

GUIDELINES ON SELECTING A COLLEGE

Things to consider:

- **Location:** Are you looking for a college close to home, in another state, another country?
- **Size:** Are you interested in small colleges or large? Private institutions or public?
- **Programs:** Which colleges offer the program/s that interest you?
- **Cost:** How much are tuition and other expenses? Are scholarships and financial aid available?

How to narrow down the many options:

Explore college websites, attend virtual information sessions, visit colleges, ask questions based on what is important to you. Suggestions include:

- What sets your college apart from other colleges that offer the same program?
- Does your college have study abroad opportunities? Internships? On-campus jobs?
- Is my program considered competitive and how can I increase my chances of getting accepted? Is there just one application or is there also a supplemental application for my program?
- Is the SAT/ACT optional and if so, what are the benefits to taking these college entrance exams?
- What kind of expenses can I expect other than tuition?
- What kinds of clubs/activities/sports does your college have? What do students do in their free time?
- Is there a fitness center? What is the surrounding town like?
- Do most students live on or off campus? What housing options are there?
- Are there support services such as tutoring and peer mentoring?
- Is assistance provided in seeking jobs during and after graduation? What are typical jobs and average starting salaries for students in the program that interests me?
- About how far is your college from here? Is there an open house coming up or virtual tours? Will there be opportunities to speak with current students and sit in on a class?

Stay in touch with college representatives with thoughtful questions to demonstrate your interest in their college. Keep in mind that some colleges will waive application fees just by visiting them.

PATHWAY TO COLLEGE

There is much to do along your path from high school to college. Using a timeline is a way to see what needs to be done during the college admissions process. You can tailor this timeline as you see fit and use a calendar along with it to add deadline dates to help you stay on track.

9TH – 12TH GRADES

- **Consider taking college prep courses** Take challenging courses based on what your school has to offer (e.g., honors, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), high school/college dual enrollment). Rigorous courses that go beyond the minimum graduation requirements will make you a more impressive applicant and may earn you college credit while in high school!
- **Focus on your grades** Your high school transcript is considered one of the most important parts of your college application, and good grades will distinguish you from many other applicants.
- **Explore extracurricular and leadership activities** Try different extracurricular activities to see which ones are most interesting to you. Once you decide what you like, dedicate more time to fewer activities in order to become deeply involved. Given the opportunity, take on a leadership role as well.
- **Find summer volunteer opportunities/jobs/internships** Summer is a great time to earn extra money for college while exploring a variety of career fields.
- **Speak with your guidance counselor and teachers** Having conversations about classes, colleges and careers is helpful to narrow down the many choices that exist.
- **Speak with your parents about how to pay for college** Start discussing why you would like to go to college and how to pay for it.
- **Search and apply for scholarships** Scholarships may be available through your school, employer and/or community agencies.

JUNIOR YEAR

- **Take the PSAT** Take the PSAT as a junior to practice for the SAT and qualify for the National Merit Scholarship program.
- **Prepare for the SAT and/or ACT** Begin preparing for the SAT and/or ACT at the start of junior year. It is a good idea to take a full length practice test of each, and use the results to help you decide which test is best for you. Some students take the test of their choice two or three times.
- **Learn more about colleges** Use resources at your high school, online search tools, attend college fairs, speak with college representatives, and ask friends already in college for their thoughts on different colleges to begin deciding where you are interested in attending. A great online resource to help is <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search>.
- **Visit college campuses** Take time to visit colleges to get a sense of what college is like. Speak with admissions and department representatives, tour the campus, dorms, classrooms, dining and recreation facilities, etc.
- **Take the SAT and/or ACT** Take the SAT and/or ACT for the first time in the winter of junior year. Most students do better their second time, so plan to test again the spring of junior year or fall of senior year. If you are worried about the cost of the test, ask if there is a fee waiver.

- **Take SAT Subject Tests for courses ending in the fall** SAT Subject Tests, required by some colleges, are best taken immediately after you've taken the related class and while the material is fresh.
- **Develop your list of target colleges** Identify 10 to 15 colleges of interest with the goal of having several schools at varying levels of selectivity.
- **If possible, set up appointments to visit and speak with representatives at your target colleges** Contact admissions offices of colleges you plan to visit. Some colleges have programs to cover the cost of travel for students with financial need.
- **Take AP Exams** AP Exams, which provide an opportunity to earn college credit, are offered each year.
- **Determine the application deadlines for each of your target schools** Early decision and early action applications are typically due in November of your senior year, while most regular admissions applications are due between January 1 and March 1. The Common App, usually available at the beginning of August, will consolidate the deadlines for you.
- **Begin preparing for your interview** Research the colleges where you plan to apply, identify those that may offer optional interviews, and begin practicing for the interviews with a teacher, friend or parent.
- **Begin drafting college application essays** Senior year is very busy, so the summer after junior year is a great time to begin college application essays. Ask a teacher to proofread your application essays and then make any revisions and prepare final drafts before college applications are due.
- **Identify potential teachers to provide recommendation letters** These should be teachers from your core classes (math, science, history, English, or world languages) who know you best. Prepare a few bullet points for your teachers, explaining why you chose them as recommenders and how you believe you excelled academically in their classes.
- **Outline your financial aid plan** Use the financial aid calculators found on individual college websites, also known as net price calculators, to determine how much your family will need to contribute for your college education. Create a list of all the financial aid options you plan to pursue along with the deadlines for each. Use a calendar for these and all deadlines to help you stay on track.

SENIOR YEAR

- **Gather all application materials** Make sure you have the necessary materials for college admissions including forms, test scores, essays, recommendations, and transcripts. If you are worried about the cost of the application, ask your guidance counselor or college of interest if there is a fee waiver.
- **Consider early decision application** Early decision applications, usually due in November, require a binding commitment in exchange for early acceptance. Exception to binding may be due to financial hardship.
- **Consider early action applications** For early action schools, you receive a decision early and can wait for the regular decision deposit deadline to make your final choice, typically May 1st.
- **Submit CSS PROFILE if required and if applying early** Though the FAFSA cannot be submitted until after October 1, certain schools require the CSS Profile in the fall if you plan to go through their early application process.

- **Ensure official SAT and/or ACT score reports are sent to early application schools** In addition to your application forms, letters of recommendation, essays, and other requested materials, your early decision application will require you to go to the College Board (SAT) and ACT Student (ACT) websites to send colleges your official test score reports.
- **Go into early admissions interviews confident** Interviews (conversations) for some early action/decision schools happen in the fall.
- **Receive response on early applications** Most applications submitted through early programs will receive a decision by December. If you submit your financial aid forms on time, you may receive an estimated financial aid package as well.
- **Submit enrollment deposit for early decision school** If you've decided to apply early decision and the school's financial aid package meets your need, enrollment deposits are often due in winter of your senior year. If you are concerned about the cost, ask the school about a fee waiver.
- **Submit regular decision applications** Most colleges have regular decision due dates sometime between January 1 and March 1 of each year.
- **Ensure official SAT and ACT score reports are sent to regular decision schools** In addition to your application forms, letters of recommendation, essays, and other requested materials, your regular decision application will require you to go to the College Board (SAT) and ACT Student (ACT) websites to send colleges your official test score reports.
- **Fill out and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** FAFSA, the main determinant of federal financial aid, can be submitted after October 1 of your senior year. Submit ASAP, as some schools give aid on a first-come, first-serve basis.
- **Receive decision on regular applications** Regular decision applicants typically receive an accept/reject/wait-list response in March or April.
- **Compare financial aid packages from multiple schools** Once you are accepted, colleges will offer a financial aid package consisting of grants along with suggested loans and work-study.
- **Consider "work study"** Many students consider work-study options offered by their college if they cannot fully cover the cost of attendance through grants and scholarships. You can indicate your interest for work-study on the FAFSA and by contacting your college's financial aid office.
- **Consider loans** Many students consider loans for college if they cannot fully cover the cost of attendance through grants, scholarships, and work-study positions.
- **Consider a financial aid appeal** If your family's circumstance has changed, or if a college's financial aid package does not meet your need, reach out to the financial aid office to appeal the offer.
- **Submit your enrollment deposit** The final date to submit a deposit and lock in your place for regular decision applications is typically May 1. If needed, ask the school if you qualify for a fee waiver.
- **Complete ongoing enrollment paperwork for your college** Once you have decided on a college, you will receive updates regarding orientation, scheduling, housing, etc. Complete all paperwork by the necessary deadlines and be sure to send official transcripts of other colleges you may have attended.
- **Conduct work-study job search** Coordinate with the financial aid office to identify work-study options. If possible, finalize your job search the summer before college begins.