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## SESSION I: GOAL SETTING: TAKING STOCK

## ACTIVITY #4: WHAT AND WHEN AND WHO?

### *Opening Discussion:*

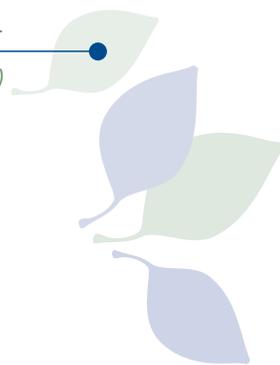
Remind students that even though the process can seem overwhelming, if they take it step-by step, it will be easier. They will feel as if they are in control of the process. Keeping a calendar of important dates and deadlines is absolutely essential throughout the college search and application process. Developing a solid relationship with the school counselor is an additional source of support, as will recognizing the role of family, friends and community contacts.

### *Activity/Handouts:*

**Calendar/Checklist****How to Use Your School Counselor****Choosing Your Team**

### *Instructions:*

1. Hand out the calendar for the junior and senior year that will give students an idea of where they should be in the preparation for entering higher education.
2. Briefly go over the list letting students know that much of the information will be discussed in future sessions.
3. Ask students to check the appropriate boxes and keep the calendar in a safe, useful place.
4. Go over the handout on “How to Use Your School Counselor,” pointing out to students the importance of using their counselor to help them through the application process.
5. Ask students if they have met with their counselor.
6. Hand out “Choosing Your Team” and ask students to identify at least one person who can support them as they apply to college.
7. Ask the students to take home their checklist, resume, and questionnaire, to complete and bring them back for the next session.



# PREPARING FOR COLLEGE: JUNIOR/SENIOR CHECK LIST

## JUNIORS

### Fall:

- Start your year off right by **talking with your school counselor about the year ahead**. Confirm that your courses will put you on the right track for college admission. Be sure to ask about test dates for the PLAN, PSAT, ACT, and SAT. You'll need to register up to six weeks ahead of time.
- Starting developing a résumé**—a record of your accomplishments, activities and work experiences. This will be an important part of your college application.
- If you haven't participated in many activities outside of class, now is the time to sign up**. Consider clubs at schools, team sports, leadership roles, or involvement in your religious or civic community group.
- Take the PSAT**. Taking the test as a junior will qualify you for some scholarship consideration and identify you to colleges as a potential applicant. When you receive the results (usually in December), review them to learn more about your strengths and weaknesses. Discuss the results with your family and school counselor.
- Begin to prepare for the ACT or SAT**. Free test preparation may be available at your school, your local community colleges, and community-based programs; in addition, there are many free resources on the Internet. If you can't find the best websites, ask your counselor. You should plan to take at least one of these tests in the spring and again next fall during your senior year. **Ask your counselor if you qualify for a fee waiver**.

### January/February:

- Meet with your school counselor again to develop your senior schedule**. Make sure that you will be enrolled in the most challenging courses for which you are qualified.
- Register for a spring offering of the SAT and/or ACT**. Ask your counselor if you should take an SAT Subject Test this spring.
- Ask your counselor about summer opportunities on college campuses**. These can be a great way to find out what college life is all about and make you a more attractive candidate for admission to colleges.



**March/April:**

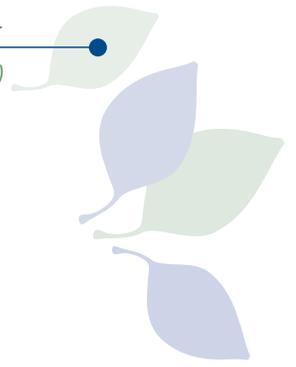
- Begin taking a more serious look at colleges and universities.** Make a file for each college and gather information about academics, financial aid, and campus life. Go to college fairs and open houses and learn as much as you can about the colleges online.
- Begin planning college visits.** Spring break is a good time to visit. Try to visit colleges near you and include a large, medium size, and small campus.
- Develop a preliminary list of colleges that interest you.** Write or email to request a viewbook and additional information.
- Think about lining up a summer job, internship or co-op.**

**May:**

- Take a look at some college applications** and consider all of the different pieces of information you will need to compile.
- Make a list of teachers, counselors, employers, and other adults you might ask to write letters of recommendation** for your college applications.

**Summer:**

- Continue investigating colleges.**
- Begin thinking about your applications. Generally, colleges will have their applications online by the beginning of August. Work on the essay before you return to school.**



## SENIOR YEAR TIMELINE

### August/September

- Register for the SAT and/or ACT** if you didn't take it as a junior, or if you aren't satisfied with your score and want to take it again. (Your counselor can help you with fee waivers).
- Take a look at some college applications** and consider all of the different pieces of information you will need to compile.
- The SAT test date most popular with high school seniors is this month.**
- Visit with your school counselor to make sure you are on track to graduate** and fulfill college admission requirements. If you're ahead of schedule, consider taking courses at a local university or community college to get a jumpstart on college credit.
- Take every opportunity to get to know colleges:** meeting with college representatives who visit your high schools during the fall, attending local college fairs, visiting campuses (if possible). Ask your counselor if they know of special campus visitation programs.
- Narrow down your list of colleges** and begin to consider "safe," "reach," and "realistic" schools. Make sure you have the application and financial aid information for each school. Find out if you qualify for any scholarships at these schools.
- Create a checklist and calendar** to chart:
  - Standardized test dates, registration deadlines, and fees
  - College application due dates
  - Financial aid application forms and deadlines
  - Other materials you'll need for college applications (recommendations, transcripts, essays, etc.)
  - Your high school's application processing deadlines
- Some schools require the CSS/Financial Aid Profile.** Ask the colleges to which you are applying for their deadlines. Register as early as September. See your school counselor about fee waivers.



## October

- Some colleges will have deadlines as early as this month.** These would include Rolling Admission, Early Decision and Early Action deadlines.
- If you cannot afford the application fees that many colleges charge, **ask your counselor to help you request a fee waiver.**
- Finalize your college essay.** Many schools will require that you submit at least one essay with your application.
- Request personal recommendations from teachers, school counselors or employers.** Follow the process required by your high school or provide a stamped, addressed envelope, the appropriate college forms, and an outline of your academic record and extracurricular activities to each person writing you a recommendation.
- Research possibilities of scholarships.** Ask your counselor, colleges and religious and civic groups about scholarship opportunities. There are also some good scholarship websites, including FastWeb ([www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)) and The College Board (<http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/scholarship-search>). You should NEVER pay for scholarship information.

## November

- Finalize and send any early decision or early action applications due this month.** Have a parent, teacher, counselor, or other adult review the application before it is submitted.
- Every college will require a copy of your transcript from your high school.** Follow your school's procedure for sending transcripts.
- Make sure testing companies (ACT or SAT) have sent your scores directly to the colleges to which you are applying.**
- The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) will be available this month,** but cannot be completed before January 1. Visit [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov) to complete this form.

## December

- Begin to organize regular decision applications** and financial aid forms, which will be due in January and/or February.
- Register for the January SAT (if needed). It is the last one colleges will be able to consider for a senior.**



## January

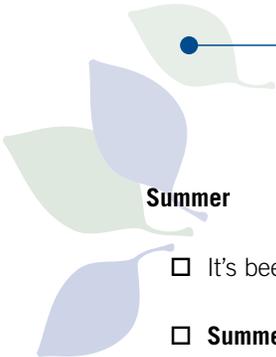
- Many popular and selective colleges will have application deadlines as early as January 1.** Others have deadlines later in January and February. Keep track of and observe deadlines for sending in all required fees and paperwork.
- If necessary, register for the February ACT (some colleges will be able consider it).**
- Ask your guidance office in January to send first semester transcripts to schools where you applied.** At the end of the school year, they will need to send final transcripts to the college you will attend.
- It is time to file the FAFSA (no later than Feb 1).** The sooner you complete it, the sooner you will have an idea of your financial aid options. Watch the mail for your Student Aid Report (SAR)—it should arrive four weeks after the FAFSA is filed or watch your email if you filed electronically.

## February/March/April

- While most of your applications are complete and you are waiting to receive admission decisions, **don't slack in the classroom.** The college that you do attend will want to see your second semester transcript. No Senioritis!
- Acceptance letters and financial aid offers will start to arrive.** Review your acceptances, compare financial aid packages, and visit your final choices, especially if you haven't already.

## May

- May 1 is the date when the college you plan to attend requires a commitment and deposit.** When you've made your college decision, notify your counselor and the colleges. Send in your deposit by the postmark date of May 1. If you've been offered financial aid, accept the offer and follow the instructions given. Also notify schools you will not attend of your decision.
- Make sure that you have requested that your final transcript be sent to the school you will be attending.**
- If you are "wait listed" by a college you really want to attend, visit, call and write** the admission office to make your interest clear. Ask how you can strengthen your application.



Summer

- It's been a long journey through high school and to college. **Enjoy your summer.**
- Summer jobs** can help pay some of your college expenses and give you great career preparation.
- Make a list of what you will need to take with you for your dorm room.** The suggested list of items, room and furniture dimensions and many other questions can usually be answered by visiting your college's website and searching under "Housing" or "Residence Life" for further information.
- You will most likely get a roommate assignment** from your college. Call, write or email to get acquainted in advance. In your conversations and communication, you should be able to figure out who will bring what for your room.
- Some colleges will offer a summer orientation/registration.** Make sure to attend to meet fellow students and other important people on campus and to familiarize yourself with your new school. This is often the time you sign up for your fall courses.



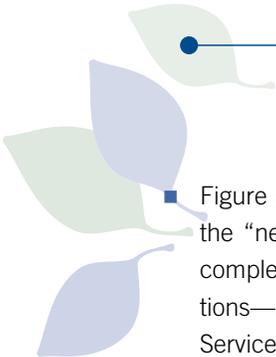
## HOW TO USE YOUR SCHOOL COUNSELOR

School counselors are one of the best ongoing sources of support for students who plan to go to college. They can be your friends throughout the entire college process. If you are lucky enough to have access to a counselor in your school, it is in your best interest to visit him or her on a regular basis.

Start by making an individual appointment to introduce yourself to your counselor. If small-group college counseling or information sessions are offered, sign up. But don't only settle for a "group" meeting in which you will have to share time with other students. Make sure that you schedule an uninterrupted time for a private, one-on-one session. **Begin by introducing yourself and stating clearly that it is your definite goal to attend college.** Make sure your counselor realizes this is IMPORTANT to you and you are HIGHLY MOTIVATED!

Throughout your high school years, your counselor can help you:

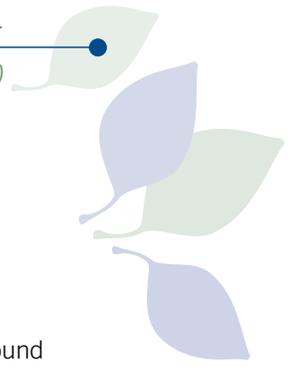
- Plan classes that will prepare you well for college admission and success. Your counselor knows which high school classes are required for college admission.
- Review your academic record with you and suggest areas that need improvement. If you need to do some catching up, your counselor can suggest ways in which to do that.
- Begin the admission process by identifying the questions you should be asking—and finding honest answers. Questions such as: "Do I want to stay near home? Does the college have my major? How important is size?"
- Clarify and understand terms, ideas and experiences for you encounter during research, campus visits or meetings with college representatives. Your counselor knows where to find information; for example in books, catalogues, brochures, and CDs that deal either with the admission process or a specific college or university. In addition, your counselor will be able to point you to websites that offer RELIABLE and FREE information about college.
- Identify special opportunities that may maximize your chances for being a well-prepared and appealing candidate for colleges. These might include weekend or summer programs on college campuses (often free for first-generation students), internships or community college classes open to high school students. Your counselor will know about local college fairs, opportunities to visit college campuses, and even overnight visits to colleges that may be offered.
- Familiarize yourself with everything you need to know about the required college admission tests. Your counselor can make sure that you get registered for the PSAT (the practice test for the SAT) and PLAN (the practice test for the ACT) tests. She/he can help you know which tests (SAT, ACT, SAT Subject tests, or TOEFL—Test of English as a Foreign Language) will be required by the colleges to which you may apply. Counselors know how and when to register for tests. She or he can even help with fee waivers if your family can't afford to pay for tests.
- Secure applications, identify application deadlines and prioritize to make sure that everything gets done carefully and ON TIME! Here also, if you do not have enough money to pay for application fees, your counselor can assist in asking colleges to waive application fees.
- Complete your applications and polish any required college essays so that the product you send to colleges will represent the best of your thinking and writing abilities. Make sure that you take a "rough draft" to your counselor early on. Leave plenty of time for revision and rewriting, prior to deadlines.

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- Figure out how to pay for college. First, your counselor can give you essential information about the “need-based” financial aid application process. He or she can help you understand how to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and, if required, other aid applications—such as those required by individual colleges or the College Board’s “College Scholarship Service Profile.” Your counselor may also be able to help you research scholarships based on factors other than your ability to pay for college.
  - Write a letter of recommendation to colleges or universities. Many colleges will require that you obtain recommendations from both a counselor and one or two teachers. In addition, counselors are often asked to complete “secondary school and mid-year reports” (included with applications).
  - Compare offers of admission and financial aid after you have heard from all of your colleges. This can be an essential step in making a final decision. Your school counselor can help you decide which programs are best suited to your educational goals. She or he can also help you compare offers of scholarships and need-based financial aid that may be sent to you in very different formats from different colleges.

There are a few other very important things to remember about working with your school counselor.

- Most school counselors have many, many students whom they want to help. So make it as easy as possible for your counselor to help you.
  - Make appointments early and show up on time.
  - Submit any forms that require counselor completion well in advance of due dates.
  - Carefully follow any procedures that have been established by your school for turning applications and related forms or for securing transcripts.
  - Whenever possible, make copies of everything you mail or give to your counselor. Sometimes, with so much paper, things get lost. When you have a copy easily at hand, nothing is lost forever.
- Make sure that you keep your counselor “in the loop” about what you are hearing from colleges. If there are any problems which arise, your counselor can act as your direct advocate with colleges.
- Whenever you have questions don’t hesitate to return to your counselor for advice, especially if you feel you are being asked by a college to do something that doesn’t seem “just right.” Your counselor will know the rules of the game by which both students and colleges are supposed to play.
- If you think it would be helpful, try to schedule a meeting with your counselor AND your parent(s). There are parts of the college process where you need lots of help from them. This is particularly true when it comes time to completing the financial aid applications.
- Be sure to thank your counselor for assistance given. The counseling door is always open to students who show that they are appreciative of a counselor’s time and effort.

Finally, when all is said and done, and you have made it successfully through the college selection and admission process, make sure that you take time to THANK your counselor one more time with a handwritten note (as well as any teachers who helped). If you have made good use of your counselor’s knowledge and assistance, the thanks will be more than well-deserved. When the student-counselor relationship “clicks,” your counselor will be able to offer the essential emotional support and encouragement you need during one of the most important times of your life. And your expression of gratitude will build a reservoir of good-will, should you need to return for further assistance at any time in the future.



## CHOOSING YOUR TEAM

Content adapted from the book *In* by Mike Moyer.

Getting into college is a team effort. You are the captain of your application team, but you will need to surround yourself with individuals who can help make your college application shine. Like any ace squadron, your team needs members with different skills. Your team should include:

### *Counselors*

They should provide: College information and academic advice. Counselors are great sources of information and can open your eyes to college possibilities. Don't be afraid to pick their brains about potential schools and if you might be a good fit. Nobody knows more than your counselor.

### *Family Members*

They should bring: Support and guidance. The best thing your parents can do is help you make the most of high school by providing a good environment for studying and by offering the encouragement you need during this stressful time. They should also support you in your college decision.

They should avoid: Making decisions for you about your activities and interests or ultimately running your college search. The right school for your parents may not be the right place for you.

### *Friends*

They should bring: Support. Getting through high school and applying to college can be stressful. Lean on your friends for support, understanding and stress relief because they're probably going through the same process. Be cautious of turning your decisions over to friends.

### *References*

They should bring: The ability to speak positively not just about your accomplishments, but about your passions and potential. These can be teachers or other adults who know you well. A reference might be someone you worked with on a volunteer project, an employer or church leader. They should be willing to contact a potential college on your behalf. Most colleges require letters of recommendation from at least one teacher so it pays to be in good standing. Do you have a class you like or a teacher that is particularly engaging? A good relationship with a teacher can lead to a good recommendation, and this can help open college doors for you.

### *My Team*

School/College counselor \_\_\_\_\_

Friends and Family \_\_\_\_\_

References \_\_\_\_\_

*Don't forget: Send thank-you notes to everyone on your team!*

For more tips, go to [www.Cappex.com/tips](http://www.Cappex.com/tips).

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