently 72 seniors.

There are 313 students in grades 9-12.

The school address is 335 Melrose St. McEwen, TN 37101.

The school phone number is 931-582-6950.

Your School Counselor is Beth Harris.

Mrs. Harris' email address is harrisb@hcss.org

Mrs. Harris' phone number is 931-582-3283.

MHS uses **un**weighted GPAs.

Memorize your GPA and your rank. (See Mrs. Harris or Mrs. Salley if you don't know it already.)

Your GPA & rank will be updated again after the first semester. You will receive it in January.

Memorize your Social Security Number.

Goals are dreams with deadlines. ~Diana Scharf Hunt

If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time. –Zig Ziglar

The question isn't who is going to let me; it's who is going to stop me. ~Ayn Rand, The Fountainhead

There are no shortcuts to any place worth going. ~Beverly Sills

*Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined!
–Henry David Thoreau*

When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on. ~Franklin D. Roosevelt