

College Planning Checklist

Freshman Year

- Plan a challenging program of classes to take.
 - The courses you take in high school show colleges what kind of goals you set for yourself. Are you signing up for advanced classes, honors sections, or accelerated sequences? Are you choosing electives that really stretch your mind and help you develop new abilities? Or are you doing just enough to get by? Colleges will be more impressed by respectable grades in challenging courses than by outstanding grades in easy ones.
 - Keep in mind the courses that colleges expect you to have completed for admission; your schedule should consist of at least four college preparatory classes per year, including:
 - four years of English
 - four years of math (through algebra II, trigonometry or higher)
 - two–four years of world language
 - three–four years of laboratory science
 - two–four years of history/social studies
 - one year of fine arts
 - one year of electives from a list provided by facilitator.

- Create a file of important documents and notes.
 - Copies of report cards and certificates, lists of awards and honors, and lists of school and community activities in which you are involved, including both paid and volunteer work with descriptions of your responsibilities.

- Get involved with academic enrichment programs, summer workshops, and camps with specialty focuses such as music, arts, and science.
 - Keep in mind that learning doesn't happen only in the classroom.

- Stay active in clubs, activities, and sports that you enjoy.
 - Colleges look at more than just your academic record for admission. It's important that you demonstrate your abilities outside of the classroom, too.

STEP BY STEP: COLLEGE AWARENESS AND PLANNING: EARLY HIGH SCHOOL

National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)

Sophomore Year

- Learn what resources are available to help you plan for college by meeting with your school's college or school counselor. Ask about catalogs, guidebooks, college search programs, and college websites.
- Begin your college search and visits.
 - Create a list of colleges and universities you are interested in and discuss it with your parents and school counselor.
 - Find out about the different types of schools. Decide which characteristics are most important to you, such as the size of the school, distance from home, cost, and extracurricular activities.
- Continue extracurricular activities, as admission officers look at students' extracurricular activities when considering them for admission.
- Continue participation in academic enrichment programs, summer workshops and camps with specialty focuses, such as music, arts, and science.
- Update your file of important documents and notes.
- Prepare for standardized testing.
 - Ask your counselor about taking the PreACT or PSAT/NMSQT test in the fall or the PSAT 10 in the spring (with or without writing). These are valuable tests to help you prepare for the actual ACT and SAT, two college entrance exams, which you can take during your junior year.
 - Review PreACT, the PSAT 10, or PSAT/NMSQT test results with your parents and school counselor.
 - Many students take SAT Subject Tests for college admission as early as sophomore year. These tests help you show colleges your proficiency in different subject areas.
- Sign up for junior year courses keeping in mind that you will want to challenge yourself with tougher courses. It will pay off in the long run, not only by making you smarter, but also by impressing colleges and helping you earn scholarships.
- Talk to your counselor about registering for AP courses next year. AP, or Advanced Placement, courses grant college credit for achievement in exams during high school covering different college-level subjects.

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Junior Year

August

- Start your year off right by talking with your school counselor about the year ahead. Be sure to ask about test dates for the PSAT/NMSQT, ACT, and SAT. You'll need to register up to six weeks ahead of time.
- Start investigating sources for financial aid. Take note of scholarship deadlines and plan accordingly.
- Develop a résumé—a record of your accomplishments, activities, and work experiences. This will be an important part of your college application.
- If you don't participate in many activities outside of class, now is the time to sign up. Consider clubs at schools, team sports, or even an after school job.

September/October

- Take the PSAT/NMSQT. Even if you took the PSAT10 during your sophomore year, taking the PSAT/NMSQT this year will count towards National Merit Scholar consideration and will give you a better predictor for the SAT you take later this year or next.
- Sign up for ACT or SAT prep courses or use free test preparation resources online. If you can't find the best websites, ask your counselor. You will want to take the test at least once in the spring and again next fall during your senior year.

November

- Sign up for the ACT and SAT, if you haven't already.

December

- PSAT/NMSQT test results should be coming in. Review the results to learn more about your strengths and weaknesses and discuss them with your parents and counselor. Connect your College Board and Khan Academy accounts to get free, personalized practice for the SAT.
- Use your PSAT/NMSQT score report to access free personalized feedback, practice and college planning based on your PSAT/NMSQT results.

January/February

- Meet with your school counselor again to develop your senior schedule. Ask how you can improve your college preparation.
- Talk to a counselor or teacher about registering for AP courses during your senior year.
- Register for a spring offering of the SAT and/or ACT.
- Think about registering for SAT Subject Tests this spring. The final registration deadline for taking the test this academic year will be in May.

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March/April

- Begin taking a more serious look at colleges and universities you are interested in attending. Gather information about academics, financial aid, and campus life. Go to college fairs and open houses and learn as much as you can from the internet about schools so you can make the best decision possible.
- Plan college visits. Your spring break can be a good time because you can observe a campus when classes are going on. Even if they aren't campuses that you think you would attend, it is important to get exposure to college campuses and the college experience.
- Think about lining up a summer job, internship, or co-op.
- If you are in AP courses, get ready for the AP exams next month.
- Develop a preliminary list of colleges that interest you. Contact them to request a viewbook and additional information.
- Take a look at some college applications and consider all of the different pieces of information you will need to compile.

May

- AP Examinations are given in high schools nationally this month. Make sure you are signed up and know the dates and times for your exams.
- Make a list of teachers, counselors, employers, and other adults who you might ask to write letters of recommendation for your college applications.

STEP BY STEP: COLLEGE AWARENESS AND PLANNING: LATE HIGH SCHOOL

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Senior Year

August/September

- Register for the SAT and/or ACT if you didn't take it as a junior, or if you aren't satisfied with your score and want to take it again. (Your counselor can help you with fee waivers). This will be your last opportunity to take the SAT and ACT before November Early Action and Early Decisions deadlines.
- Take a look at some college applications and consider all of the different pieces of information you will need to compile.
- Visit with your school counselor to make sure you are on track to graduate and fulfill college admission requirements. If you're ahead of schedule, consider taking courses at a local university or community college to get a jumpstart on college credit.
- Take every opportunity to get to know colleges. Meet with college representatives who visit your high schools during the fall, attend local college fairs, visit campuses (if possible). Ask your counselor if they know of special campus visitation programs.
- Narrow down your list of colleges and begin to consider "safety," "match," and "reach" schools. Make sure you have the application and financial aid information for each school. Find out if you qualify for any scholarships at these schools.
- Create a checklist and calendar to chart:
 - Standardized test dates, registration deadlines, and fees
 - College application due dates
 - Financial aid application forms and deadlines
 - Other materials you'll need for college applications (recommendations, transcripts, essays, etc.)
 - Your high school's application processing deadlines
- Some schools require the CSS/Financial Aid Profile. Ask the colleges to which you are applying for their deadlines. Register as early as September. See your school counselor about fee waivers.

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October

- Some colleges will have deadlines as early as this month.** These would include Rolling Admission, Early Decision, and Early Action deadlines.
- It is time to file the FAFSA.** State funded grant programs have limited funds, so the earlier you apply, the better your chances of getting the grant money. And the sooner you complete it, the sooner you will have an idea of your financial aid options. Watch the mail for your Student Aid Report (SAR)—it should arrive four weeks after the FAFSA is filed or watch your email if you filed electronically.
- Ask your counselor to help you determine if you are eligible for an application fee waiver.**
- Finalize your college essay.** Many schools will require that you submit at least one essay with your application.
- Request letters of recommendations from teachers, school counselors, or employers.** Follow the process required by your high school or provide a stamped, addressed envelope, the appropriate college forms, and an outline of your academic record and extracurricular activities to each person writing you a recommendation.
- Research possibilities of scholarships.** Ask your counselor, colleges, and religious and civic groups about scholarship opportunities. There are also some good scholarship websites, including Fastweb (www.fastweb.com) and The College Board (<http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/scholarship-search>). You should never pay for scholarship information.

November

- Finalize and send any early decision or early action applications due this month.** Have a parent, teacher, counselor, or other adult review the application before it is submitted.
- Every college will require a copy of your transcript from your high school.** Follow your school's procedure for sending transcripts.
- Make sure testing companies (ACT or SAT) have sent your scores directly to the colleges to which you are applying.**
- The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) will be available this month, but cannot be completed before Oct. 1.** Visit www.fafsa.gov to complete this application.

December

- Begin to organize regular decision applications and financial aid forms, which will be due in January and/or February.**

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January

- Many popular and selective colleges will have application deadlines as early as Jan. 1. Others have deadlines later in January and February. Keep track of and observe deadlines for sending in all required fees and paperwork.
- If necessary, register for the February ACT (some colleges will be able consider it).
- Ask your counseling office in January to send first semester transcripts to schools where you applied. At the end of the school year, they will need to send final transcripts to the college you will attend.

February/March/April

- Don't slack in the classroom while most of your applications are complete and you are waiting to receive admission decisions. The college that you do attend will want to see your second semester transcript. No senioritis!
- Acceptance letters and financial aid offers will start to arrive. Review your acceptances, compare financial aid packages, and visit your final choices, especially if you haven't already.

May

- May 1 is the date when the college you plan to attend may require a commitment and deposit. When you've made your college decision, notify your counselor and the colleges. Send in your deposit by the postmark date of May 1. If you've been offered financial aid, decide which offer to accept and follow the instructions given. Also notify schools you won't attend of your decision.
- Make sure you have requested that your final transcript be sent to the school you'll be attending.
- If you are "waitlisted" by a college you really want to attend, visit, call and write the admission office to make your interest clear. Ask how you can strengthen your application.

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Summer

- Enjoy your summer.** It's been a long journey through high school and to college.
- Summer jobs** can help pay some of your college expenses and give you great career preparation.
- Make a list of what you will need to take with you for your dorm room.** The suggested list of items, room, and furniture dimensions and many other questions can usually be answered by visiting your college's website and searching under "Housing" or "Residence Life" for further information.
- You will most likely get a roommate assignment** from your college. Call, write, or email to get acquainted in advance. In your conversations and communication, you should be able to figure out who will bring what for your room.
- Some colleges will offer a summer orientation/registration.** Make sure to attend to meet fellow students and other important people on campus and to familiarize yourself with your new school. This is often the time you sign up for your fall courses.