

# THE TIMELINE

## *The Next Steps to a College Education*

The National Center for College Costs

Toll Free Phone: 1-877-687-7291

Website: [www.collegecosts.com](http://www.collegecosts.com)



### Prior to Junior Year

#### **PLANNING AHEAD**

Starting with freshman year, you should pursue as strong a schedule of college preparatory courses as you can handle. The quality of your high school courses will be the first, and often, the most important item that college admission committees will notice. Challenge yourself with the courses you take, especially in areas of academic strength and personal interest.

#### **THINK ABOUT TESTING**

Take the **PSAT** and/or **PLAN (pre-ACT)** as a sophomore. Many states pay for juniors or sophomores to take these tests. Check out the policy in your state.

#### **MAKING VACATION PRODUCTIVE**

If you and your family travel, make time for casual visits and tours of colleges near your vacation destinations. Begin to formulate ideas of what you want or don't want in a college. Be sure to include some large and small colleges, urban and rural settings, etc.

#### **CHECK OUT COLLEGE WEB SITES**

Take advantage of the array of college web sites on the Internet. Every college has designed a user-friendly web page to inform and impress prospective students. Check back often for updates.

## JUNIOR YEAR

#### **PRIORITIZE**

Your priorities ultimately will determine the college that is the best fit for you. Size, location, academic program, reputation and placement record are some of the most important criteria for students.

**Special Note:** Unless we already have run a *College Costs Estimator* for you and you know there are certain financial aid realities to work around, **do not make the list cost of a college an initial consideration.**

#### **TESTING**

Sign up to take the **PSAT** in the fall of your junior year. It is good practice for the **SAT**, and its scores are used to determine National Merit semi-finalists. You can begin taking the **ACT** and/or **SAT** as early as the spring of the junior year. Most colleges accept either test. This gives you time to retake the test in your senior year if you are not happy with your results. Most colleges will use your best sub-scores from multiple test results, which can be advantageous for admission and scholarship consideration.

#### **PLAN YOUR CAMPUS VISIT**

A campus visit is a vital element in your college search. A visit allows you to get up-to-date information, to view the facilities of the college, and to meet with students, faculty and staff. It also will allow you to get a "feel" for the campus atmosphere. By the spring of your junior year, you should start visiting colleges in earnest. Take advantage of college visit days if allowed by your high school. Use days when your high school is closed but when colleges might be open, such as fall break, spring break or other holidays.



#### **FIND THE MONEY**

Have your parents complete a **College Costs Estimator**, to help you get an idea about funding for college. For more information, visit our website at [www.collegecosts.com](http://www.collegecosts.com) or call us toll free at 877-687-7291.

Obtain a copy of the program from your high school's annual award ceremony to see what local scholarships are available. Your high school guidance counselor can be a great source of information about these and many other scholarships. Don't forget to check the library for books and CD's pertaining to scholarships. Check your community resources, such as your parent's employer, civic organizations, local businesses and corporations. There are also dozens of web sites that provide free college and scholarship searches; be sure to check them out! (For some ideas on websites to explore, visit our website at [www.collegecosts.com](http://www.collegecosts.com))

#### **CAMPUS VISIT TIPS**

\* **Call, write or e-mail the admission office to schedule the time and focus of your visit.**

\* **Take a tour of campus.** Investigate important areas: residence halls, dining halls, library, classrooms, computer facilities, etc.

\* **Schedule an interview with an admission officer.** Ask about current admission requirements. If you would like to know about your chances of being admitted, be sure to bring an unofficial transcript with current test scores from your guidance office. An interview is a great opportunity to get answers to all of your questions.

\* **Obtain current college costs.** Your admission officer should be able to answer simple financial aid questions about need and merit-based aid. If not, schedule an appointment with a financial aid officer. You may even want to inquire about what a typical financial aid package might be, based on your **College Costs Estimator** results and assuming the numbers remain the same in the spring of your senior year.

\* **Arrange appointments** with faculty and staff in your areas of academic and extracurricular interest. You might even want to sit in on some classes in your area of interest to see faculty/student interaction.

\* **Inquire about placement records and career planning services** for graduates in your field of interest.

\* **Stay overnight, if possible. This is often the MOST important step for students.** Some colleges may have similar programs and facilities, but the overall environments of colleges can vary greatly. The students who attend these colleges may have very different values and priorities than your own. An overnight visit will help highlight these differences. Depending on the college, you may not have this overnight option until your senior year after you have been admitted to the college.

SENIOR YEAR

MAKING PREPARATIONS (First Semester)

- **Hit the books!** Your first semester schedule and grades will be critical pieces of academic information for most admission committees. Any upward or downward trend in grades will be noticed immediately, with the obvious positive or negative potential effect respectively. Remember to take college prep courses that will challenge you academically.
- **By the fall of your senior year, narrow down the list of schools to which you will apply.** If you apply to some competitive “long-shot” schools, be sure also to apply to some colleges where you have a high probability of gaining admission (and financial aid, if needed).
- **Complete admission and scholarship applications as early as possible.** Check the application deadlines of your most serious college options and scholarship opportunities. At colleges that have rolling admissions, the earlier you apply, the earlier you will know your admission status. This gives you more time to consider your options. When completing your applications, be sure you have included any additional materials the college or scholarship provider requests with the application (i.e., essay, transcript, fee, etc.). Allow your guidance counselor and those from whom you request recommendations ample time to complete their sections of the application before the deadline.
- **Continue your college visits.** See the section on “Campus Visit Tips” on the reverse side. Now is the time to set overnight visits when possible.
- **Register for the SAT/ACT** early in the first semester if you are not satisfied with your previous scores.
- **Continue to investigate local scholarships** and complete those applications. Check with your guidance counselor weekly for new information that he/she might have.

TAKING THE FINAL STEPS (Second Semester)

- **Submit any outstanding applications** to the colleges still on your list.
- **Get student & parent PIN numbers in plenty of time (if filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, electronically) and/or obtain a paper copy of the FAFSA** from your guidance office or colleges you are considering. If needed, attend a workshop on FAFSA completion if one is offered at your school or attend “College Goal Sunday” when this program is held in your area.
- **Submit the FAFSA electronically (www.fafsa.ed.gov) by the end of February**, even if you have to use estimated year-end figures. If you must mail the FAFSA, get a certificate of mailing from the Post Office so you have proof for the college that it was mailed by the deadline. Some states/colleges have early deadlines to qualify for **need-based state/college aid**, so be sure to check with them.
- **Complete any additional applications an individual college may require** for merit or need-based financial aid.
- **Pay any deposit the college of your choice may require** – don’t miss the May 1<sup>st</sup> Deadline (National Candidate Reply Date) or the college may not guarantee your admission and/or financial aid beyond that date. **NOTE:** Unless you have applied Early Decision (a national and binding agreement to attend your first-choice college), a college should not expect a decision from you until May 1<sup>st</sup>. With any deadline before May 1<sup>st</sup>, you should be eligible to request a written extension of the deadline. This will give you sufficient time to hear about admission and financial aid from **all** of your college prospects. Don’t hesitate to ask a college to give you until May 1<sup>st</sup> to respond to their deposit request (unless it’s a refundable deposit).

TIMELINE AT A GLANCE

JUNIOR YEAR

AUGUST – JANUARY

- STUDY HARD and GET GOOD GRADES
- Register in early fall for the October **PSAT**
- Start searching for scholarship opportunities
- Complete a *College Costs Estimator* from NCCC

FEBRUARY – APRIL

- Register for challenging senior courses senior year
- Investigate colleges using catalogs, publications and web sites; make college visit plans
- Register for the spring **SAT/ACT**

MAY – JUNE

- Take **AP** tests for any **AP** courses you are taking
- Register with the **NCAA Clearinghouse** if you plan to play sports at a Division I or II college
- Last chance to take the **SAT/ACT** this spring

JULY

- Start college visits (if you haven’t already)

SENIOR YEAR

AUGUST – NOVEMBER

- Continue college visits if necessary
- Register for the fall **ACT/SAT** (if needed)
- Narrow down college options
- Begin completing and mailing college/scholarship applications
- Update your *College Costs Estimator* with NCCC if there have been drastic changes in financial figures

DECEMBER – JANUARY

- Take **SAT II: Subject Tests** as needed
- Obtain a **FAFSA** from high school guidance office
- Attend school’s financial aid meeting (or College Goal Sunday)
- Last chance to file many regular decision applications

FEBRUARY

- Submit **FAFSA** online by month’s end (get certificate of mailing if mailed)- many states/colleges have early deadlines

MARCH – APRIL

- Review financial aid packages from colleges
- Make overnight visits to final college choices

MAY

- Submit enrollment deposit to school of your choice
- Take **AP** tests for any **AP** courses that you are taking

JUNE – JULY

- Attend on-campus orientation/registration sessions
- Make final preparations for your departure in August