

A TIMELINE FOR APPLYING TO COLLEGE

FALL OF JUNIOR YEAR

MAKE A LIST OF COLLEGES DECEMBER

Make a list of the factors that matter most to you in a college: size, location, cost, available majors, etc. Then use an online college finder or buy a college guidebook to start making a list of your favorite schools.

TAKE THE PSAT OCTOBER

The PSAT is a great introduction to what the SAT will be like, and it also might qualify you for a National Merit Scholarship. In 2019, the PSAT will be held in October.

WINTER OF JUNIOR YEAR

NARROW DOWN YOUR LIST OF SCHOOLS

Aim for 3 to 5 that match your ability level, plus one stretch school and one safety school. Find out about the financial aid options and application deadlines for each of your favorites.

FIND OUT ABOUT FINANCES

Now is the time to find out how much your family can afford to contribute to your college costs. It's also a good time to attend a financial aid night at your school or at the Illinois Student Assistance Commission.

REGISTER FOR THE SAT OR ACT FEBRUARY

Your school will likely offer the SAT or ACT the spring of your junior year. However, you may want to take the other test, too, to see which scores are stronger. Registration is about one month before the test.

SPRING OF JUNIOR YEAR

TAKE THE SAT OR ACT

Take college entrance exams in the spring of your junior year so you'll have time to take them again and possibly improve your scores before you apply. They are usually offered again in October and November.

START A SCHOLARSHIP SEARCH

Scholarships can make a big difference in whether or not you can afford to attend the college of your choice. The earlier you research them, the better.

TAKE THE APS MAY

Doing well on AP exams not only looks good on college applications, but may also help you earn credit for college courses and save money.

SUMMER BEFORE SENIOR YEAR

CREATE COMMON APP ACCOUNT AUGUST

VISIT COLLEGES

Try to visit the campuses of your top five choices. Take a tour, meet with financial aid staff, and schedule an interview if possible.

FALL OF SENIOR YEAR

WRITE COLLEGE ESSAYS

Start working on your college essays so you have time to revise them before the deadlines.

APPLY EARLY DECISION MID-OCTOBER

Most early application deadlines are Nov. 1 or Nov. 15.

FINISH ALL APPLICATIONS DECEMBER

Use winter break to finish your applications, which are usually due Jan. 1 or Feb. 1.

MAKE A LIST OF DEADLINES

Create a spreadsheet of the deadlines for all of the schools you're applying to and what supporting materials you'll need for each one.

FILL OUT THE FAFSA OCTOBER 1

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is required for any student who hopes to receive scholarships, grants or loans from government or school sources. Some funds are rewarded on a first-come, first-served basis, so apply early.