# Contents

Acknowledgments xi

Introduction xiii

## Part 1 What You Need to Know Before You Begin

1 Why Has College Admissions Become So Competitive? 3
2 What Do Colleges Look for in an Applicant? 20
3 How Do Colleges Make Their Decisions? 45
4 How Colleges (and Students) Differ: Finding What Fits 62

## Part 2 Making the Right Choices for You

5 Where Should You Apply? 101
6 The Big Tests 127
7 Deciding About Early Decision and Other Early Options 150
8 Paying the Bill 164

## Part 3 Tackling Your Applications

9 Applying Well, Part I: The Application and the Essay 199
10 Applying Well, Part II: Recommendations, Interviews, and Activities 219
11 Making the Most of Your Special Talents 242
12 Students with Special Circumstances 266
13 Advice for International Students 289
Part 4  Bringing the Process to a Close  
14  Making Your Decision After the Colleges Make Theirs  
15  What Matters Most: Advice to Parents and Students  

Appendixes  
   A. College Research Worksheet  
   B. Essay Prompts, 2017–2018  
   C. Financial Aid Shopping Sheet  
   D. Cost of Attendance Worksheet  

College Preparation Time Line  
Resources  
Notes  
About the Authors  
Index