

11th GRADE COLLEGE PLANNING TIMELINE

FALL

Meet With Your School Guidance Counselor.

Determine what classes you should take to put yourself in a good position for college. Check your class rank and GPA, and don't be afraid to ask questions, your school guidance counselors are a great resource during the college planning process.

Explore Possible Careers and Majors.

There are several questionnaires and tests that have been developed in order to help you figure out not only which careers you might be good at, but also which you might enjoy most. Usually these tests work by measuring your abilities in a variety of academic areas in addition to asking you questions about your interests.

One of the more popular and thoroughly tested versions of these tests is the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). The ASVAB was originally developed to encourage students to increase awareness of their skills and interests and to understand how those skills and interests could translate into military and civilian occupations. However, the current version of the ASVAB is designed to assist all students, whether they're planning on getting a job right out of high school, joining the Military or going to a university, community college or vocational school.

The ASVAB provides you with scores in several different areas that are specifically designed to help you narrow your search for careers (or majors). The results will be provided to you on a summary sheet that not only lets you know how you scored, but also how you compare to other people who took the test. The summary sheet explains each of the scores, what they mean and gives you suggestions on how to proceed.

The ASVAB is only one of many options available in terms of testing, but, besides being well established and thoroughly tested, the ASVAB is free, which makes it worth looking into. Ask your guidance counselor if the ASVAB is offered at your school.

Take the PSAT in October.

Not only is it a good way to practice for the SAT, it also qualifies you for the National Merit Scholarship program.

Start Reviewing Colleges.

Look online. Go to college fairs. Speak to college representatives that visit your school. Start to actively learn more about the schools you are interested in.

Start Thinking about Financial Aid.

Have a discussion with your parents about what they think they can and can't afford. And if your school offers it, attend financial-aid night together. Such seminars can offer insight on ways to save, and information on what is required to apply for college financial aid. If your school doesn't offer this course, look into local community colleges or adult education classes.

WINTER

Organize Your Spring Testing Schedule.

Find out registration deadlines and the exact dates and times of important tests like the ACT, SAT and SAT Subject Tests.

Take Part in Extracurricular Activities.

Colleges like well-rounded students who participate in more than just school. They are especially impressed if you display consistent involvement or take a leadership role. So join a sports team, school club or community program. Not only will it look good on your application, it will also offer you an opportunity to learn and grow.

Start Visiting Local Colleges.

Big. Small. Public. Private. Plan trips around colleges you are interested in, visit friends in college and tour nearby campuses, not necessarily because you will apply to them, but because you can get to know the differences between each and to get a feel for what you like and dislike.

SPRING

Take an SAT or ACT Practice Test.

Use an SAT or ACT prep book to experience what it's like taking one from beginning to end. You can locate your weak areas and focus your studies to help you improve.

Explore Scholarship Opportunities.

Scholarships are a great way to save money. The trick, however, can be locating them. Research what's available by talking to your school counselor and looking online. The sooner you identify scholarships you qualify for, the more prepared you will be when it's time to submit financial-aid applications.

Set Up Your Senior Class Schedule.

Challenge yourself. Meet with your counselor and review possible honors and AP classes. Colleges pay attention to senior year courses and grades, so set yourself up to stand out.

Reach Out to Recommendation Writers.

You are going to need recommendation letters when you apply to schools in the fall, so beat the rush by contacting those writers (teachers, coaches, mentors) you want to ask now. Not only will this give your recommendation writers time to prepare, it will be one less thing for you to worry about next fall.

Put Thought Into Your Summer Work.

While financial pressure often dictates your summer employment, start thinking about how your summer work may look on a college application. Seek out work, volunteer or internship opportunities that highlight interests, demonstrate your civic duty and/or display your willingness to learn. These are all traits that your college admissions officer will be looking for.

SUMMER

Visit Colleges You Are Seriously Considering.

Go to your top five choices, if possible, and learn as much as you can about each. Take campus tours. Sit in on a class of a subject that interests you. Speak with teachers and students. Set up a meeting with the school admissions counselors and financial-aid staff. Don't be afraid to wander around the campus by yourself and to ask questions, this is your opportunity to evaluate firsthand each college experience. If you can't visit in person, look for virtual tours and college forums online.

Take Summer Classes.

Whether it's taking summer classes through a local community organization or at an accredited college, attending a summer program can enhance your transcript and your chances of getting into a competitive college. Talk to your high school guidance counselor to find out what programs are available in your area and what kind of classes you should specifically consider.

Start Working on College Applications.

Request applications from the colleges to which you want to apply. Compose rough drafts of the essays you will need and go over them with a teacher. You want your essay to be flawless and error-free come actual submission time.

Chat with College Students Home For the Summer.

Get their take on college, especially if they attend a school you are considering. It's always good to get a student's perspective. Ask them questions you don't find in the pamphlets, like 'What is dorm room living really like?'