

College planning check-list for Seniors and parents

Grade 12

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 College Board or ACT 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.
- contact the College Board or ACT to have them sent.

November

- ✓ 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.

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 you 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.

*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 college scores for the SAT or ACT? 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

- 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?

*How can your child find colleges that match his or her needs? First, identify priorities. Next, carefully research the characteristics of a range of schools. Finally, match the two. Here are some college characteristics to consider.

Size of student body

Size will affect many of your child's opportunities and experiences:

- range of academic majors offered
- extracurricular possibilities
- amount of personal attention your child will receive
- number of academic resources (e.g., books in the library)

In considering size, your child should look beyond the raw number of students attending. For example, perhaps she's considering a small department within a large school. She should investigate not just the number of faculty members, but also their accessibility to students.

Location

Does your child want to visit home frequently, or is this a time to experience a new part of the country? Perhaps he would like an urban environment with access to museums, ethnic food, or major league ball games. Or maybe he hopes for easy access to the outdoors or the serenity of a small town.

Academic programs

If your child knows what she wants to study, she can research the reputations of academic departments by talking to people in the fields that interest her. If your child is undecided, as many students are, she may want to choose an academically balanced institution that offers a range of majors and programs. Students normally don't pick a major until their sophomore year, and those students who know their major before they go to college are very likely to change their minds. Most colleges offer counseling to help students find a focus. In considering academic programs, your child should look for special opportunities and pick a school that offers a number of possibilities.

Campus life

Your child should consider what college life will be like beyond the classroom. Students have to maintain a balance between academics, activities, and social life. Before choosing a college, your child should learn the answers to these questions:

- What extracurricular activities, athletics, clubs, and organizations are available?
- Does the community around the college offer interesting outlets for students?
- Are students welcomed by the community?
- Is there an ethnic or religious group in which to take part?
- How do fraternities and sororities influence campus life?
- Is housing guaranteed?
- How are dorms assigned?

Cost

In considering cost, look beyond the price tag. For most students, today's college costs make finances an important consideration. At the same time, most colleges work to ensure that academically qualified students from every economic circumstance can find financial aid that allows them to attend.

Diversity

Your child should explore what she might gain from a diverse student body. The geographic, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity of the students can help students learn more about the world. Investigate which student organizations or other groups with ethnic or religious foundations are active and visible on campus.

Retention and graduation rates

One of the best ways to measure a school's quality and the satisfaction of its students is to learn the percentage of students who return after the first year and the percentage of entering students who go on to graduate. Comparatively good retention and graduation rates indicate that responsible academic, social, and financial support systems exist for most students.

Source: www.collegeboard.com