

College Planning Checklist

50 Critical Questions: You Have Answers



OK, parents may read this also, but please share this checklist with a student.

True or False: Successful students begin planning for college when they enter the 9th grade.

This is a trick question because *yes* many students and their parents begin seriously planning for college as soon as they enter high school. But the answer is also *no* because increasingly successful students actually begin planning for college much sooner.

Welcome to the world of GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs). GEAR UP services are provided in selected schools throughout the country. GEAR UP begins working with students in 6th grade to develop awareness about the importance of planning for college, which begins with taking school seriously and working really hard to get good grades.

Let's begin with GEAR UP basics: Why Go to College? Do some research. You can begin answering this question by considering the 2001 earnings data from the U.S. Census bureau:

High school dropout	--	\$22,100 a year
High school graduate	--	\$30,056 a year
College graduate	--	\$54,704 a year

You might also consider whether you want an hourly wage job-- such as staffing a fast food restaurant, where you pretty much show up and serve the public OR having a career--such as teaching or engineering, journalism, medicine or law, where you will have opportunities to grow and move up. Of course, there are management jobs in the fast food industry, and college coursework is a certain way to prepare for them.

Preparing for College: Grades 7-8

What can students do before they get to high school to prepare for college? Yes answers provided on the following checklist indicate that you are already doing the job:

- 1. Do you consider yourself a good student?
- 2. Do your teachers consider you a good student?
- 3. Are you well organized? Do you have a notebook with sections or different notebooks for each subject? Do you use a planner to record your assignments each day?
- 4. Do you use your planner to remind you of work that needs to be done? Do you complete all homework each night?
- 5. Do you arrive at each class each day with your books, notebook, and writing utensil?
- 6. Do you attend school every day? (Do you miss fewer than 3 days of school each marking period?)
- 7. Are you taking an honors class?
- 8. Are you preparing to take Algebra 1 (7th grade) or taking Algebra 1 (8th grade)?
- 9. Are you typically on the school's honor roll 3 marking periods each year?
- 10. When you have a question or do not understand a lesson, do you ask the teacher to help you? Do you remain after school for extra help?
- 11. Have you begun thinking about the world of work and what you would like to do?

- ___ 12. Are you investigating high schools to determine which schools have the programs that most interest you? Have you attended a high school open-house? Are you talking to your parents/guardian about your interests and plans?
- ___ 13. Do you know the difference between a two year college and a four year college?
- ___ 14. Do you know the difference between a private college and a public college?
- ___ 15. Do you know the approximate costs to attend different colleges in Delaware?
- ___ 16. Do you save \$1.00 out of every \$5.00 that you earn or receive as a gift? Have you started your own college savings account? Have you enrolled in UPromise and established a 529 College Savings Account, which will allow you to contribute funds towards college costs when you make ordinary household purchases, such as groceries, gasoline, and school supplies? Visit www.upromise.com for more information.

If you answered yes fewer than 16 times, then get busy you have work ahead, but you are starting in time.

Preparing for College: Grade 9

Once you are in high school, the decisions you make each day really do matter.

Here are the critical questions:

- ___ 17. Can you answer yes to all 16 questions above?
- ___ 18. Have you visited your guidance counselor to get information that will help you select the best courses, based on your career interest or to help you determine a career interest?
- ___ 19. Are you involved in school clubs or service organizations? Have you identified an organization or program that can help you plan for college?
- ___ 20. Are you adding 10 new words a week to your vocabulary? Are you and a friend testing each other on new words?
- ___ 21. Have you visited your counselor to get information for signing up for the PSAT? Are you signed up to take an SAT prep course offered by your school or college prep program?
- ___ 22. Have you completed a four year course plan? Check your plan to make certain that it contains the following:
- **Math:** You should earn a high school credit for Algebra 1 by the end of your 9th grade year. Colleges require that you have three years of math, including Algebra I and II and Geometry. If you are planning a career as a doctor, an engineer, a computer programmer or in any science field, you should also take Advanced Algebra, Pre-calculus, and/or Calculus. You will need to take four years of high school math if you want a career in a science related field.
 - **English/Language Arts:** To graduate from high school, you will need four years of English, and colleges require that you have four years of English, including composition and literature. Remedial courses do not count, and you should take steps to avoid being assigned to any remedial classes. Honors and Advanced Placement courses are encouraged because they are more rigorous and they help you prepare for the level of work that you will have in college.
 - **Science:** College bound students are encouraged to take at least three years of science. Take courses with lab experiences, such as Biology and Chemistry. You might also have the opportunity to take Physical Science and Physics.
 - **Social Science:** Take three years of Social Science. Take an Honors or AP History course, if you can. College will expect a minimum of two years of high school Social Science credit.
 - **Foreign Language:** Take two years of a single language. Many schools prefer that applicants have three years of their foreign language. Native Spanish speakers should definitely prepare for Honors and Advanced Placement study in Spanish.

HIGH SCHOOL COURSE PLANNING CHART

This chart can be used to plan your classes for the next four years! First plan your 9th grade classes and then pencil in the classes you expect to take in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades. These choices may change later, depending upon your interests and career plans. As you learn more about your career interests, you will be able to adjust your course plans to include pre-requisites for specific college majors.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS	(4 years)	9	10	11	12

Literature, Grammar, Writing, Reading, Speech

MATHEMATICS	(3 years)	9	10	11	12

Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2, Trigonometry, Precalculus, Calculus

NATURAL SCIENCES	(3 years, include lab experience)	9	10	11	12

Biology, Physical Science, Chemistry, Physics

SOCIAL SCIENCES	(3 years)	9	10	11	12

History, Sociology, Psychology

FOREIGN LANGUAGE	(3 years)	9	10	11	12

Two years of the same language

ART, MUSIC, THEATRE, COMPUTER SCIENCE	(0)	9	10	11	12

PHYSICAL EDUCATION	(see state requirements)	9	10	11	12

Preparing for College: Grade 10

OK now you are really on the college planning path, so your activities this year matter more than ever.

- ___ 23. Can you answer yes to questions 1-22?
- ___ 24. Are you working or volunteering in a field in which you have some interest? Have you met and talked to someone who works in a career in which you are interested? Do you know the things that are best about your planned career and do you know the things that are least attractive about your planned career?
- ___ 25. Have you scheduled a test date for taking the PSAT?
- ___ 26. Have you visited your counselor to review your courses and to make certain that you are on track to take required courses?
- ___ 27. Have you visited the counselor or library to get copies of PSAT and SAT practice tests?
- ___ 28. Have you visited the campuses of Delaware Technical and Community College, Delaware State University in Dover, and the University of Delaware? You may answer yes to this question, if you have visited the web sites of these colleges to learn about their admissions procedures and programs of study.
- ___ 29. Do you have a schedule of when representatives of different colleges will visit your school? Have you signed-up to meet with college representatives?
- ___ 30. Have you registered for the SAT II Subject Tests or AP (Advanced Placement) tests in your current Honors or AP courses such as Biology or Spanish? It is best to take these tests as soon as you complete the courses.
- ___ 31. Have you obtained a social security number for use on your college and financial aid applications?
- ___ 32. Are you involved in a college prep program? Will you have an opportunity to spend time on campus studying and preparing for college during the summer?

Preparing for College: Grade 11

Fall

- ___ 33. Can you answer yes to questions 1-32?
- ___ 34. Are you taking an AP course this year?
- ___ 35. Have you registered to take the Spring SAT?
- ___ 36. Have you begun reviewing a SAT Preparation book? You should spend 20-30 minutes an evening working on sections of the preparation book. You can get a SAT Review book from a bookstore or a library.
- ___ 37. If you are working, are you saving at least one-half of your earnings?

Spring

- ___ 38. Have you begun narrowing your list of colleges to determine which schools you want to visit? Have you attended a College Night Program where you can collect college publications and talk with admissions representatives about their schools? These are typically held in the fall. You can also make virtual visits by visiting schools online or viewing admissions videos.
- ___ 39. Have you received view books and applications from schools in which you are most interested? Most schools now publish applications on their websites and even allow you to apply online. There is also a common application, which you can view online at www.commonapp.org
- ___ 40. Have you requested letters of recommendation from teachers? You should write a resume and share it with teachers who agree to write letters for you.
- ___ 41. Have you begun looking for scholarships? Contact the Delaware Higher Education Commission at www.doe.state.de.us/high-ed/ to get complete information on state scholarships.

Review the Delaware Scholarship Compendium for information on scholarships that are specifically designed for Delaware residents.

___ 42. Have you asked the following sources about scholarships that they might offer? Have you done a free scholarship search at www.EducationPlanner.org to calendar deadlines for applications?

- Your parents' employers
- Your employer (if you have a part-time job)
- An organization for which you volunteered
- Your church
- Local chapters of sororities and fraternities

___ 43. Have you reviewed a copy of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)? You can find information on federal aid and view forms online at www.studentaid.ed.gov

___ 44. Have you discussed a plan for paying for college with your parents/guardians? Plan to attend a Financial Aid presentation where you can learn about the financial aid process and get specific information to help you plan for putting your package together. These are typically offered in January and February.

Preparing for College: Grade 12

Fall

___ 45. Can you answer yes to questions 1-43?

___ 46. If your SAT score is less than the score needed for admission to schools in which you are interested, have you signed up to take the SAT again in November or December?

___ 47. Have you created a filing system (binder or expandable file with pocket folders) to keep up with your copies of applications submitted (keep either an electronic copy or a paper copy), scholarships for which you apply, and important information received from prospective colleges.

___ 48. Have you created a planning calendar, which includes your test dates, application deadlines, scholarship application deadlines, and financial aid application deadlines? Create a month-by-month plan of action that includes activities to complete each week. Don't forget to schedule requests for and submission of letters and transcripts needed by schools to process your application.

___ 49. Are you focused on your studies, making the best grades possible, in the most challenging courses that you can handle? Remember these are the grades on which colleges will focus first.

___ 50. Are you all set to submit complete applications for admissions, scholarships, and financial aid? Most students apply to 3-6 schools. Remember you can continue to search for scholarships on www.EducationPlanner.org and check the on-line Delaware Scholarship Compendium for the most recently offered scholarships.

- Don't forget to write a good college essay and have someone edit it for grammar and sentence structure.
- Don't forget to set up a filing system for keeping up with information from the college that you will actually attend.

The following <i>Senior Year Monthly Strategy</i> was adapted from <i>Applying to College</i> , A LifeWorks Guide by Casey Watts:
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October Tasks

- ✓ Visit with your counselor to determine exactly how transcripts and applications are mailed.
- ✓ Photocopy all application forms before you fill them out, and use the duplicate as a worksheet
- ✓ Have your counselor, English teacher, parent, Upward Bound counselor or other capable adult check your college application essays.
- ✓ Mail early decision applications, if you are applying for early decision.
- ✓ Prepare for the November or December SAT retest.

November Tasks

- ✓ Check with your counselor to make certain that you have completed the forms to submit your SAT I and SAT II scores to your colleges of choice.

- ✓ Check with the people who have agreed to write your letters to make certain that they have the appropriate forms, stamped envelopes, and reminders about the due dates.
- ✓ Confirm that your transcript has been sent to your colleges of choice.
- ✓ Complete all remaining applications, making copies of everything. File copies accordingly in the filing system that you create. Keep everything in a designated place in your home.
- ✓ Make arrangements for overnight visits to the colleges in which you are most interested.
- ✓ Write and mail thank you notes to everyone who wrote a letter of recommendation for you.

December Tasks

- ✓ Take the SAT retest (if required).
- ✓ Verify with your counselor that all applications, transcripts, and test scores have been sent to prospective colleges.
- ✓ Complete any unfinished applications. Don't forget to make copies of everything
- ✓ Check with the prospective colleges to find out which financial aid forms they require.
- ✓ Begin completing and submitting scholarship applications. Keep copies.
- ✓ Pick up your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) from your counselor.

January Tasks

- ✓ Complete additional applications for colleges with later deadlines or rolling admissions.
- ✓ Complete and submit the FAFSA and other required financial forms.
- ✓ Check with the colleges' admissions offices to verify they have received all required materials from you and your high school.

February Tasks

- ✓ Send a mid year report to colleges anywhere you have a pending application.
- ✓ Complete submission of all financial aid applications.
- ✓ Send updates to colleges to notify them of additional honors or accomplishments.

March Tasks

- ✓ Register for any Advanced Placement (AP) tests that you want to take before graduation.
- ✓ Watch the mail for your Student Aid Report. Respond immediately if additional information or corrections are required.
- ✓ Contact the Financial Aid offices at the colleges where your application is pending to determine if they require any additional information.
- ✓ Continue applying for state, private, and other scholarship opportunities.

April Tasks

- ✓ Discuss your acceptances and financial aid offers with your family and guidance counselor.
- ✓ Call the financial aid office when you need additional information about the level or types of financial aid offered.
- ✓ Call or write to schools if you want to reject their offers.
- ✓ Decide which offer to accept.
- ✓ Send your deposit to signal your acceptance by the deadline set by the school.

May Tasks

- ✓ Take AP exams.
- ✓ Continue to look for scholarships and financial assistance.

References

American Education Services Planner

www.educationplanner.com

Applying to College A Planning Guide for Students by Casey Watts

A LifeWorks Guide

Preparing Your Child for College

www.ed.gov/pubs

Federal Student Aid

www.studentaid.ed.gov

Mapping Your Future

www.mapping-your-future.org

Make High School Count

www.act.org

Delaware Higher Education Commission

www.doe.state.de.us/high-ed/