

The College Process – A Timeline for Rising Seniors

JUNIOR YEAR – End of Year Tasks

Submit brag sheets, activity resume and authorization form to your guidance counselor by June 15.

Ask 2 teachers to write a letter of recommendation and provide them with a completed teacher recommendation form.

Make sure you know your Naviance log in and password.

SUMMER BEFORE SENIOR YEAR

Prepare your College list – This summer is a great time to work on your list of colleges. By the end of the summer, you should have narrowed your list of 20-25 schools down to 10 or 12, including Reach, Match and Safety schools. Make sure that every college on your list is one which you would like to attend. Do not include any college simply because you need a “safety” name. Visit as many of these colleges as you can, including your “safety” choices.

Common Application – Many colleges and universities use the Common Application, which can be found online. You can register a Common Application account and become familiar with it during the summer. You can even “complete” the Common Application over the summer and have it ready to submit in the fall. Know what is required, sketch out an application timeline and begin writing your essay, which is a critical component of any application.

SAT or ACT – You should already have taken one SAT or ACT. There is time to complete additional testing in the fall. Go online to confirm testing dates and register now. This will give you time to take the test again if you’re not happy with your first score.

Campus visits – Before you’re loaded up with homework and extracurricular activities, use the idle months of summer to visit some of the campuses on your list. Almost any college will be conducting tours throughout the summer.

SENIOR YEAR

SEPTEMBER

Guidance counselor – Hopefully you’ve already talked about college with your guidance counselor during your junior year. Now that you’ve had the summer to explore your options, sit down again to review the whole process. Your counselor will give you valuable perspective about the schools on your list and help you chart out the application process. Also make sure that you’re fulfilling all of your requirements for high school graduation.

Senior Parent Night- Join your parents for our evening program on the college application process. Counselors will provide an overview of important facts and timelines necessary to consider when applying to college.

Letters of recommendation – As soon as you possibly can, ask two teachers to write you letters of recommendation. It is wise to ask teachers from your junior year, especially if you have a good relationship with them and participated in their class. If a teacher doesn’t really know you or hasn’t heard much from you in class discussions, they won’t have much to write about.

SAT or ACT– Register for the SAT or the ACT, which is usually administered in October, November and December. You can also take SAT Subject exams, which is a good idea if there is a particular subject you excel in.

Request applications – It’s time to start getting applications from the schools on your list. By now you want to have your list down to 8 or 10 schools, tops. With each application, write out a schedule of deadlines so you don’t miss anything down the road. This is especially important if you’re thinking of applying early decision or early action.

College Essay –Allow yourself plenty of time to formulate your essay. This is crucial. Students who have spent months reflecting on the essay will stand out. These essay questions can be very broad, and it can be a real challenge relating it to your life. Make sure you talk to others about how to approach the essay.

Grades/Extracurriculars - Remember, don’t let your grades sink. Admissions counselors will look at the first half of your senior year to see that you’re still challenging yourself and succeeding. If you’ve already been active in extracurricular activities, explore leadership opportunities. This can mean being captain of a sports team, starting your own club or getting involved with student government. Senior year is your opportunity to transform from a young adult into a student leader.

Financial aid – Most colleges require you to submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA. Start exploring financial aid and scholarships at the colleges you applied to. The FAFSA should be filed as soon as possible after October 1st. By the time you start receiving acceptance letters, you’re going to want to have a grasp of how much you can save, and aid packages can differ a great deal among schools.

OCTOBER

Financial Aid – Obtain an FSA ID and file your FAFSA as soon as possible after October 1st.

Narrow your list – By this point, your list should be whittled down to a handful of schools, and you'll probably have a favorite. Know whether or not your grades are in line with the academic standards of each school. This will help you break your list into three categories: reach, match and safety.

Work on applications – With fewer schools to consider, you can now begin working on your applications in earnest. If you're using the Common Application, make sure each application is tailored to the school. Don't make the mistake of copying and pasting and forgetting to change the name of the college.

College Fairs – Most colleges and universities host college fairs in the fall. This is an open recruiting forum where students and parents are invited to see the campus and learn more about academics and student life. These days, most schools also offer virtual fairs online. Find out the fair schedule of each school on your list and take advantage of this opportunity. It will reveal a lot about each school.

High school transcripts – Review your high school transcripts and verify that they are accurate. Your counselor will provide you with a copy of your transcript in the beginning of the year. If anything is wrong or missing you'll need time to correct it. Reviewing your transcript is also a good reminder to maintain your grades through to the end.

Testing – Around this time you should be taking your SAT and ACT exams. The sooner the better, as you may get a lower-than-expected score and will need time to take the exam again. This is common.

Applying Early – If you are applying to a school through early decision or early action, you will need to complete your application in October. Deadlines for these admissions programs are usually the end of October or the beginning of November.

NOVEMBER

Applications – By now you should know what schools you're applying to—5 or 6 ideally. You've had a few months to look over the various applications and think long and hard about your essay. Give yourself ample time in November to complete all the applications and get feedback about your essay. Have parents, teachers and other adults in your life read your essay and try to keep an open mind to their constructive criticism.

Financial aid and scholarships – Deadlines for financial aid and scholarships are still further down the road, but the sooner you apply the better. Knowing the different types of aid packages that are available will help you weigh the cost of different schools.

Testing – November is still within the normal window to take the SAT and/or ACT, but December will

probably be your last opportunity to do so. If you haven't taken or would like to retake either one, make sure you register now for the December test. Retaking in the spring will be too late!

Grades – November is also a critical month for your high school classes. The semester will end in mid-December, so if you need to improve any grades, now is the time to get serious. Even if you are accepted to a school, the decision can be reversed if your grades take a nosedive. We do not submit first quarter grades, unless requested by the college. You may send a copy of your 1st quarter report card if you wish to share that information.

DECEMBER AND JANUARY

Submit applications – Most colleges have regular application deadlines sometime in December. Make sure you've been keeping track of all deadlines; they can vary from school to school. Don't leave anything to the last minute. For most people, the month of December is always filled with extra holiday-related activities, not to mention the end of the fall semester.

Finalize other application components – By now you've taken your exams, written your essays and secured your letters of recommendation. Confirm that your test scores have been officially submitted to every college to which you're applying. Also verify that any letters of recommendation have been mailed.

Early acceptance – If you applied to a school through early decision or early action and are accepted, you will receive a letter sometime in December. Make sure you completely understand the timetable and all deadlines. It's also a great courtesy to notify the other schools you applied to. This will help them open up your seat to other applicants.

Grades – Your counselor will automatically send your first semester grades to all of the schools that you've applied to. Even if this is after the application, admissions counselors will incorporate it into their decision. If your high school grades started out poor but steadily improved, your senior year transcript is a way for you to demonstrate this upward trend.

FEBRUARY AND MARCH

Confirm applications – Most colleges will send you a confirmation that your application has been received and is being processed. If you haven't gotten receipt confirmation on any of your applications, do so as soon as possible.

Financial aid – You submitted your FAFSA in October, and by now you should have received a Student Aid Report, or SAR. Review this carefully and verify that everything is accurate. Discrepancies on this form may result in the loss of thousands of dollars in financial aid.

Late applications – Some schools have late deadlines or rolling admissions policies, meaning there is no

set deadline and applications may be submitted anytime in the winter or spring. As with everything else, it is still wise to apply as early as you can. You never know how competitive open seats will be.

Acceptance letters – Acceptance, rejection and waitlist letters may start arriving as early as February or March. Deferral letters will also be sent out. If you receive a deferral, remember that it is not a rejection. In many cases, the college is just waiting for more information. If you should receive a deferral, there are suggestions for following up with the college. In most cases, you will have until the end of April to make a decision. If you haven't received any letters yet, don't worry. It is common for letters to go out in April.

APRIL

Make your final decision – With some exceptions, by now you should have heard from all of the schools to which you applied. If you are accepted to multiple schools, weigh all your options before making a final decision. Talk with parents, other family members, teachers, mentors and friends. Take a good, hard look at finances, including financial aid and cost of living expenses at each school. If possible, visit campuses again. Now that you've been accepted, your perspective will be vastly different and you can ask much more detailed questions.

Notify other schools – Once you've made your decision, notify the other schools that accepted you as soon as possible. They will have plenty of waitlist applicants anxiously waiting for seats to open up.

Open House – Similar to college fairs in the fall, many colleges host spring open houses for incoming freshman. Find out when this is scheduled and take advantage if you are able. It is a chance to learn more about the school directly from current students. You may also make friends before the school year even starts!

Appeals – If you were rejected from a school, you may be able to appeal the decision. This is an extremely rare occurrence and only applies to certain circumstances. If you feel you may have a chance to appeal, research that school's admissions policies and talk to your high school guidance counselor.

MAY AND JUNE

Deposit deadline – Typically, colleges will have a deposit deadline of May 1st. You may have already signaled your intent to enroll, but now it's time to commit financially. Your acceptance letter should include all the details.

Complete the Graduation Survey in Naviance – We need to collect your college acceptance information, as well as your final decision on which school you'll be attending.

Final transcripts – Once you’ve graduated, as long as you have completed the Graduation Survey in Naviance and indicated the college which you will be attending, the Guidance Department will send your final transcript to that college.

AP exams – If you’ve been taking AP classes in high school, you’ll be taking your national exams at the end of the school year. This is a huge opportunity that you shouldn’t let go to waste. A high score of 4 or 5 on your AP exam will translate to college credit. Some students begin college with much of their freshman requirements fulfilled through AP credits.

Dual Enrollment credit- Contact the college to request your transcript to be sent to your attending college.

Thank you letters – You didn’t get here by yourself. Chances are there were many people who helped with your college applications. Take the time to write personalized thank you letters, especially to guidance counselors and teachers who wrote letters of recommendation. They will appreciate the gratitude and will be happy to know where you enrolled.