

College planning for ninth- and 10th-graders

There are some steps you can take as a ninth- and 10th-grader to make sure you're on the right track for college. Here's a list to help you navigate the college planning process:

GRADE 9

- 1. Create a four-year high school plan.** Think about what you'd like to accomplish in the next four years.
 - Make sure you know what high school courses are required by colleges, and that you're taking the right classes as early as ninth grade. You can ask your counselor about what those "right" classes are.
 - Get to know the levels of courses offered by your school.
- 2. Start thinking about your life after school, including the types of jobs that might interest you.** Of course these will change — often — but it's good to start thinking about the possibilities.
 - Identify your interests — likes and dislikes — not just in classes but in all areas. This will help you focus on your goals.
 - Talk to other people about careers you might find interesting. Try talking to your school counselor, teachers, recent college graduates who are working, professionals in the community, etc.
- 3. Participate in extracurricular activities.** Academics aren't everything. Explore your interests in a sport, school club, music or drama group, or community volunteer activity.
 - Remember that colleges would rather see real involvement in one activity than a loose connection to several of them.
 - If you're interested in playing sports in college, research the National College Athletic Association eligibility requirements. The NCAA requires completion of certain core courses; you can find the specifics at www.ncaaclearinghouse.net.
- 4. Meet with your high school counselor.** Your counselor knows how to help you get the most out of high school. Be sure to take some time during the school year to discuss post-high school plans with him or her.
- 5. Save for college.** It's not too late to put money aside for college. Every little bit helps!
- 6. Explore summer opportunities.** Look for a job, internship or volunteer position that will help you learn about a field of interest.

GRADE 10

- 1. Meet with your high school counselor — again.** Make sure you meet with your school counselor to ensure your course schedule is challenging enough to prepare you for college.
 - Check into any prerequisites for advanced-level junior- and senior-year courses.
- 2. Ask if the PSAT/NMSQT® is offered to 10th-graders.** While this test is usually given in the 11th grade, it is also often offered in the 10th grade. That's because it provides valuable feedback through the Student Score Report; you can then work on any academic weaknesses while there is still plenty of time to improve upon them.
- 3. Are you interested in attending a U.S. military academy?** If so, you should request a precandidate questionnaire.
- 4. Attend college and career fairs.** These often take place in the fall, at your school or in your area.
- 5. Keep up your participation in school activities or volunteer efforts.** Extracurricular activities can help you develop time-management skills and enrich your high school experience.
- 6. Tour college campuses.** If possible, take advantage of vacation or other family travel time to visit colleges and see what they're like.
 - Even if you have no interest in attending the college you are visiting, it will help you learn what to look for in a college.

