



## THE ULTIMATE COLLEGE CHECKLIST

When it comes to selecting, applying, and getting accepted to your best-fit college or university, no matter where you are in your high school career, there are certain things you might want to do and think about. To help, we've come up with some and broken them down by year. Take a look.

### High School Freshmen

Though it may seem early to think about college now, here are some low-stress choices you can make as a high school freshman to prepare for college.

- 1. Adjust to high school:** Give yourself some time to make the transition into high school. Use the resources available at your high school guidance office if you need help with organization or time management.
- 2. Develop your study skills:** Trust us, learning how to study now will benefit you in college.
- 3. Increase your involvement:** Choose one or two activities, clubs, organizations or teams to join. Studies show that if you are involved in high school, you are more likely to be successful academically.
- 4. Make friends with your counselor:** Meet them and be clear that your schedule will be designed for a college bound student.

### High School Sophomores

- 1. Picture yourself in a career:** Spend some time thinking about what kind of jobs appeal to you and why.
- 2. Begin thinking about what kind of college appeals to you:** Would you thrive best at a large university or a small, close knit community? Consider visiting both for an individual visit or a visit day geared for sophomores and juniors.  
[www.iwu.edu/admissions/visit](http://www.iwu.edu/admissions/visit)
- 3. Think about a future major:** Explore your options. We know it may feel too early to choose a college major, and you don't need to make decisions now, but it is a good idea to be thinking about what you enjoy about your high school classes.
- 4. Attend a college fair:** This is an excellent opportunity to collect materials, meet admissions counselors, and learn about a wide variety of colleges and universities.
- 5. Research major requirements:** Some majors have entrance requirements that exceed the university entrance requirements. If you're interested in a particular college major, research the requirements to be admitted into that major at several colleges. If there are GPA requirements, work to meet or exceed those requirements. (If you haven't settled on a major yet, that's okay too. There's still plenty of time!)
- 6. Stay involved:** Assess your involvement in your chosen organizations or teams at high school. Are they making you happy? If so, great! If not, maybe explore adding a different one? This is an important time to be figuring out what you like to do.
- 7. Community service:** Find ways to volunteer and get involved in your community. Of course, this will build your resumé, but even better than a good resumé is the experience itself. Working as a volunteer builds job and communication skills and can help you discover your ultimate path.
- 8. Prepare for testing:** Prepare for the PSAT test if your school administers it. Take practice tests. Many colleges and universities have moved to a test-optional path to admission. That being said, having the option to submit a score if you choose, can still be valuable.
- 9. Don't stress:** While reading this "to do" list, you may be wondering when you'll fit in one more task. Don't worry, if you are reading this list and thinking about college, you are on the right path. If you are overwhelmed scale back a little. Plan to volunteer just a couple times this year and take full advantage of meeting with the college admissions counselors who visit your high school.

## High School Juniors

- 1. Start your college list:** Create a list of colleges and universities that interest you. Visit their websites. Do research on their outcomes and student profiles to get a “feel” for each school. Dream big. Don’t automatically rule out schools due to location or sticker price.
- 2. Make college visits:** Visit the colleges and universities on your list, if possible. Being on campus is one of the best ways to see if that school is a fit for you. Most schools offer open house or visit days designed for juniors.
- 3. Prepare for testing:** Improve your test scores by prepping for the ACT or SAT; it helps your college application. Sign up for and take the ACT or SAT. Many colleges and universities have moved to a test-optional path to admission. That being said, having the option to submit a score if you choose, can still be valuable.
- 4. Create a resumé:** Begin to put down on paper “who you are” based on what you’ve done. Not only will this help with job interviews, it will help get you thinking about which activities reflect and “tell your story” best.
- 5. Scholarship research:** Visit your high school counseling office and begin gathering all the scholarship information you can.
- 6. Build Relationships:** Continue to build relationships with teachers and your high school counselor. Soon, you will be asking them to write you letters of recommendation for college applications and scholarships.
- 7. Sneak a peek at a job:** If possible, have coffee with someone who does what you think you want to do, or even better, see if you can “shadow” them during a day at work.
- 8. Work hard:** This is your last year to improve your GPA and add activities that you’ll be listing on your college applications.

## High School Seniors

- 1. Finalize your list:** Visit [collegescorecard.ed.gov](https://collegescorecard.ed.gov) for data and statistics from the U.S. Department of Education. Pay attention to information on **retention, graduation rates, average federal debt after graduation, and average salary after graduation.** Many students’ final college “short lists” include 3 to 7 schools.
- 2. Maintain your grades:** Colleges can revoke an acceptance if grades are not maintained.
- 3. Begin applying:** Complete the college applications to your final list of colleges and universities in the fall. Ask someone to review your essays before you submit them. Here’s where those letters of recommendation come in.
- 4. Scholarship applications:** Begin completing scholarship applications. Ask someone to review your essays before you submit them.
- 5. Financial aid:** complete the FAFSA for federal financial aid before November 1 if possible. (IWU’s FAFSA code is 001696.)
- 6. Testing:** We recommend taking the ACT or SAT in the fall if you have not already done so. Even though many schools have moved to a test-optional path to admission, submitting a solid score doesn’t hurt! And if you aren’t happy with your scores, you could opt to not include them if the school you’re considering doesn’t require them.
- 7. Take another look:** Revisit the schools where you’ve been admitted for a more in-depth look. Take advantage of these visits to ask students about their experiences in and out of the classroom, meet professors, and visit a class. If finances make it difficult to make a college visit, contact your college admissions counselor to see if assistance is available.
- 8. Make your choice:** Here’s the hard part. Review your acceptance and financial aid packages, your notes from your college visits, your value-driven research from [collegescorecard.ed.gov](https://collegescorecard.ed.gov), and choose your college or university. In the end, trust your heart. It will tell you.
- 9. Prepare for your adventure:** Congratulations on making your choice. Your next step is to make your decision official by submitting your acceptance deposit.