Katie Scalise is Counselor Coordinator for State College High School North. Genna Welsh Kasun is a Marketing and Development Staff Writer at Juniata College. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County Communities That Care serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region Communities That Care serving the State College Area School District.

With more postsecondary options than ever before, college-bound high school students are faced with a great challenge. Juniata College Director of Admission Terri Bollman-Dalansky and State College High School Counselor Kate Scalise weigh in on a central question for students and parents undergoing the college search process: What should students think about and do when searching for a college?

**Prepare for the process.**
Terri Bollman-Dalansky: Students should research themselves first! Ask, “What kind of environment inspires me and, to some degree, makes me comfortable?” So many young adults are busy with practices and activities they forget to evaluate what they like and what they find fun academically.
Kate Scalise: Choose to take the most rigorous courses in high school that you can handle. Remember that your transcript begins in ninth grade.

**Manage time wisely.**
Scalise: Make sure you take the SAT or ACT in 11th grade; don't wait.
Bollman-Dalansky: At the beginning of your junior year, build a list of 10 to 15 potential colleges. By the spring of junior year, visit one or two schools. During the summer, target teachers to write you letters of recommendation. Be in front of the pack of students who rush for letters in October. Have applications sent out by November of your senior year.

**Collect and read information.**
Scalise: Check out local information opportunities, college nights, college visits, SAT information nights, and financial aid and scholarship sessions.
Bollman-Dalansky: Research on the web and attend fairs and interact with college representatives. Interact with teachers, family members, people from the community and church. Let them provide information, but not persuasion. Read information – don’t just look at the pictures.

**Apply.**
Scalise: Apply to a "safety" college (one you think that you can get into based on your academic credentials) and a college that your parents can afford to send you to for at least four years. Apply to your dream school as well and perhaps a few (one or two) schools in the middle. Visit the schools you are considering applying to if possible – remember, you would not buy a car unless you drove it first.
Visit.
Scalise: When you visit a college, make sure that you feel comfortable on campus. Be sure it is a good emotional fit for you. Students often transfer not because they cannot succeed academically, but because they are unhappy.
Bollman-Dalansky: Open house events are wonderful visit opportunities. Go with questions. Get the inside scoop from people who are living there.

Both counselors agree: this process is harder than it looks. “Think about the logistics of the process. Don’t take it lightly,” Bollman-Dalansky concludes.

To find the best college fit, take advantage of a local opportunity – the Central Region College Night will be held on March 25, 2010 from 6 to 8:30 p.m. at Mount Nittany Middle School in State College. A panel discussion titled "How to Select the Right College for You" begins at 6 p.m. Representatives from colleges, universities, technical schools, business schools, PHEAA and more will also be available.

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