

# College Planning Timeline: Grade 8-12

## 8th Grade Year

- Talk to friends and family about careers and possible school choices.
- Consult with your middle and high school counselors to find out which courses you should take that will qualify you to attend certain colleges and/or enter certain career fields.
- Discuss your financial situation with your parents to see how they can assist you in paying for your education. Work together to establish a savings plan in which you can participate.
- Learn about financial aid from your school counselor.

## Freshman Year (9th Grade)

- Build a flexible schedule allowing for study time, extracurricular activities, and your other interests. Use a day planner, calendar or electronic organizer to help you get organized.
- Get involved only in extracurricular activities in which you have a genuine interest and those to which you are willing to make the necessary time commitment.
- **Make a four-year schedule of classes that increases your eligibility to attend the college of your choice.**
- Start developing a resume by keeping a scrapbook of your accomplishments including articles about yourself, awards that you have won, and activities in which you have participated.
- Take your parents with you to talk to your counselor about your interests, postsecondary possibilities and career information.
- Find out about summer jobs and how to gain the skills necessary to obtain one.
- Look into volunteer opportunities that will expand your experience and skills.

## Sophomore Year (10th Grade)

- Visit the high school guidance counselor or college counseling office and explore college catalogs, websites, and other college materials including financial aid information.
- Reevaluate your high school course selection to make sure it meets college requirements.
- Try to complete most of your academic requirements by your junior year.
- **Take the PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test) and/or the PLAN (Preliminary ACT) in October to prepare you for college entrance exams. The PSAT may qualify you for certain scholarships.**
- See your counselor to take interest inventories to discover which career(s) might be a match for you.
- If pursuing athletics, check out NCAA requirements.

## Junior Year (11th grade)

### Fall - August through December

- Take the PSAT in October to practice taking entrance exams and to establish eligibility for some scholarships.
- Attend sessions with college representatives who visit your high school. You may find it helpful to visit local college fairs.
- Develop a list of possible postsecondary schools. Your counseling office and/or school library may have books and materials to help you. Send off for admissions literature and applications from the schools that are on the top of your list. **The internet will be your friend in this process.**
- Talk with an admissions counselor to determine if there are any institutional scholarships for which you could apply.
- Begin researching private sources of financial aid such as scholarships and write for applications.
- Request financial aid bulletins from all potential schools. Estimate the costs for each school and begin identifying ways to meet them. **Many civic, fraternal and religious organizations offer postsecondary scholarships.**

### Spring - January through May

- **Take the SAT/ACT for the first time. Check with your intended college(s) about which test they prefer. Begin narrowing your choices for postsecondary schools.**
- Schedule campus visits. Consider an overnight trip that would allow for you to get a feel for what life is like on that particular campus.
- Now is the time to check with your counselor, libraries, community organizations, and Student Outreach Services for the names and addresses of possible scholarship sources. Send for applications as soon as possible. Keep records of anyone you speak with concerning grants or scholarships.
- Start developing portfolios, audition tapes, writing samples, or other evidence of talents required for college admission and/or for scholarships.
- If you plan to play sports in college, write to college coaches at your target schools. Include a schedule of your athletic events for the upcoming year. Register with the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse.
- Develop a resume of your sports accomplishments including a highlight tape and relevant articles about your successes.

## **Summer - (most important time of college entrance preparation)**

- Practice writing online applications, filling out rough drafts, without submitting them.
- Review applications, especially the essays. Ask others to proof the essay for any grammar, content or punctuation errors.
- Read all college mail and send reply cards back to schools of interest.
- Apply for those scholarships whose deadlines are in the fall. You may be too busy once school starts.

## **Senior Year (12th Grade)**

### **Fall - August through December**

- Make sure you continue to meet high school graduation and college admission requirements.
- Organize and record relevant dates on a calendar so you can plan your year more efficiently.
- Register for the Advanced Placement (AP) tests, if needed.
- Make copies of your admissions and financial aid forms. Practice filling them out before doing the final one.
- Meet with visiting admissions representatives from the schools that interest you.
- Arrange visits to schools you are considering and schedule admissions interviews if required.
- Make the final preparation of your portfolios, audition tapes, writing samples, or other evidence of talent required for admission and/or for scholarships. Finalize your resume to send with your applications.
- **Submit your college admissions applications. Watch out for deadlines.**
- Talk with your parents about what type budget you'll be on your freshman year.
- Take or retake the ACT or SAT.
- Keep records of everything you submit.
- Identify at least two of the following to write solid recommendation forms for you: a teacher, an extracurricular advisor, a counselor, a principal, or an employer. Give the recommendation forms to teachers, counselors, etc. at least one month before they are due. Follow up on the progress of these recommendations.
- If seeking athletic scholarships, contact the coaches from the schools you are considering and include a resume of your accomplishments.

## Spring - January through May

- Apply for financial aid by completing and submitting your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as soon after January 1 as possible. The FAFSA is available from your guidance counselor, from your college's financial aid office, or online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov).
- Call the school of your choice and confirm that they have received your admissions applications materials, including letters of recommendation and housing applications.
- Request that your high school send a copy of your transcript to the school where you have applied.
- Make sure your first semester senior year grades are included on the transcript.
- The information you receive back after the FAFSA is processed is the Student Aid Report (SAR). If any portion of the information on the SAR is incorrect, please correct it and resubmit it to the processing center.
- Submit any additional financial aid forms and documentation that is required by the school of your choice. Some of these forms may be available online, including the FAFSA and some admission applications.
- Notify the school(s) in writing by the proper deadline as to whether you are accepting or declining admission.
- Review your financial aid award letter with your parents and be sure that you understand the terms and conditions that accompany each kind of aid. Sign your financial aid award letter and return it to the school.
- Notify the financial aid office of any outside scholarships or grants that you have accepted since your initial application.
- Be aware of due dates for tuition, fees, room and board, and other expenses. Find out how your financial aid will be disbursed and whether you can defer payments until the funds are available.
- Respond immediately to all correspondence regarding school, scholarships, and financial aid.
- Participate in summer orientation programs for incoming freshman after graduation.
- Meet all class registration deadlines.