



THE GREEN PAGES

News from Christ School's College Guidance Office

Spring 2013

A Taste of English Colleges

– Kirk Blackard, Director of College Guidance



Kirk on Gonville and Caius College campus, part of Cambridge University.

"My tour of British universities this past summer was inspired by Graylyn Loomis, Christ School Class of 2010. Given the quality of education he is receiving in and out of the classroom at the University of St. Andrews, in Scotland, and my desire to expand students' collegiate options, I crossed the pond, again, for a closer look at a few more universities."

It was like a dream—a cathedral bell for an alarm clock, bomb sniffing dogs outside my window, the police and the Queen's blue/black Bentley 20 yards from my residence hall which was actually a 1000 year old castle. But this was not a dream; this was my first morning of a seven day tour of British universities.

I and eleven other high school guidance counselors from the United States, Canada and Hong Kong were invited to examine the campuses of Durham, Newcastle and York universities. We lived in each school's residence hall, which for Durham meant staying in Durham Castle and dining in the castle's Great Hall. This Great Hall was used in part of the Harry Potter films and, more recently, for Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee visit which occurred 24 hours following our visit.

While touring English universities in the northeast region of the country, we shared lunches, dinners and information sessions with professors, administrators and a few students. These conversations gave me a better sense of why an increasing number of students in the post 9/11 era elect to study overseas with the United Kingdom being the top destination for US students studying abroad.

Over dinner, in one of the parlors of Durham Castle, I asked a post graduate American student how she decided to study in the UK. She said, "I grew up reading the Harry Potter

series and have always been enthralled with castles." Another more practical incentive may be that students in the United Kingdom attain their degrees in three years instead of the standard four required of undergraduate students in the US. Retention is particularly high among international students because of the support services available to them. These services might include a foreign student office, international student societies and academic support opportunities.

Each school provided me with a "Kodak moment" or a lasting image in which to anchor my thoughts and impressions. Mike Church, Chair of the Archaeology program at Durham University provided one such encounter. He excitedly exclaimed as he escorted us to his department, "Let's go examine some dead bodies!" His enthusiasm never waned. He took us from one lab to the next where several US and UK post graduate students were studying artifacts from Roman times that included human remains, coins and other antiquities from nearby excavation sites.

If you peel back the layers of Newcastle University, you begin to see its charm. Physically, the campus is fairly compact and easy to navigate which means no more than a 10 minute walk to class. To get from our dorm to the campus center, we took a well-trodden path across a cow pasture to a campus dotted with old and new buildings, within easy access to a city that ranks among the top university towns in the UK. Well established in the humanities and social sciences, Newcastle also is strong in the basic sciences, particularly medical sciences.

At York University, we found a modern campus including one building that resembled a space ship located near one of the school's numerous ponds and in close proximity to another school

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Kirk, with international high school counselor group, in front of Durham Castle which also serves as a residence hall for a few lucky Durham University students.

building, 14th century manor house. The campus includes one other historic building. A 15 minute drive from the main campus is King Edward VIII's former residence which now houses the school's renowned Archaeology Department. These historic properties were gifted to the school when it came into existence in 1963, young even by American standards.

On my own for the second leg of my tour, I explored individual college campuses within the Oxford and Cambridge university systems. I chose Christ Church and Merton at Oxford and St. Catherine's, Kings, and Gonville and Caius (pronounced "Keys") colleges

at Cambridge. Aside from the beauty of the campuses, I was struck most by the history of the schools. Having toured a couple hundred colleges and universities over the years, it surprised me to see a sign when I entered the Porter's Office at Merton College (Oxford) which read: "Sustaining Excellence, 750 Years, Merton College." I was more familiar with schools that promoted 150 years of excellence, not 750!

Strolling along the stone walkways of Oxford and Cambridge with tutors and admission officers, I thought of all the notable alumni who have attended either institution: Charles Darwin and Sir Isaac Newton were at Cambridge while TS Elliot attended Oxford. Some of our own Supreme Court Justices, Stephen Breyer and David Souter, are both graduates of Oxford.

For the English enthusiasts, you can only imagine the tutorials one might have had with the likes of C.S. Lewis and J.R. Tolkien both of whom served on the Oxford faculty. For those interested in the sciences, students today might enjoy weekly sessions at Oxford's Merton College Dr Alan Barr, well known for his work at CERN, in his 14th century Mob quad office. All a student needs to do in these sessions, according to one Oxford publication, is: "Be ready to present and defend your opinions, accept constructive criticism and listen to others."

From the first day of our visit when we became familiar with the Queen's security team at Durham University to the last where I walked the same cobble stone pathways as some of the great thinkers of all time, this was an adventure and a journey I encourage others to take. You will collect a multitude of memories along the way AND, like Graylyn Loomis, you may just find the school of your dreams.

Know Your Tests

It's hard to find a student who is excited about taking standardized tests. In popularity rankings, they probably rank somewhere between Saturday classes and brussel sprouts. However, though more than 800 colleges and universities have decided to make these tests an optional part of their admission process (see full list at www.fairtest.org), chances are good that students will be required to submit standardized test scores to at least one school. So, it's important for students to understand which tests they may take, when, and why.

PSAT (www.collegeboard.com) – Cosponsored by the College Board and the National Merit Scholarship Program, all Christ School freshman, sophomores and juniors take this SAT practice test during a school day in October; no special registration is required. This test gives students experience with the SAT format and serves as the initial screening for National Merit Scholarship programs. Students are assessed in Critical Reading, Math and Writing; each section's maximum score is 80. Test time: just over 2 hours.

PLAN – (www.act.org) This is the practice test for the ACT. At Christ School, all sophomores take the PLAN during a school day in November; no special registration is required. This test helps students become familiar with the ACT format. Students are assessed in English, Math, Reading and Science; each section's maximum score is 32. Test time: just over 2 hours.

SAT – (www.collegeboard.org) Designed to help colleges determine students' college readiness, this aptitude test is administered on Saturdays at numerous test sites around the country. Students must register themselves, but Christ School will provide transportation to a local site.* Students are assessed in Critical Reading, Math and Writing; each section's maximum score is 800. Test time (with check in and breaks): over 4 hours. Christ School boys typically take this test for the first time in January of their junior year.**

ACT – (www.act.org) Designed to help colleges determine students' college readiness, this curriculum-based test is administered on Saturdays at numerous test sites around the country. Students must register themselves, but Christ School will provide transportation to a local site.* Students are assessed in English, Math, Reading and Science; each section's maximum score is 36. Test time (with check in and breaks): over 4 hours. Christ School boys typically take this test for the first time in February of their junior year.**

Note: Though the SAT may be more familiar to many parents, the ACT and SAT are now completely interchangeable. Christ School encourages every student to take both tests at least once to determine which test is best for him.

Subject Tests – (www.collegeboard.org) Formerly known as SAT II's, some selective colleges recommend or require these single-subject tests. Administered on most SAT test dates, students must register themselves, but Christ School will provide transportation to a local site.* Each test's maximum score is 800. Test time (with check in): just over 1 hour. Christ School boys are encouraged to take these tests after completing Honor Pre-Calculus and AP courses in relevant subject areas.**



SAT	ACT
• 3 hours 45 min	• 3 hours 45 min
• 10 sections:	• 5 sections:
• Essay	• English
• Math (3)	• Math
• Critical Reading (3)	• Reading
• Writing (2)	• Science
• Experimental (1)	• Essay

In January, Christ School juniors did intensive SAT/ACT prep with Asheville Learning, Inc. (www.ashevillelearning.com).

TOEFL (www.ets.org) – This test assesses the ability of non-native English speakers to use and understand English in a university setting. Many colleges require this test in addition to the SAT or ACT. Christ School students must register themselves.* Students are assessed in listening, reading, speaking and writing; the test's maximum score is 120. Test time: 4 hours. Christ School boys should meet with Mr. Blackard to discuss the timing of these tests.

**Coco Parham offers registration help sessions for all juniors in the fall; if a student elects to take tests before these sessions, she is available to assist him as well.*

***For more information about your son's testing calendar, contact his college counselor. Students review 9th and 10th grade test results with Emily Pulsifer (epulsifer@christschool.org) while 11th and 12th graders meet with Kirk Blackard to determine timing and spacing of future ACT, SAT and TOEFL tests (kblackard@christschool.org).*

Accommodations and Extend Time Students with documented learning differences may apply for various accommodations through College Board and ACT. Applications for all accommodations must be filed and approved by the individual testing agencies. For more information, contact Dale Sparacino (dsparacino@christschool.org).

Test Prep Resources

In Print

Christ School recommends that students purchase and study Direct Hits Core Vocabulary of the SAT (rising sophomores) and Direct Hits Toughest Vocabulary of the SAT (rising juniors). These books can be purchased through the Christ School Bookstore.

Peterson's, McGraw-Hill, Kaplan, College Board and Barron's offer comprehensive test prep books; most include CDs and multiple sample tests. These books are available through publisher websites and Amazon.

Online Programs

- College Board Online Resources (www.sat.collegeboard.com)
- ACT Test Prep (www.actstudent.org)
- Kaplan Test Prep (www.kaptest.com)
- Princeton Review (www.princetonreview.com)
- Gorilla Test Prep (www.gorillatestprep.com)
- ePrep (www.eprep.com)

Classes and Tutoring

- **Christ School Test Prep** – This course introduces Christ School students to every aspect of the SAT and ACT, and helps them identify and master the sections that give them difficulty. There is no extra charge for this course and it is offered every quarter during the school year. For more information about this class or individual tutoring at Christ School, please contact Dale Sparacino (dsparacino@christschool.org).
- **Asheville Learning, Inc.** provides premium, individualized test preparation and academic coaching services to provide a “best-fit” for each student’s target scores, learning style, and baseline concept understanding; typically one-on-one sessions are conducted in the student’s school or home. For more information, call Ben Ambrosino, Director, at (828)713-7135 or send an email inquiry to succeed@ashevillelearning.com.
- **Chyten** is a nationally franchised center with an array of tutoring services in addition to test prep. One Christ School student wrote that Chyten was “the reason” for the “huge increase” in his scores. There are three North Carolina branches: Asheville, Clayton and Wake Forest. For more information about services and locations, visit www.chyten.com.
- **Direct Hits** offers intensive, four-day test prep sessions in Atlanta. Go to www.directhitseducation.com to learn more.
- **Academic Consulting & Educational Services** offers highly individualized, flexible tutoring for students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area. More information is available at www.bettersat4u.com.
- **In addition** to their print and online programs, Kaplan (www.kaptest.com) and Princeton Review (www.testprep.princetonreview.com) offer courses in select locations around the country. Consult their websites for dates, locations and prices.

Questions about testing? Please contact...

Scheduling/Test Content/Reading Scores – Your Son’s College Counselor

(Emily Pulsifer, 9th and 10th Grades; Kirk Blackard, 11th and 12th Grades)

Registration/Ordering Score Reports – Coco Parham (cparham@christschool.org)

Extended Time/Eligibility for All Accommodations – Dale Sparacino (dsparacino@christschool.org)



Crafting Personal Essays



A Winter Workshop for Juniors

Personal essays, required by many colleges, let students share elements of their lives that might not appear on high school transcripts, testing reports or in teacher recommendations. Guided by prompts like “Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure” (Common Application)* or “Think of things that fascinated you when you were 10 years old — what has endured?” (Wake Forest), students can share the unique experiences, relationships, interests and perspectives which, in their minds, have shaped who they are and how they view the world. In January, most juniors spent four English classes learning about this style of creative writing, reading examples of strong essays from former Christ School students, and moving through the process of writing multiple essay drafts.

**This fall, the Common Application, a standard application accepted by almost 500 colleges and universities, announced new essay questions for the 2013-14 application cycle. To view these new questions, go to www.commonapp.org.*

Summer 2013

Have You Considered...?

A job
An internship
An academic program
Job shadows
College visits
Test prep
Community service
Outdoor adventures
Reading Moby Dick

College Guidance Spring 2013 Calendar

Thursday, March 28

Career Speaker Night, *Wetmore Hall 1st Floor (7:00-8:15PM)*

Students will learn from professionals in four fields:
Emergency Medicine, Engineering, Sport Psychology and
Financial Planning/Investing.

April

Sophomore and Junior Meetings with College Counselors

Thursday, April 4

West Point Visit, *College Guidance Office (2:00PM)*

Dan Wickersham, liaison officer for West Point, will meet with students interested in the United States Military Academy.

Friday, April 5

Appalachian State University Visit,
College Guidance Office (10:50AM)

•Interested students will meet with a representative from the admissions office.

Saturday, April 13

ACT

Wednesday, April 17

AP Pre-Registration, *Media Center (8:45AM)*

All AP students must attend this important meeting to complete preliminary forms and receive important testing information.

Wednesday, May 1

National College Deposit Deadline for Seniors

•Seniors will commit to attending one institution by making a deposit at that school.

Saturday, May 4

SAT/Subject Tests

Monday, May 6 - Friday, May 17

Advanced Placement Exams, Christ School

Monday, May 13

Alumni Panel, *Pingree Auditorium*

•Former students will share wisdom with seniors.

Sunday, May 19

GRADUATION, *Yard A*

•All students attend this celebration.

Saturday, June 1

SAT/Subject Tests

Saturday, June 8

ACT

The West Point representative met with students on April 4th.

