

SUMMER ACTIVITIES GUIDE

Deciding how best to spend your time as you apply to college and finish up your high school career can sometimes feel pretty intimidating. Starting at the end of your Junior year, this breakdown of what you should do as you get closer to the next step of your academic career makes it easy to see what you need to do and when. Consider this your college planning checklist!

Before School is Out

Talk to your school's Career Specialist. The last thing you should do before you leave school for the summer after Junior year is make an appointment with your Guidance Counselor or Career Specialist. They are a great resource when it comes to starting the college selection process, and will give you some good pointers about where to start your search.

Get college guides. The College Board (the company that administers the SAT) puts out a College Handbook every year. The Handbook provides a thorough snapshot of every undergraduate institution in the United States. Many other companies also have college guides available; do some research on which ones are best, and purchase a few. Start reading them, and narrowing down your list of school based on what you're looking for.

Visit facts.org. This is a great tool where you can monitor your Bright Futures eligibility as well as State University System admission requirements. You can also research information on colleges and careers.

Early Summer Activities (June, July)

Start researching schools. Once you have a solid list of schools, start doing some serious research on them. Go to each school's website, and spend some time reading about what they offer academically, socially, and extracurricularly. Check on incoming class sizes, standardized test score requirements, application deadlines, and financial aid. Run the list by your parents and friends, who will help you as you make your selections.

Think about potential majors. Colleges have a variety of major opportunities—everything from English and Political Science to unique majors like Folklore or Jazz Studies. Do you know what you're interested in? How do your interests translate into a career? Start thinking about this now, so that you'll be able to answer application questions about potential majors clearly and intelligently. Check Florida CHOICES for free online career assessments. See Ms. Colon, Career Specialist, for career exploration exercises.

Narrow your schools selections to 4-6 options. When you've researched all the schools you're interested in, make your final choices. Make sure they fulfill what you're looking for in a school: Location, size, offerings, environment, and anything else you consider important. We recommend 1-2 "reach" schools, 2-3 competitive schools and 1 "safe" school.

Take a leadership role in your school extracurriculars. Even if you're not the captain of your team or the editor of your newspaper, there is still plenty of leadership you can demonstrate. Take on tasks, work with others to complete complex project, and make a difference in the groups you're a part of. This won't only look good on your applications, it'll make your activities much more rewarding!

Beef up your work experience. Keep your résumé fresh and your experiences outside school interesting by volunteering at a new place or taking on added responsibilities at your after-school job.

Keep your profile clean. Colleges look for, and take a dim view of, blogs and Facebook pages with embarrassing comments and photos, including evidence of underage drinking and inappropriate or illegal behavior.

Start working on any school-specific essays. Many schools require admission essays. If your school is one of them, start thinking about which topic or topics you will write about, and start drafting. The more time you spend on these essays, the better they will be. Use the information on the Senior Resume to demonstrate activities, experiences and unique personality characteristics!

Late Summer/Early Fall Activities (July, August, September)

Sign up to take or re-take or the SAT and/or ACT (Register in August for September test) What test does your schools require that you take? The SAT tests logic and reasoning, while the ACT tests academic knowledge. Which one do you feel the most comfortable taking? If you have already taken it, you may want to re-take the test to try for a higher score. This can increase chances for college admission and eligibility for scholarships. Once you have decided, pick a test date, and register for each test (SAT at www.collegeboard.org, and ACT at www.actstudent.org). If you're eligible for free/reduced lunch, contact Ms. Colon for a fee waiver.

Decide who will write Letters of Recommendation for you and ask them (nicely!) Not all college require Letters of Recommendation but if you need one, pick teachers that know you well, and with whom you've worked closely. These teachers will be able to not only speak about your academic abilities, but about your personal qualities, too. Remember to give them plenty of time to complete the letters (we recommend 2-3 weeks) so you don't miss any application deadlines. Don't forget to follow-up with your teachers and say THANK YOU!

Consider applying early. Is there a school that you know you want to attend above all others? Perhaps applying under early admission or early decision is the way to go. There are benefits (as well as some drawbacks) to this. Because of the restrictions placed on applicants applying through early decision, explore this option if you are 100% sure that the college is your best choice.

Start looking into scholarships. Don't wait for your college to cover your cost of attendance with loans and institutional grants. Do some legwork and find other scholarships and grants on your own. FastWeb (www.fastweb.com) is a great resource for searching and applying for scholarships that you may not find elsewhere.

Remember College deadlines. Make a list of deadlines: When the application is due, when different supplements and forms are due, and when the various financial aid documents are due. This will allow you to complete each application thoroughly and submit it on time—without rushing.

Create checklists. Applying to college can feel like you're working your way through a daunting pile of paper, but it doesn't have to be. Create college planning checklists of required documents for each school, and go crossing them off as you complete them. That way, you'll be able to keep on top of what you need to do without ever feeling flustered or overwhelmed.

Organize your Selections. Organize your selected colleges into separate folders or use an accordion file to keep track of your letters, usernames/passwords and submitted forms to the colleges you're interested in. In addition to a paper filing organization system, you can also track deadlines and specific information about your selected colleges through an Excel spreadsheet.