

Senior Year

College Process Timeline

~ Fall ~

Continue to learn about schools. You'll have opportunities to speak with college representatives who visit your high school and attend college fairs. Fall is also a great time to visit the schools on your college list because classes are in session and you are better able to meet and talk with students and professors. You may even be able to sit in on a class or two.

Finalize your college list. Use the information you've gathered from college visits, interviews, and your own research to decide which schools you will apply to. It's okay to apply to colleges that you think will be more difficult to get into. But it's also important to have a few schools where you're more confident you'll get in. Talk to counselors, teachers, and family about your final choices.

Submit financial aid forms. Fill out the FAFSA, and if necessary, the CSS Profile. These forms can be obtained online. No matter what your family's income level is, the FAFSA is your main priority for financial aid purposes because it will determine how much you're expected to pay. Pay attention to deadlines. You can submit the FAFSA as early as October 1st.

Stay on track with your grades and extracurricular activities. Colleges will look at what you've done in your senior year, so stay focused on doing well in your classes and maintaining a commitment to extracurricular activities.

Take standardized tests again, if necessary. Colleges typically consider your highest scores, so there is no risk to giving the exams another shot. Remember to request that your new test scores be sent to the colleges of your choice.

Keep track of deadlines for applications and financial aid. You'll be filling out lots of forms this year, so it's important to know what form is due when. Make a calendar showing the application deadlines for admission, financial aid, and scholarships. Early deadlines can be as soon as October 15. Financial aid forms such as the CSS Profile may have early deadlines as well.

Confirm letters of recommendation. Discuss your goals and ambitions with your teachers so they'll be more prepared to write about you. Remember to write thank you notes to those that have written your recommendations.

Meet with your school counselor. Your counselor can help you stay on track with admissions requirements. Make sure they know which colleges you want transcripts and letters sent to. Give your counselors any necessary forms at least four weeks before the actual deadlines so they'll have time to prepare the forms.

Complete applications. Finish the application forms for the schools you're interested in and proofread them. Make sure you and the school counseling office have sent all necessary materials, including test scores, recommendations, transcripts, and application essays. No matter how late your deadlines are, you should plan to get everything done before winter break, so you won't be rushing as the deadlines arrive.

Schedule interviews and auditions. If schools you are applying to require or recommend these, now is the time to make arrangements to schedule them.

Continue your scholarship search. Apply for scholarships and keep searching for more scholarship and grant opportunities. Using online scholarship search tools is a great way to find potential aid. Ask colleges about what scholarships you may qualify for. The downtime after applications have been sent is a great time to focus on financial aid.

~ Winter ~

Get ready for the results of early applications. If you applied Early Decision or Early Action, you'll soon find out if you were accepted. If you get in Early Decision, you have to withdraw your applications from other schools. If not, keep your other applications out there and focus on those colleges. Since Early Action applications are non-binding, you are free to apply to additional schools and continue your research.

Follow up on your applications. Verify with your counselor that all forms are in order and have been sent out to colleges. Check with the schools to make sure they have received all your information, including test scores, transcripts, and recommendations.

Keep Working Hard Remember that the schools will continue to keep track of your grades, so it's important to keep working hard throughout your senior year.

~ Spring ~

Watch for notification from colleges. If you applied under the regular application process, you should receive an admissions decision by March or April. Notifications of financial aid awards should arrive by the end of April. Check out your options if you're put on a waitlist. Being put on a waitlist is not a rejection. You must notify the college if you want to remain on the waitlist. In the meantime, keep your options open in case you don't get in. Check out schools that have late or rolling application deadlines.

Compare financial aid packages. Make sure to consider each financial aid award carefully. If you have questions, don't hesitate to contact the financial aid office of the college to get more information. Financial aid is a key factor in deciding where you will attend.

Prepare for any last standardized tests. You may be taking AP exams to earn some college credit as the school year winds down.

Make your final college decision. Notify all schools of your intent by May 1. If you're not sure which offer to accept, make one more campus visit to the schools you're considering. Make sure to send your deposit to your chosen school and ask your school counselor to send your final transcript.

Follow up on financial aid information. Make sure you have received a FAFSA acknowledgement. If you applied for a Pell Grant, you will receive a Student Aid Report statement. Review this notice, make a copy for your records, and send the original to the college you plan to attend. If necessary, apply for loans.

Complete enrollment paperwork for the college you will attend. Once you accept an offer, you should receive information from the college about course scheduling, orientation sessions, housing arrangements, and other necessary forms. Be sure to complete all required paperwork by the appropriate deadlines.

Congratulations! You've finished high school and are about to embark on an exciting new phase of life. Good luck!