



College Timeline: The 4-Year Plan

College Timeline: Freshman Year

- **Work Hard In All Of Your Classes!** This is the most important way you can prepare for college admission. While a lackluster freshman year will not necessarily hinder college acceptance, your chances of being accepted to the college of your choice will increase greatly if you show a steady rate of achievement through all four years of high school.
- **Start researching colleges and universities.** Begin to think about whether or not you want to go away to school or attend a local college.
- **Make time to talk with your parent(s) or guardian(s) about college.** See if you're on the same page. This is a great time to let them know that you are thinking of going away to school. This is also a great time for you and your family to start saving for your college education. Families are expected to contribute at least some money toward your education. This burden is lessened if families create a realistic financial plan that allows for college savings over a period of years.
- **Begin to get involved in extracurricular activities.** Find a few activities that you enjoy and intend to stick with for a few years.
- **Begin to form relationships with your teachers.** Keep in mind that these are the people who will be writing your letters of recommendation. A letter of recommendation from a teacher who knows you well and has several positive examples of your behavior, maturity and leadership potential, will go a long way toward making you an attractive applicant.
- **Begin to prepare for the SAT, SAT Subject Tests and ACT.** Even though these tests are two years away, you should begin to prepare now. Remember these tests require that you pull upon several years of acquired knowledge to successfully score in a desired range. The best way to prepare for these tests now is to pay particular attention in your Math and English classes. You should also spend more time reading for pleasure. And I do mean pleasure. Find a genre you enjoy (horror, mystery, science fiction, romance, classics), then devour as many books as you can. Remember the more you enjoy a book the more you will look forward to reading.
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- **Take advantage of school breaks and summer vacation to visit colleges and universities.** Actually spending time on a college campus is the best way to research a school. You will have the opportunity to meet current students, faculty members, eat in the dining halls, visit classrooms and public facilities and sometimes even sit in on classes.

College Timeline: Sophomore Year

- **Perform even better in your sophomore year than your freshman year.** Colleges and universities look for steady progression of achievement. Now is not the time to allow your grades to fall.
- **Begin to challenge yourself by taking some demanding classes.** Strongly consider adding an AP and honor courses to your schedule.
- **Take SAT Subject tests.** If you are interested in attending a school that requires SAT Subject tests for admission, you should see whether the school requires a specific sequence of tests, or if you can choose any test you wish. Typically, schools that require them will request between two or three subject tests in an area of your choice. You can check this requirement by logging onto the College Board website, or visiting your college counselor.
- **Prepare for the PSATs.** Pay attention in your Math and English classes, purchase a prep book and read all the novels you can.
- **Continue to research and visit colleges.**
- **Begin to seek leadership roles in one or two of the organizations or teams of which you are a member.** Colleges and universities are more impressed by students who are seriously committed to few organizations or activities, than by students who belong to dozens of clubs and activities on a superficial basis. In addition, taking on leadership roles will allow you to become comfortable with making important decisions and taking control.
- **Consider doing some volunteer work.** Community service is a great way to get involved with your community.
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- **Schedule a time to meet with your college counselor.** Although counselors are usually very busy working with senior junior students, they are always happy to see that their future students are excited about college and already beginning to prepare.
- **Do something productive with your summer.** You should consider attending summer camp, a college summer session, traveling, volunteering or working over the summer. Colleges look for students who like to fill their time with productive worthwhile activities.

College Timeline: Junior Year

September-November:

- **Begin to prepare for the PSAT/NMSQT.** This test is very important; if you score high enough you may be qualify as a National Merit Scholarship finalist (Only PSATs taken in your junior year will be considered for the NMSQT).
- **Create a preliminary college list.** When choosing perspective colleges you should make sure that you match your needs and wants with the college's offerings. It is also important to be realistic. Make sure that your numbers match or are near those required for admission. Try to remain flexible and focus on a college's characteristics, philosophy, academic process and policies, rather than on a particular college. That way you will optimize your chances of finding a school that fits your needs.
- **Learn about financial aid.** Become familiar with the FAFSA and CSS Profile. Talk with your parents about college costs. Come up with a viable plan to meet any shortfalls between the cost of attendance and your financial aid award. You should expect that your family will have to make some financial contribution toward your college education.

December-January:

- **Create a College Board account,** if you don't already have one. Be sure to memorize your username and password, and keep a written record of both your username and password in a safe easily accessible location. Remember you may only have one College Board account.
- **Log onto College Board and register to take the SAT or ACT.org for the ACT.**

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- **Sign up for a SAT or ACT preparation course if you are able or take out a book from your counselor's office and begin prepping.**
- **Visit perspective colleges over winter breaks.** Whenever possible request to join a tour and information session. You should also consider requesting an on-campus interview with an admission representative.

February-March:

- **Make an appointment to meet with your counselor for your college meeting.**
- **Research the colleges on your college list.** Whittle the list down to approximately 12-15 schools. Remember to be realistic, but don't be afraid to dream as well. You should have a good balance of "Reach", "Match" and "Safety" Schools on your list.
- **Continue to prepare for the SAT or ACT.** Make sure that you are signed up for SAT/ ACT Preparatory classes. Take advantage of the College Board and ACT websites to complete practice tests. If possible enroll in an SAT/ ACT test prep course on your own.
- **Meet with your counselor to discuss your academic progress.** Achieving academically is very important this year.
- **Continue to seek positions of leadership and responsibility within your organizations, clubs and sports teams.**

April-May

- **If you haven't already done so, now is the time to register for the SAT or ACT.**
- **Meet with your counselor to finalize your college list.** By now you should have researched and visited most of the colleges on your list. It's time to decide which colleges will make it to your final list. Your final list should be no more than 8-10 colleges.
- **Ask teachers with whom you have a good relationship to write letters of recommendation for you.** Remember these letters must come from core academic teachers.

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- **Apply for summer college programs, take advantage of study abroad programs or apply for work.**

June-August

- **Work on your college essays.** Most colleges will be on the Common Application thus allowing students to write an essay on a topic of their choice. This will be your foundation essay used for a variety of colleges.
- **Work on your supplemental essays.** Many colleges will ask the question, “Why Us?” in their applications. These short essay responses will need to be unique and authentic. Get a jump on these all-important essays by working on them now.
- **Take the SAT or ACT exam.**
- **Prepare for your senior year.** Keep in mind that you must continue to achieve academically and challenge yourself by still taking Advanced Placement courses.
- **Continue to visit colleges and universities.** Most colleges receive upwards of 30,000 applications a year. Taking the time to visit a campus and meet with an admission officer is a great way to stand apart from the crowd and show them that you are seriously interested in their school.
- **Review your SAT / ACT scores.** If you are disappointed, make a realistic plan to raise your scores. Use the summer to prepare for the fall sitting of these exams.
- **Work on your Common Application.** Add the colleges that you wish to apply to and begin filling out the application.
- **Have a productive summer.** The worst thing that you can do is nothing.

College Timeline: Senior Year

September-November

- **As soon as you return to school make an appointment to meet with your counselor.** If you have not done so already begin to finalize your final list.
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- **Meet with any teacher who agreed to write a letter of recommendation for you.** It is your responsibility to make sure that your teachers have written these letters and delivered them to your college counselor. If you have not asked any teacher to write you a letter of recommendation, now is the time. Keep in mind that many teachers may be too busy to write letters, or they may not be able to complete them before you have submitted your applications.
- **If you haven't done so already, create your Common Application account.** Begin/continue filling out your applications. It is best to do this slowly, when you are relaxed and can dedicate at least 1-2 hours for each college, not including supplemental essays.
- **If you haven't already done so complete your college essay.** Ask someone to proofread your essay. This is one of the most important aspects of your application. This is your chance to convince the admission committee to accept you instead of all those other applicants. A sloppy essay shows the admission committee that you aren't taking this process seriously. It may also raise red flags if the admission committee feels that your writing ability isn't up to par.
- **Register to take the SAT and/or the ACT if you haven't taken them twice.**
- **Make a second appointment with your counselor to review your applications.** After you and your counselor review your applications, you should begin submitting your applications. Remember each college has different deadlines, but the rule of thumb is that Early Action and Early Decision deadlines are either November 1 or November 15, while Regular Decision deadlines are around January 15 or February 1.
- **Submit your applications.** It is important to get all applications in as early as possible to the extent that they are ready. Data will show that the earlier you apply it can help your chances of getting in as selectivity rates are slightly higher.
- **Make sure you have given your college counselor a complete list of every college and university you are applying to.** This is the only way your college counselor will know where to send your supporting documents, including transcripts, letters of recommendations and secondary school reports.
- **Send your SAT or ACT scores to all of the colleges you applied.** Your counselor does not send these scores. **The scores must be sent by you.**

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officially through the company that administered the exam, Collegeboard.org for the SATs and ACT.org for the ACTs.

- **After October 1, complete and submit the FAFSA.** We will be hosting several Financial Aid Workshops, where counselors will be available to assist with the completion of this form.
- **Complete the CSS Profile if required.** Some colleges and universities require that in addition to submitting the FAFSA you also submit the CSS Profile. To find out if any of your schools require this application, log onto and search the list of schools that require CSS Profile submission.

December- January

- **Contact all of the colleges and universities you've applied to; make sure that they have received your application and all supporting documentation.** Keep in mind that it can often take four or more weeks for admission offices to match your application with your supporting documents.

February-April

- **Continue to work hard in all of your classes and challenge yourself.** Admission committees will request mid-year and final grades for all students. They use these grades in their decision making process, a student who begins to slack off may not be as appealing as a student who continues to work hard through their senior year. Colleges are also allowed to withdraw an offer of admission if a student fails classes or fails to graduate in June.
- **Keep an eye out for email and mail from your colleges and universities.** Schools with rolling admission policies will begin to send out admission decisions within four weeks of receiving an application. Read every email or piece of mail you receive thoroughly. If you don't understand something make an appointment with your counselor.
- **Inform your college counselor of all college acceptances, rejections and waitlist notifications.** Schools need to keep track of all decisions made on your applications. You should bring a copy of all offers of admission to your college counselor.

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- **Visit schools to which you have been accepted.** Take advantage of accepted student weekends. This is a great opportunity to see if you really want to attend a particular school. Remember, per NACAC agreement you are not expected to make a decision or submit a deposit to any school until May 1st.

April-June

- **Decide where you are going to deposit.** You should accept the offer of admission and provide a deposit to the school of your choice by May 1. Please keep in mind that you are only allowed to deposit at one college or university. Double depositing (with some exceptions) is unethical.
- **Make a final review of your financial aid award.** Make sure you and your family are financially prepared for the upcoming year. College is expensive and you need to plan accordingly. If you are unhappy with your financial aid award, appeal the decision directly with the office of financial aid.
- **Make sure you have told your college counselor which school you will be attending.** This is the only way we can ensure that your final transcript will be sent to the right place.
- **Prepare for life at your new school.** If you haven't already done so, make arrangements to spend a day or night at your new school. Review the student catalog; get to know what is expected of you. Research different majors and get generally comfortable with the policy and procedures of your new school.
- **Relax and enjoy your summer.**