



## College Planning: 12th Grade

### The Qualities Colleges Look for in Students

Many college-bound students want to know what college admissions counselors look for when evaluating applications. The following is a list of qualities that college admissions counselors seek in prospective students.

- A challenging high school curriculum.
- Grades that represent strong effort and an upward trend.
- Solid scores on standardized tests.
- Passionate involvement in a few activities, demonstrating leadership and initiative.
- Letters of recommendation from teachers and counselors that give evidence of integrity, special skills, positive character traits and an interest in learning.
- Special talents or experiences that will contribute to an interesting and well-rounded student body.
- A well-written essay that provides insight into the student's personality, values and goals.
- Enthusiasm in attending the college.
- Work and community service experiences that show dedication and responsibility.
- Demonstrated intellectual curiosity through reading, school and leisure pursuits.

### Checklist

Stay on track with your college application process by following the guidelines below.

## SUMMER

- ❑ **Visit colleges** . If you haven't already, make plans to check out the campuses of colleges in which you are interested. When planning your campus visits, make sure to allow time to explore each college. While you're there, talk to as many people as possible. These can include college admission staff, professors and students.
- ❑ **Finalize a college list**. Choose which colleges to apply to by weighing how well each college meets your needs.
- ❑ **Find out a college's actual cost**. Once you have a list of a few colleges you're interested in, **Net Price** is the real price that a student pays to go to a college. It's the published price of the college minus the gift aid that the student receives. The net price of a college is often much lower than its published price. Most colleges now offer a tool on their websites called a net price calculator. This online tool gives you an estimate of the actual price you would pay to go to a certain college, based on information you enter about your finances. Your net price will be different for every college, so it's a good idea to use each college's net price calculator.
- ❑ **Start on applications early**. You can get the easy stuff out of the way now by filling in as much required information on college applications as possible.
- ❑ **Decide whether to applying early**. If you are set on going to a certain college, think about whether applying early is a good option. Now is the time to decide because early applications are usually due in November and some colleges have financial incentives for students.
- ❑ **Gather financial documents**: To apply for most financial aid, you will need to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). You'll need your parent's most recent tax returns and an FSA ID to complete the FAFSA, which opens Oct. 1.

## FALL

- **Narrow your list of colleges to between 5 and 10.** Meet with a counselor about your college choices and, if you haven't done so yet, 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.
  - Required financial aid application forms and their deadlines (aid applications may be due before college applications)
  - Other materials you'll need (recommendations, transcripts, etc.)
- **Take the SAT or ACT one more time:** Many seniors retake the SAT or ACT in the fall. Additional course work since your last test could help you boost your performance.
- **Be sure** to have your SAT or ACT scores sent to the colleges you're applying to.
- **Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):** To apply for most financial aid, you'll need to complete the FAFSA. Oct. 1 is the first day you can file the FAFSA.
- **Complete the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE through College Board:** PROFILE is an online application used by certain colleges and scholarship programs to determine eligibility for their aid dollars.
- **Prepare early decision/early action or rolling admission applications** as soon as possible. Colleges may require test scores and applications between Nov. 1 and Nov. 15 for early decision admission.
- **Ask a counselor or teacher for recommendations** if you need them. Give each teacher or counselor an outline of your academic record and your extracurricular activities. These are written in your senior resume.
- **Write first drafts** and ask teachers and others to read them if you're submitting essays. If you're applying for early decision, finish the essays for that application first.
- **Ask counselors** to send your transcripts to colleges. Give counselors the proper forms at least two weeks before the colleges require them.

## WINTER

- **Keep photocopies** as you finish and send your applications and essays.
- **Have your high school send a transcript** — it is sent separately by mail to colleges if you apply online.
- **Give the correct form to your counselor** if the college wants to see second-semester grades.

## SPRING

- **Visit your final college before accepting.** You should receive acceptance letters and financial aid offers by mid-April. Notify your counselor of your choice.
- **Inform every college** of your acceptance or rejection of the offer of admission and/or financial aid by May 1. Colleges cannot require your deposit or your commitment to attend before May 1.
- **Send your deposit** to one college only.
- **Take any AP Exams.** Show what you've learned in your AP classes. A successful score could even earn you credit, advanced placement, or both in college.
- **Waitlisted by a college?** If you intend to enroll if you are accepted, tell the admission director your intent and ask how to strengthen your application. Need financial aid? Ask whether funds will be available if you're accepted. **Keep active in school.** The college will want to know what you have accomplished between the time you applied and the time you learned of its decision.
- **Ask your high school** to send a final transcript to your college.
- **Review your financial aid awards:** Not all financial aid awards are the same, so it's important to choose the aid package that's best for you and your family. Be sure to note what you have to do to continue receiving financial aid from year to year, and how your aid might change in future years.