

Senior Year Planning Guide

August – September:

- Your transcript will be mailed to you from your counselor. Please review it and let her know if anything is incorrect.
- Remember to update your resume with any significant activities that you did over the summer.
- Provide a copy of your resume to your counselor.
- Register for and take/retake the ACT/SAT if necessary.
- Consider taking the SAT Subject tests if a highly selective school that you will be applying to requires it.
- Check the Senior Updates for any announcements, college, career or scholarship opportunities you should be working on.
- Ask a couple teachers and your counselor for a recommendation letter. Give at least a 2 week notice before you need it and provide a copy of your resume.
- Narrow your college choice to three to six schools. Update your list of colleges.
- List the application deadlines of the colleges to which you plan to apply. Pay careful attention to early decision and early action colleges, if you are considering that.
- You may need to send your ACT and/or SAT test scores from the testing agency directly to your colleges. Check the colleges to which you are applying – many colleges will not accept your test scores on your transcript, only from the testing company.
- Watch deadline details! Because of the fall holidays make sure you ask for necessary application items well in advance (transcript, recommendation letters, etc.) If the deadline is 12/1, then you should request these items by early November due to Thanksgiving break.
- Don't wait until the due date to submit your application. The Common Application and other online applications suggest that you submit your applications at least 48 hours before the due date. Their systems and the internet get very busy at submission time and errors do occur.
- Visit colleges of interest. You get 2 college visit days 1st semester.
- Continue taking challenging courses including A.P. course where possible.
- Continue your involvement in extracurricular and volunteer activities. Colleges look favorably upon a strong commitment to activities, especially a few, rather than many and not being able to dedicate your time.
- Seek opportunities to develop your leadership skills.
- Apply for scholarships; remember to seek private sources such as organizations, churches, employers, etc.

October – December:

- Check the Senior Updates for important updates and opportunities.
- Consider attending the National College Fair held in Cincinnati, usually in October.
- Check college application and scholarship deadlines carefully. Some deadlines are as early as October especially for some scholarship programs or honors programs.
- Remind your parents to attend the financial aid program. A financial aid officer from a college will explain the financial aid process.
- Parents can use the FAFSA forecaster at www.fafsa4caster.org to get an estimate of any financial aid that your family may qualify for. In addition, every college has a financial aid estimator on their website designed to provide families with an estimate for any aid they may qualify for based on income, ACT/SAT and GPA.
- Some selective colleges may request that parents complete a CSS Profile.

- Maintain good grades. Some colleges request a mid-year report with your first semester grades. They want to see if you are still applying yourself. They can revoke an offer of admission for failing or disappointing grades on a mid-year or final transcript.

January – February:

- Continue to check the Senior Updates for deadlines and opportunities.
- Parents should complete the FAFSA at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Remember, this is free, so don't pay for this process.
- Consult the individual colleges of your choice for deadlines for financial aid – a common deadline is as early as 2/15.
- Ask that your counselor send your transcript to the colleges that require mid-year reports in which you applied for admission.
- Apply for the 4-H/FFA and Education Foundation scholarships.
- Update the Senior Survey to let your counselor know your mid-year plans.

March – April:

- Colleges will notify you of financial aid awards. Compare the financial aid packages to help you decide which college to attend.
- Continue to apply for scholarships; remember to seek private sources such as organizations, churches, employers, etc.
- Remember to apply for our local scholarships – application will be on the school website.
- Don't catch senioritis. Keep Working!

May 1st:

- This is the final date to notify a college that you intend to enroll there. You should also be courteous and notify the other colleges that you have been accepted to that you have decided not to enroll there – a simple polite email is appropriate.

May:

- Complete the Senior Survey with your final plans: final college and major choice, any scholarships you are receiving, where you will be stationed for basic training, when you leave, or where you will be working. The senior slide show is based off of this information and your counselor will send your transcript to the location listed on this final survey.
- You do not need to request your transcript be sent to your college from JCHS. Your counselor will automatically do it based off of the information you provide on your senior survey.
- If you took Dual Enrollment courses through Urbana University, you will need to fill out a transcript request form and send it to U.U. to request they forward your college transcript to your college of choice.

Other Items to Consider Your Senior Year:

- Budget your time well and keep a calendar of important dates/deadlines.
- Manage a simple budget; keep a check book, etc.
- Learn how to do laundry and make simple meals.
- Ask for help if you are overwhelmed.

College planning calendar for seniors

September

- Narrow your list of colleges to 5 to 10. Meet with a counselor about them and, if you've not yet done so, download college applications and financial aid forms. Plan to visit as many of these colleges as possible.
- Create a master list or calendar that includes:
 - tests you'll take and their fees, dates and registration deadlines.
 - college application due dates.
 - financial aid application forms required and their deadlines. (Note: Aid applications may be due before college applications.)
 - other materials you'll need (recommendations, transcripts, etc.).
 - your high school's own application processing deadlines.
- If you can't afford application or test fees, a counselor can help you request a fee waiver.
- If you have not had your test scores sent to the college to which you are applying, be sure to contact the appropriate test organization to have your scores sent.

October

- Try to finalize your college choices.
- Prepare Early Decision, Early Action or rolling admissions applications as soon as possible.
- Ask for counselor or teacher recommendations if you need them. Give each teacher or counselor an outline of your academic record and your extracurricular activities. For each recommendation, provide a stamped, addressed envelope and any college forms required.
- If you're submitting essays, write first drafts and ask teachers and others to read them. If you're applying for Early Decision, finish the essays for that application now.
- If you have not had your test scores sent to the college to which you are applying, be sure to contact the appropriate test organization to have them sent.

November

- November 1-15: For Early Decision admissions, colleges may require test scores and applications between these dates.
- Complete at least one college application by Thanksgiving.
- Counselors send transcripts to colleges. Give counselors the proper forms at least two weeks before colleges require them.

College planning calendar for seniors (page 2)

December

- As you finish and send your applications and essays, be sure to keep copies.
- If your college wants to see seventh-semester grades, be sure to give the form to your counselor.

January

- If you apply to colleges online, be sure to have your high school send a transcript — it goes to colleges separately, and by mail.

February

- No senioritis, please! Accepting colleges do look at second-semester senior grades.

March

- Keep active in school. If you are wait-listed, the college will want to know what you have accomplished between the time you applied and learned of its decision.

April

- You should receive acceptance letters and financial aid offers by mid-April. If you've not done so yet, visit your final college before accepting. As soon as you decide, notify your counselor of your choice.
- If you have questions about housing offers, talk to your counselor or call the college.

May

- May 1: Colleges cannot require a deposit or commitment to attend before May 1. By that postmarked date, you must inform every college of your acceptance or rejection of the offer of admission and/or financial aid. (Questions? Talk to your counselor.)
- Send your deposit to one college only.
- Wait-listed by a college? If you will enroll if accepted, tell the admissions director your intent and ask how to strengthen your application. Need financial aid? Ask whether funds will be available if you're accepted.
- Work with a counselor to resolve any admissions or financial aid problems.

June

- Ask your high school to send a final transcript to your college.

Source: *The College Board*

Questions to ask college representatives

College reps, as well as college students, admissions counselors and faculty, genuinely enjoy talking to high school students. They like to share their ideas about their college, and they all appreciate students who have thought about the college and want to know more than is in the course catalog, in the viewbook, or on the Web site. They like thoughtful questions, and their answers can help you make a good college match. Ask questions of interest to you in the following categories:

Students

- How would you characterize the majority of students?
- From what economic background are the majority of students?
- Are there clubs, activities or housing that are minority related?
- What do students like most about the college? Like least?
- Has the student government made any real contribution to the school? How do you get into student government?
- What political, social or academic issues concerned students last year? How did the administration react? What was the resolution?

Social life and campus activities

- What do students do for fun?
- What is the role of fraternities and sororities on campus? If I didn't want to join, could I have a satisfactory social life?
- What are the dominant social groups on campus? Do the groups get along with one another? Have there been any problems?
- What role do team sports play in the social life of the college? What happens on football or basketball weekends? If I didn't want to join in, would I find kindred spirits?
- Is there a good balance of academics, social life and extracurricular activities?
- What were the social or cultural highlights last year?
- What is the role of the campus newspaper?
- Is there an alcohol problem and, if so, how is the college handling it? What is the incidence of binge drinking? Do students feel safe on campus?

Campus facilities

Housing and dining

- Is there something I should know about housing that would help me in my choice?
- What are the types of food plans? All you can eat? Vegetarian? Kosher?

Questions to ask college representatives

(page 2)

Activity centers and athletic and recreational facilities

- What kinds of facilities does the student center have? Is it a magnet for student activities? Are there other hangouts?
- Do you think the college pays attention to its appearance?
- How would you rate the fitness center?

Health, career counseling, special student services and security

- Is there a doctor, nurse, psychologist or career counselor on campus? What is the waiting period for appointments?
- Is the office for special services adequate to the demand?
- How good is the security on campus?

Library

- What have been students' experiences with the library? Have there been complaints?
- Is the library well equipped with computers and copy machines?

The community off campus

- What is there to do in town? How would I get there?

Academics and faculty

- What is distinctive about education here? What is the educational philosophy of the college? Has it changed much in recent years?
- Is the honor code working? How widespread is cheating?
- What is the most popular major on campus? Why?
- Do you think that students are generally enthusiastic about their classes? Do people talk about their courses outside of class?
- How would you characterize the academic pressure and workload?
- Are there research possibilities with the faculty? In what areas?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the advising system?
- What is the quality of student and faculty relationships? Is the faculty interested in and accessible to students after class? Do faculty members participate in student activities?
- Are curriculum changes in the works? How will that affect my college years?
- Are any departments being cut back or discontinued? If so, why?
- Are any new programs scheduled for the next four years?

Source: Adapted from *Campus Visits & College Interviews* by Zola Dincin Schneider (College Board, 2002). This book has many more questions you might ask of college representatives, plus chapters on every aspect of the interview and campus visit.

College resources for students and families

General Web sites

Campus Tours: Virtual College Tours. Virtual tours with still pictures and descriptions, webcams, campus maps and videos of hundreds of colleges throughout the United States. Provides a first look at colleges. www.campustours.com.

The College Board. A complete site, with college and scholarship searches, information about the SAT® and SAT Subject Tests™, and other material pertaining to the college search and application process. Easy-to-use college search feature. www.collegeboard.com.

Collegiate Choice Walking Tours Videos. A site run by a group of independent counselors in New Jersey who offer videos of walking tours of more than 350 colleges, providing “an unedited recording of an actual student-guided campus tour offered at that college.” www.collegiatechoice.com.

eCampusTours.com. Virtual tours of colleges. Useful for its 360-degree views of dorm rooms and other buildings. www.ecampustours.com.

NCAA Eligibility Center. Official NCAA Web site that gives details of student-eligibility requirements to play NCAA sports. Watch this site for changes in eligibility; students can print the “Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete.” www.ncaaclearinghouse.net.

Peterson's Education Portal. An all-purpose site including a college search, as well as information about summer programs, summer camps and jobs. The site asks you to register before using some of the search engines and other resources, but there is no registration fee. There is a charge for some of the services provided. www.petersons.com.

U.S. Department of Education. The federal government's Web site is easy to use and an excellent source of information on financial aid, much of it in Spanish as well as English. www.ed.gov.

Financial aid Web sites

The College Board. Has a scholarship search, a loan calculator and an online application form for the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE® form, which is required by some colleges. www.collegeboard.com.

FAFSA on the Web. The Web site for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. This form must be submitted in the senior year (after January 1 and by June 30) for families applying for need-based aid. Students may complete it electronically at this site. www.fafsa.ed.gov.

FastWeb. Extensive information on merit- and need-based scholarships and aid. www.fastweb.com.

FinAid! Good site for information about types of financial aid and applying for financial aid. www.finaid.org.

College resources for students and families (page 2)

Books

Comprehensive objective directories

- Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*. New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc. Updated every two years.
- The College Board College Handbook*. New York: The College Board. Published annually.
- Peterson's Guide to Four-Year Colleges*. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides. Published annually.
- Peterson's Guide to Two-Year Colleges*. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides. Published annually.

Subjective guides

- Fiske, Edward, and Robert Logue (contributor). *The Fiske Guide to Colleges*. Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks Trade. Updated annually.
- Greene, Howard, and Matthew W. Greene. *Greene's Guide to Educational Planning: The Public Ivies*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
- Greene, Howard R., and Matthew W. Greene. *The Hidden Ivies: Thirty Colleges of Excellence*. New York: HarperCollins, 2000.
- Pope, Loren. *Colleges That Change Lives: 40 Schools You Should Know About Even If You're Not a Straight-A Student*. New York: Penguin, 2006.
- Staff of Yale Daily News. *The Insider's Guide to the Colleges*. New York: St. Martin's Press. Updated annually.

Specialized topics

- Aaron, Scott. *Jewish U: A Contemporary Guide for the Jewish College Student*. New York: Urj Press, 2002.
- College Board Book of Majors*. New York: The College Board. Published annually.
- Detailed descriptions, written by professors, of more than 180 popular majors, plus lists of 900 majors and the colleges that offer them.
- Getting Financial Aid*. New York: The College Board. Published annually.
- Mathews, Jay. *Harvard Schmarvard: Getting Beyond the Ivy League to the College That Is Best For You*. New York: Prima Publishing, 2003. Good insights on the college choice process from the education columnist for the *Washington Post*.
- Nelson Reference. *Nelson's Complete Guide to Colleges & Universities for Christians*. 2002.
- Princeton Review et al. (eds.). *The Hillel Guide to Jewish Life on Campus*. 14th ed. New York: Random House Information Group, 1999.
- Princeton Review et al. (eds.). *K&W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder*. 8th ed. New York: Random House Information Group, 2005.
- Schoem, David. *College Knowledge: 101 Tips for the College-Bound Student*. University of Michigan Press, 2005.
- Practical advice on how to become engaged in college intellectual and cultural life.
- Windmeyer, Shane L. *The Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students*. Boston: Alyson Publications, 2006.

Assessing your list of colleges

As you develop a list (mental or otherwise) of colleges that interest you, be sure you can answer these questions about them.

The basics

- Where is the college? Can you locate it on a map? Is it too close to home? Is it too far? Is it too cold or too hot there?
- Have you taken the course work the college requires for admission?
- What size is the college? How many students are undergraduates?
- What is the college's selectivity ratio (what proportion of applicants were admitted last year)?
- Does the college offer majors that interest you?
- Is the college coed or single sex?
- What percentage of students live off campus?
- How many of the students graduate in four years? Five years? Six years?
- How many first-year students return for their sophomore year?
- How much does the program cost? What is the total per-year expense?
- What type of financial aid is available?

Where would you fit in?

- What are the admission test scores at the colleges that interest you? Where does that place you?
- What were the high school GPAs of most of the freshmen last year?
- Are freshmen guaranteed on-campus housing? If not, where do they live?
- Are there extracurricular activities that interest you?

Visit the colleges' Web sites, read the guidebooks and look at their literature

- What are their strong academic programs? (Ask a college representative, students, graduates and teachers.)
- What courses are required for graduation?
- Are the courses you need/want available each semester? At convenient times?
- Are there special programs that interest you (study abroad, internships, etc.)?
- What is the social life like? What percentage of students join fraternities or sororities?
- Do the pictures and the language the college uses to describe itself attract you?
- What is your general impression of the college?

Assessing your list of colleges (page 2)

- Is the school accredited?
- If professional certification is required for employment in the field that interests you, how many students enrolled in the school's program pass the certification exam?

Admissions process

- When are applications due?
- Does the college accept the Common Application? If so, does it require supplemental forms?
- What does the application contain? Are essays required?
- Is an interview suggested or required? Is an interview available from staff or alumni?
- When may you visit the college? What is its policy regarding campus visits?
- What are the financial aid deadlines? What financial aid forms are required?

Now answer these questions

- Am I a strong candidate for admission to this college?
- If I am not a strong candidate, what are my chances?
- Do I want to visit this college?
- What additional information do I need?

Source: Susan Staggers, Cary Academy, North Carolina