



**AMERICA REFRAMED  
DISCUSSION & VIEWERS GUIDE**

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## ABOUT THE FILM



*Personal Statement* follows three inspirational teens in Brooklyn who take it upon themselves to make a difference by becoming peer college counselors in their schools. They are high school seniors who are fighting to defy the odds not only for themselves but for every single one of their classmates. They have decided to become the very resource they don't have themselves.

In the heart of Brooklyn, New York, Karoline Jimenez, Christine Rodriguez, and Enoch Jem-mott aspire to become the first generation in their families to attend and graduate college. But, like so many public school students throughout the country, their under-resourced schools don't have enough college guidance support. That is why Karoline, Christine, and Enoch have decided to do their part to close the college guidance gap. *Personal Statement* is an observational film that follows them through their senior year as they struggle to get themselves and their peers to college. The film's narrative weaves their individual struggles, family life, and their respective college application and admission processes.

### The film's creative team includes:



**JULIANE DRESSNER**  
Director/Producer/  
Cinematographer



**BETH LEVISON**  
Producer



**EDWIN MARTINEZ**  
Co-Director/Editor/  
Cinematographer



**MADELEINE GAVIN**  
Editor

<http://worldchannel.org/programs/episode/arf-s6-614-personal-statement/>



WORLDChannel



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*Personal Statement* will premiere on the Columbia-DuPont Award-winning series "America ReFramed" on WORLD Channel on October 23, 2018, at 8:00 pm Eastern.



## **PRACTICAL RESOURCES FOR APPLYING TO COLLEGE**

### **What Action Steps Do I Take to Apply to College? And In What Order?**

Applying to college can be an overwhelming process. Get ahead of the curve by understanding how to apply, what actions you can take to increase your chances of success, and when you should engage each step by visiting the Khan Academy's Master Timeline for College Admissions:

<https://www.khanacademy.org/college-careers-more/college-admissions/get-started/introduction-ca/a/master-timeline-college-admissions>

### **How Do I Determine Where I Want to Apply?**

Choosing the right path for higher education is a very personal decision. For some, this means beginning at a two-year college before transferring to a four-year college. Some students may be looking for a highly specialized program, and others may need more time to figure out their major. Schools that consider identity at the core of their mission, such as all women's schools or historically black universities, may be an important factor. How much does financial assistance matter in the decision making? Knowing where to start can be intimidating. Take the U.S. News College Personality Quiz to help you begin your journey:

<https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/right-school/choices/articles/college-personality-quiz>

### **The College Application Process**

While some colleges will have their own application process, The Common Application (common app) is a single undergraduate college admissions application that students can use to apply to over 700 colleges and universities in the United States, as well as international higher education institutions in Canada, Europe and China. View this Quick Guide to learn the sections of the Common App, and visit the links on the second page to learn more best practices and tips for applying:

<https://www.commonapp.org/files/ready-resources/2017CARReady-APPQuickGuide.pdf>



## What Are the Most Important Parts of a College Application?

- **Grade Point Average:** Grades matter in determining what schools will be available to you. If you are looking to raise your GPA, PrepScholar has excellent tips on how to improve your grades quickly:

<https://blog.prepscholar.com/strategies-to-raise-gpa-in-high-school-fast>

- **Standardized Test Scores:** Test scores are an important component of most college applications, although more and more schools are no longer requiring students to submit standardized test scores.

Here is a list of college that don't require standardized test scores: <https://blog.prepscholar.com/the-complete-guide-to-sat-optional-colleges>

Compass Prep offers an overview of score ranges that specific colleges are looking for. Most students will benefit from test preparation, either in-person through school, or a local community center, or if none are available — by utilizing free online resources. The College Board offers free online tests, sample questions, and even daily apps to help you prepare for the SAT and PSAT. You can also register to take the tests through their site. The ACT offers a free online prep program on their website. Which should you take? The Princeton Review has a compare and contrast chart to help you determine if you'd be better off taking one test or both.

<https://www.compassprep.com/college-profiles-new-sat/>

<https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/practice>

<http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/test-preparation.html>

<https://www.princetonreview.com/college/sat-act>

- **Personal Statements:** Your writing sample offers colleges a chance to get to know you, beyond the story your grades, test scores and activities tell. *Personal Statements* should, at their best, give significant insight into your personality, shine with exemplary writing skills, and show a journey of growth. Your *Personal Statement* offers an opportunity to present any issues that you experienced — and overcame — during your high school years, and empower the narrative. For more information on writing an outstanding *Personal Statement*, visit PrepScholar's guide:

<https://blog.prepscholar.com/what-is-a-personal-statement-everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-college-essay>

- **Letters of Recommendation:** These testimonials offer colleges admissions a critical outside perspective on your gifts, challenges and work ethic. Choosing the right teachers and mentors to write the recommendation is an important decision. You'll want to approach potential recommenders you have a strong relationship with, be sure to give them enough time to write your recommendation, and supply them with enough information to speak on the full range of your skills, strengths, and interests. For advice on getting great letters of recommendation for college, visit Great College Advice:

<https://greatcollegeadvice.com/six-tips-for-getting-great-letters-of-recommendation-for-college>



- **Finances:** Everyone knows that college is expensive! How can you afford to attend? And what are the options for help? Scholarships, merit-based and need-based financial aid and work-study are all possibilities, but you need to know how to apply for each. My College Guide offers an easy roadmap to options for financing college, as well as advice about the dreaded conversation: debt.

[https://mycollegeguide.org/articles/paying-for-college/financing\\_your\\_college\\_education](https://mycollegeguide.org/articles/paying-for-college/financing_your_college_education)

*If you are concerned about the cost of a four-year college, you might consider starting out in a two-year community college. Two-year community colleges offer degrees and certifications in a diverse array of professions such as veterinary technician, dental hygienist, and web designer. Many students get their Bachelors degree at a lower cost by first getting an Associate's degree at a community college and then transferring to a 4-year college.*

## How Can I Use Extracurricular Activities To Become A More Attractive Applicant?

Colleges are impressed by young people who are engaged in the world outside of the classroom. Extracurriculars offer a chance to prove you have personal initiative, can collaborate in a team environment, and have character, interests, and skills to offer their college community. Here is what colleges are looking for in an applicant's extracurricular choices:

- **Passion:** Rather than padding your resume with a series of random activities, choose a few that you really love. Colleges are interested in students who are passionate and build a roster of activities that revolve around specific interests such as the arts, science and math, debate, athletics, etc. If you have not discovered your passion, colleges are also impressed by students who can articulate that experimenting with different activities was an important part of their journey of discovery.
- **Leadership:** Students can exercise their leadership skills by heading up a school project or club, starting a new program, becoming captain of a sports team, joining student government, working a job or internship, or creating their own entrepreneurial endeavor. Colleges want to know how you might show leadership on their campus, and beyond.
- **Impact:** Colleges are looking for students who look beyond themselves in order to contribute to the world. What issues fire you up? What difference can you make in your local community? Consider volunteer opportunities such as walking dogs at a local shelter, tutoring peers or supporting a soup kitchen. Get involved with activist groups, or start your own with interested peers.

These three categories are inspired by PrepScholar's framework. For hundreds of examples of extracurricular activities, visit their exhaustive list at:

<https://blog.prepscholar.com/list-of-extracurricular-activities-examples>

Additionally, utilizing summer break to boost your college application is a smart plan. Here are 14 summer activities to consider:

<https://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/summer-activities-for-college-applications>



## WHAT IF COLLEGE IS NOT FOR YOU?



While it is true that a college degree can open doors in specific industries, there are also many fields that require a different form of education — one that may be more hands-on, shorter term or based in direct experience...

*If college is not for you, what else is possible?*

- Technical and trade schools offer pathways to administrative and technological positions in the medical field, computer-aided drafting and architectural design, construction, auto-repair, criminal justice, and many other fields.
- Short boot camps offer those interested in the tech field with programs that are only months long and equip students with skills in coding.
- Specialized programs support alternative therapies such as acupuncture and massage. Those pursuing welding, metalwork, masonry, forestry, landscaping and even tattooing gain their education through apprenticeships.
- Entrepreneurship is an option for highly motivated individuals with ideas for companies and products, and an entire network of online workshops exist to tap into — many that are free.

### **If college is not your path, here are some resources to help you discover your next steps:**

**Trade, Technical and Vocational Schools:** Begin with this [U.S. News listing of the best vocational schools by state](#). The website [Trade-Schools.net](#) also offers a large variety of resources for those seeking careers in trade fields and includes an internal search for options in your area.

**Apprenticeships:** The [U.S. Department of Labor](#) offers various resources to discover and connect with apprenticeship opportunities in a variety of fields.

**Tech Bootcamps:** [Value Colleges](#) ranks the top coding bootcamps, and an Internet search can lead you to options in your area.

**Entrepreneurship:** How does one become an entrepreneur? [GetEducated.com](#) offers an essential overview and Entrepreneur magazine offers [25 Essential Entrepreneur Resources](#).

**Free Classes:** The Muse lists [45 free online courses](#) in various industries, and Open Culture lists [1,300 Free Online Course From Top Universities](#).

**Service Industry:** For an overview of jobs in the service industry, [Collegegrad.com](#) has a thorough listing that includes information on working conditions and the nature of the industry.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### College Counseling Disparity in American Education

Read these scenarios from *Personal Statement*, and discuss using the questions that follow:

**Irma, Karoline’s counselor and supervisor**, provides an important source of emotional support while she navigates harassment for her sexual identity, her relationship with her father, and a disappointing college process.

**Enoch** struggles to locate necessary financial documents to complete his college application and must miss school to travel to government agencies to obtain them.

**Christine** stages an intervention with her cousin to convince her mother that as a young woman she should have the right to pursue an education of her own shaping.

**Using Karoline, Enoch and Christine as examples, discuss the kinds of barriers they face and whether additional counseling is important to help students who face these kinds of challenges.**

What makes a strong counselor, and how can a college counselor help students with these kinds of challenges? What might Karoline’s experience of school have been without Irma? What might Genesis’s experience have been without Christine? What do students lose out on when a school does not have enough school counselors to meet the needs of their students? What other barriers do students in low-income communities face?

### The Role of Peer-to-Peer Leadership

Read these scenarios from *Personal Statement*, and discuss using the questions that follow:

Christine motivates Genesis to improve her grades and consider going to college, even though Genesis does not believe that she will “get in to any schools.” In the end, when Genesis has choices for attending college, she discovers her assumption was incorrect.

Early on in the film, we see Karoline exhausted by her attempt to locate specific students to give them their SAT slips. Later, we see her sharing her personal story to a class of students after an incident of homophobic bullying.

What does a peer-to-peer leadership model offer to the student in the mentor role? What does it offer to the student in the mentee role? What gaps can peers uniquely fill, perhaps even better than adult counselors? What elements of the college counseling process are best done by a peer and what elements are best done by an adult college counselor?



## The Financial Challenges of Higher Education

As you think about the challenges that Karoline, Enoch and Christine confront in their journeys, what are your thoughts about the role that costs and finances play in going to college?

How would Karoline, Enoch and Christine's situations be different if they didn't have so many additional barriers due to their financial situation? Is paying for college the greatest challenge that many young people face? What can be done to support young people for whom paying for college is the biggest challenge? What are some of the other big challenges that students face when applying to college? What can be done to address those barriers?





## THREE ACTIVITIES



### Test Your College Prep Timeline Instincts

In *Personal Statement*, Enoch, Karoline and Christine participate in a college application process timeline activity at a College Access: Research & Action (CARA) training. Inspired by this scene, use Khan Academy's master timeline for college admissions to recreate the activity. To make moveable representations of the steps, you can print directly from the website, and cut the steps into strips of paper, or copy and paste onto larger paper, then print. Be sure to remove the headers that give away when each step should be completed. Then, test your instincts by physically grouping and ordering the steps under the following headers:

- Throughout high school (freshman-senior year)
- Junior year, fall (September to November)
- Junior year, winter (December to February)
- Junior year, spring (March to May)
- Junior year, summer (June to August)
- Senior year, fall (September to November)
- Senior year, winter (December to February)
- Senior year, spring (March to May)
- Senior year, summer (June to August)

This activity can be used solo, in small groups or large groups. Up the ante by timing the activity!

<https://www.khanacademy.org/college-careers-more/college-admissions/get-started/introduction-ca/a/master-timeline-college-admissions>

### Get Vocal: Social Media Activism Campaign

Create an activism campaign in the footsteps of Christine, who is an activist and youth organizer. In the film we see her participating in organizing meetings and protests and testifying in front of the New York City Council as part of her work with Make the Road New York and the Urban Youth Collaborative. . Using the facts listed on the *Personal Statement* website, and engaging in additional research, create a series of typed or handwritten posters that share the facts. Bring the visual campaign into the community (school, or outside of school) and invite people into the conversation. Offer them an opportunity to pose with a sign, or create a brief video interview, sharing thoughts about the statistic. Create a recognizable, unique hashtag and post on various forms of social media. Take it a step further by tagging local politicians and changemakers.

<https://www.personalstatementfilm.com/resources>



## Group Sourcing the College Essay

- **Part I:** Using ThoughtCo.'s list of college essay prompts, invite a group of students to gather and write notes based on 5 prompts on the list of their choosing. Give students about 15 minutes for this task. <https://www.thoughtco.com/personal-essay-topics-1857000>
- **Part II:** In small groups or pairs, invite students to share their ideas and offer their peers feedback. Which essay topic is the most compelling, and why?
- **Part III:** Give students time in or out of the room to write a draft of their essay. This works best when students can write overnight and return with a typed version of the draft. Have each student pass their draft to the peer on their left. This student's task, in 10 minutes, is to identify what they think is the most compelling line in the whole essay. Pass to the left for as many 10 minutes reviews as the time frame allows. When students receive their essay back, ask them to identify the lines, sharing aloud. Often these lines will be embedded in the text of the essay, rather than the original opening line. Explain that strong opening hooks are powerful for the reader, and this might mean beginning your essay in the middle of the story or action. Invite each student to create a subsequent draft using the identified line as the new opener.

