



**National Association for  
College Admission Counseling**  
*Guiding the way to higher education*

## **Steps to College**

Steps to College is NACAC's online newsletter for and about students in the school-to-college transition. New stories are added to this page throughout the year, so visit often! Click on the link below.

<http://www.nacacnet.org/MemberPortal/News/StepsNewsletter/>

## **Prep for College Calendar**

*The following information is also available at the NACAC web site*  
<http://www.nacacnet.org/MemberPortal/ForStudents/CollegePrep/>

### **Freshman Year**

*It is never too early to plan for the future!*

- Build strong academic, language, mathematics and critical thinking skills by taking challenging courses.
- Study hard and get excellent grades.
- Strengthen your vocabulary by increasing your reading.
- Become involved in co-curricular activities.
- Meet your high school guidance counselor and discuss your plans for the next four years.
- Browse through college literature or surf the Web to get an idea of what kinds of schools may be of interest to you.
- Check out what high school courses colleges require.
- Know NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) requirements if you want to play sports in college.
- Keep an academic portfolio and co-curricular record.
- Research career possibilities.
- Begin saving money for college.

## **Sophomore Year**

*Concentrate on academic preparation and continue to develop basic skills and co-curricular interests.*

### September

- Consult your guidance counselor about taking the PSAT in October. The PSAT is a preliminary test that will prepare you for the SAT Reasoning Test.
- If you plan on taking the ACT, talk to your guidance counselor about taking the PLAN this fall. The PLAN is a preliminary standardized test that will give you some preparation for the ACT. PLAN does not have national testing dates, so ask your guidance counselor about test dates offered by your school.
- You need to register several weeks in advance for the PLAN and the PSAT, so consult your guidance counselor early in September.
- Take NCAA-approved courses if you want to play sports in college.

### October

- Take the PSAT for practice. The results will not be used for college admission.
- Sign up, if you have not done so already, for co-curricular activities that interest you. The level of involvement and accomplishment is most important, not the number of activities.
- Keep a record of your co-curricular involvement, volunteer work, and employment (all year).

### November

- Make sure you are "on top" of your academic work. If necessary, meet with your teacher for additional help.
- Save your best work in academic courses and the arts for your academic portfolio (all year).

### December

- Receive results of PLAN and/or the PSAT. Read materials sent with your score report. Consult your guidance counselor to explore ways to improve on future standardized tests and courses to discuss which may be required or beneficial for your post-high school plans.

### January

- Keep studying!
- Volunteer-a great way to identify your interests and to develop skills.

### February

- It is never too early to start researching colleges and universities. Visit your guidance office to browse through literature and guidebooks or surf the Web and check out college and university home pages.

### March

- NACAC has developed a list of on-line resources to help you in the college admission process called Web Resources for the College-Bound.

### April

- Register for June SAT Subject Test. These are one-hour exams testing you on academic subjects that you have already completed. Among the many to choose from are biology, chemistry, foreign languages and physics. Many colleges require or recommend one or more of the SAT Subject Tests for admission or placement. You can take SAT Subject Tests when you have successfully completed the corresponding course in high school study (B+ average or better). Talk to your teachers and counselor about which tests to take.
- See your guidance counselor for advice.
- Continue to research career options and consider possible college majors that will help you achieve your career goals.

### May

- Plan now for wise use of your summer. Consider taking a summer course or participating in a special program (e.g., for prospective engineers or journalists or for those interested in theatre or music) at a local college or community college. Consider working or volunteering.

### June

- Take the SAT Subject Tests that you registered for in April.
- If you work, save some of your earnings for college.

### July

- During the summer, you may want to sign up for a PSAT/SAT prep course, use computer software, or do the practice tests in books designed to familiarize you with standardized tests.

### August

- Make your summer productive. Continue reading to increase your vocabulary.

## **Junior Year**

*Begin college selection process. Attend college fairs, financial aid seminars, general information sessions, etc., to learn as much as you can about the college application process. Make sure you are meeting NCAA requirements if you want to play Division I or II sports in college.*

### September

- Register for the October PSAT. Meet with your guidance counselor to review your courses for this year and plan your schedule for senior year.
- Save samples of your best work for your academic portfolio (all year).
- Maintain your co-curricular record (all year).

### October

- Junior year PSAT scores may qualify a student for the National Merit Scholarship Competition and the National Achievement and the National Hispanic Scholars Programs. So, even though these scores will not be used for college admission, it is still a good idea to take the PSAT. The more times you take standardized tests, the more familiar you will become with the format and the types of questions asked. If you wish to receive free information from colleges, indicate on the PSAT test answer form that you want to participate in the Student Search.

### November

- Junior year grades are extremely important in the college admission process, because they are a measure of how well you do in advanced, upper-level courses. Grades also are used to determine scholarships and grants for which you may be eligible. So put in the extra effort and keep those grades up!
- If you will require financial aid, start researching your options for grants, scholarships and work-study programs. Make an appointment with your guidance counselor or start by visiting NACAC's Web Resources for the College-Bound to do research on your own using the Internet.

### December

- During December you should receive the results of your PSAT. Read your score report and consult your school counselor to determine how you might improve on future standardized tests. The PSAT is excellent preparation for the SAT Reasoning Test, which you will take in the spring.
- If you plan to take the ACT, register now for the February ACT. Many colleges accept the ACT (American College Test) or the SAT Reasoning Test. Some colleges require the ACT or both SAT Reasoning Test and the SAT Subject Tests. When you begin to explore different colleges and universities, double-check to see if they prefer or require the ACT, the SAT Reasoning Test and/or the SAT Subject Tests.

### January

- Begin to make a preliminary list of colleges you would like to investigate further. Surf the Internet and use the college resources in the guidance office or library.
- Ask your parents for your Social Security number (required on many college applications). If you were never issued a Social Security number, contact the closest Social Security office as soon as possible to obtain a number.

### February

- Meet with your guidance counselor to discuss your preliminary list of colleges. Discuss whether your initial list of colleges meets your needs and interests (academic program, size, location, cost, etc.) and whether you are considering colleges where you are likely to be admitted. You should be optimistic and realistic when applying to colleges.
- Register for the March SAT Reasoning Test if you have completed the math courses covered on the SAT Reasoning Test. If not, plan to take the SAT Reasoning Test in May or June. Prepare for the SAT Reasoning Test or ACT by signing up for a prep course, using computer software, or doing the SAT/ACT practice tests available in the counseling office or at bookstores. But don't spend so much time trying to improve standardized test scores that grades and co-curricular involvement suffer.

### March

- Write, telephone, or use the Internet to request admission literature and financial aid information from the colleges on your list. There is no charge and no obligation to obtain general information about admission and financial aid.

### April

- When selecting your senior courses, be sure to continue to challenge yourself academically.
- Register for the May/June SAT Reasoning Test and/or the May/June SAT Subject Tests. Not all SAT Subject Tests are given on every test date. Check the calendar carefully to determine when the Subject Tests you want are offered. Register for the June ACT if you want to take that test.
- Continue to evaluate your list of colleges and universities. Eliminate colleges from the original list that no longer interest you and add others as appropriate.
- Look into summer jobs or apply for special summer academic or enrichment programs. Colleges love to see students using their knowledge and developing their skills and interests.

### May

- Attend a college fair to get more information about colleges on your list. NACAC sponsors college fairs in cities across the country during the fall and the spring. Visit NACAC's National College Fairs Web page to check out the schedule for the National College Fairs and the Performing and Visual Arts College Fairs.
- Get a jump start on summer activities-consider enrolling in an academic course at a local college, pursuing a summer school program, applying for an internship, working, or volunteering. If you work, save part of your earnings for college.
- Begin visiting colleges. Phone to set up appointments. Interviews are always a good idea. Many colleges will tell you they are optional, but an interview will show interest, enthusiasm and initiative on your part and provide an excellent opportunity to have your questions answered. Do a practice interview with your counselor, teacher, employer, or a senior who has had college interviews. Set up interviews as early as possible-interview times become booked quickly!
- Take the SAT Reasoning Test or the SAT Subject Tests.

## June

- After school ends, get on the road to visit colleges. Seeing the college firsthand, taking a tour and talking to students can be the greatest help in deciding whether or not a school is right for you. Although it is ideal to visit colleges during the academic year, going in the summer will be valuable. Admission offices employ their students to give tours and answer questions from prospective students and their parents.
- Take the SAT Reasoning Test, the SAT Subject Tests and/or the ACT.

## July

- Visit colleges, take tours, have interviews and ask questions. Make college visiting a family event. Involve your parents and siblings in every step of your application process. Choosing the right college is a tough decision; the opinions of those who know you best can provide helpful insight into which college is best for you.

## August

- Continue to refine your list of potential colleges and universities.
- Begin preparing for the actual application process: draft application essays; collect writing samples; and assemble portfolios or audition tapes. If you are an athlete and plan on playing in college, contact the coaches at the schools to which you are applying and ask about intercollegiate and intramural sports programs and athletic scholarships.
- Complete the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse form if you hope to play Division I or II sports. (This form cannot be mailed until you finish your sixth semester of high school.)

## **Senior Year Calendar**

*Apply to colleges. Make decisions. Finish high school with pride in yourself and your accomplishments.*

## September

- Make sure you have all applications required for college admission and financial aid. Write, phone, or use the Internet to request missing information.
- Check on application and financial aid deadlines for the schools to which you plan to apply. They may vary and it is essential to meet all deadlines!
- Meet with your guidance counselor to be sure your list includes colleges appropriate to your academic and personal record. Review your transcript and co-curricular records with your school counselor to ensure their accuracy.
- Register for the October/November SAT Reasoning Test and/or SAT Subject Tests, or September/October ACT.
- If the colleges require recommendations, ask the appropriate people to write on your behalf. At least three weeks before the due date, ask your counselor and teachers, employers, or coaches to write letters of recommendation. Provide recommendation forms, any special instructions and a stamped, addressed business envelope to the people writing your recommendation. Be thoughtful! Write thank-you notes to those who write recommendations and keep them informed of your decisions.
- Plan visits to colleges and set up interviews (if you didn't get to them during the summer or if you want to return to a campus for a second time). Read bulletin boards and the college newspaper. Talk with current students and professors.

## October

- Attend a regional college fair to investigate further those colleges to which you will probably apply. Visit the College Fairs section on NACAC's Web site to view the schedule for NACAC's National College Fairs and the Performing and Visual Arts College Fairs.
- Mail applications in time to reach the colleges by the deadlines. Check with your guidance counselor to make sure your transcript and test scores have been/will be sent to the colleges to which you are applying.
- If applying for early decision or early action, send in your application now. Also prepare applications for back-up schools. Remember, if you are accepted under the early decision option, you are expected to enroll at that college and to withdraw all other applications. Submit financial aid information if requested from early decision/action candidates.
- Register for the December/January SAT Reasoning Test and/or SAT Subject Tests, or December ACT if you have not completed the required tests or if you are not happy with your previous test scores and think you can do better.
- Have official test scores sent by the testing agency to colleges on your list.

## November

- Take the SAT Reasoning Test or SAT Subject Tests if appropriate. Don't forget to have test scores sent to colleges on your list.
- Be sure your first quarter grades are good.
- Continue completing applications to colleges. Make copies of all applications before mailing the applications.
- If you need financial aid, obtain a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) from your guidance office. Check to see if the colleges to which you are applying require any other financial aid form. Register for the CSS Profile if required and obtain the college's own financial aid forms, if available.
- Keep all records, test score reports and copies of applications for admission and financial aid. Do not throw anything away until at least the end of your first year in college. Having detailed records will save you time and effort should anything be lost or should you decide to apply in the future to other colleges and scholarship programs.

## December

- Have official test scores sent to colleges on your list if you have not done so.
- Consult your school counselor again to review your final list of colleges. Be sure you have all bases covered. It is a good idea to make copies of everything before you drop those envelopes in the mail. If for some reason your application gets lost, you will have a back-up copy. File your last college application.
- If you applied for early decision, you should have an answer by now. If you are accepted, follow the instructions for admitted students. If the decision is deferred until spring or you are denied, submit applications now to other colleges.

## January

- Keep working in your classes! Grades and courses continue to count throughout the senior year.
- Request that your counselor send the transcript of your first semester grades to the colleges to which you applied.
- Parents and students, complete your income tax forms as soon as possible. You will need those figures to fill out the FAFSA. Complete and return your FAFSA as quickly as possible after January 1. Check to make sure your colleges or state does not require any other financial aid forms. If they do, consult your guidance counselor or contact the college's financial aid office.

## February

- Remember to monitor your applications to be sure that all materials are sent and received on time and that they are complete. Stay on top of things and don't procrastinate; you can ruin your chances for admission by missing a deadline.
- If you completed a FAFSA, you should receive your Student Aid Report (SAR) within four weeks after submitting the FAFSA. Review the SAR carefully and check for any inaccuracies. If necessary, correct any items on the SAR and return it to the FAFSA processor (if a college transmitted your data directly, notify the college of any change).
- If more than four weeks have passed after sending in your FAFSA and you have not received an acknowledgment, contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at (319) 337-5665. To identify you, they will need your name, social security number, address, and date of birth exactly as it was written on your FAFSA.
- Complete scholarship applications. You may be eligible for more scholarships than you think, so apply for as many as you can.
- Enjoy your final year in high school, but don't catch senioritis!

## March

- Stay focused and keep studying-only a couple more months to go!

## April

- Do not take rolling admission applications for granted. (Some colleges do not have application deadlines; they admit students on a continuous basis.) These schools may reach their maximum class size quickly-the earlier you apply, the more availability there may be.
- Review your college acceptances and financial aid awards. Be sure to compare financial aid packages in your decision-making process. If you are positive you will not enroll at one or more of the colleges which accepted you, please notify those colleges that you have selected another college. Keeping colleges abreast of your plans might enable those colleges to admit someone else. If you know which college you will attend, send your tuition deposit and follow all other instructions for admitted students. You must decide which offer of admission to accept by May 1 (postmark date).

## May

- By May 1, decide on the one college that you will attend. By May 1, send in your tuition deposit to the college you will attend. Notify the other colleges that accepted you that you have selected another college.
- BE PROUD-you have completed a difficult task.
- If your first-choice college places you on their waiting list, do not lose all hope. Some students are admitted off the waiting list. Talk with your counselor, and contact the college to let them know you are still very interested. Keep the college updated on your activities.
- Take Advanced Placement examinations, if appropriate and request that your AP scores be sent to the college you will attend.

## June

- Request that your counselor send your final transcript to the college you will attend. Notify the college of any private scholarships or grants you will be receiving.
- Know when the payment for tuition, room and board, meal plans, etc., is due. If necessary, ask the financial aid office about a possible payment plan that will allow for you to pay in installments.
- Congratulations, you've made it through high school! Enjoy your graduation and look forward to college.

## July

- Look for information in the mail from the college about housing, roommate(s), orientation, course selection, etc. Respond promptly to all requests from the college. August-September
- Ease the transition into college. Accept the fact that you'll be in charge of your academic and personal life. What you do, when you do it and how things get done will be up to you. You'll have new responsibilities and challenges. Think about budgeting your time and establishing priorities. Take charge of the changes that lie ahead and eliminate or minimize pressures. Go forth with confidence and enthusiasm, willingness to adapt and determination to succeed academically and personally.
- Pack for college. Don't forget to include things that remind you of friends and family. Be prepared for the new opportunities and challenges. Have a great freshman year!