

Twelfth Grade College-Planning Checklist

FALL

Academics

Continue to work hard. Grades remain important, as does the rigor of your classes. The college you decide to attend will want to see your final transcript.

Visit the College Advisers (if at your school)

Tests

August: Register now. If you still need to take the SAT or ACT, get this out of the way as early as you can. Do some test prep beforehand.

If any of your schools require SAT Subject Tests, take them in October.

Create a Common App Account

August: Create an account at www.commonapp.org. Fill in your personal and family info and list the schools you might apply to in your dashboard. You can keep adding or deleting schools as you refine your list. Arrange them by deadline. Make sure you note whether any schools require supplemental essays. Note that not all schools accept the Common App (UGA does not, but they do accept the Coalition App), but more than 900 do.

Portfolio Reviews and Auditions

If you need these, start planning and scheduling now. Your teachers can help.

Resume

Early September: If you don't have a resume, create one now. You will need it when you ask for letters of recommendation, and it will also help you when you're filling out the Common App or other applications.

Create a Parchment Account

Mid September: Some schools use the website Parchment to send transcripts electronically. Set up your account now at www.parchment.com. Then you'll be ready to quickly request that your transcript be sent to the schools you apply to.

Write Your Common App Essay and Supplemental Essays

August-October: The Common App requires you to write an essay. If you don't know how to get started or if you'd like help developing your essay, editing or proofing, ask for help.

Some schools require additional supplemental essays. Check the requirements carefully. The more selective the school, the more likely you will have to write extra essays. Give yourself plenty of time (which is easier to plan if you know how many you'll have to do). Even if you don't think you need much help, please ask someone (teacher, parent, friend, CCC volunteer, College Adviser, etc.) to proof all your essays before you send them.

Letters of Recommendation

Mid September: Most schools require one counselor and two teacher recommendations, but check your schools to see if any require more. Contact two junior-year teachers of core subjects (English, science, math, social studies) and ask if they'd be willing to write a letter of recommendation. If they agree, provide your resume and let them know when your first application is due. If you asked teachers last spring to write a recommendation, remind them politely now (don't expect them to have written it over the summer) by email or in person, and provide another copy of your resume.

Ask your counselor for a letter of recommendation as well. Colleges understand that most high school counselors serve hundreds of students, so they don't expect them to know you personally. The counselor will speak to your academic record in the context of the school. Provide your resume to the counselor when you ask. Be sure to thank teachers and counselors!

College Visits

If any schools on your list are visiting your school, meet the rep, who is likely the person who will first read your application. But don't limit yourself to schools on your list—you may learn about a school you hadn't considered that turns out to be a great fit for you.

Continue to visit colleges on your list if you can. If you don't have a chance to see them all before you apply, you can still visit in the spring if you're admitted.

Clean Up Your Online Image

Create professional-sounding email accounts (sue.smith@gmail.com, for example, not sexy.kitty@gmail.com). Do you have potentially embarrassing photos or angry rants on social media? Delete them now.

Complete the FAFSA

October 1: The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) becomes available on October 1. Parents should complete this as soon as possible at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Every student must have this on file whether you think you qualify for aid or not! You'll need it for HOPE. You can link it to your IRS tax return, and the information will be filled in automatically.

Refine Your College List

If you have not yet completed (or begun) your college list, compile a list of potential schools by visiting one of the many college search engines out there, such as Collegexpress, Cappex, College Board, College Navigator, College Confidential, or Unigo. GAFutures (formerly Georgia College 411) is great for in-state searches. Find links on the college adviser website. Type in what you're looking for, and these sites generate a list of potential matches.

If you have a long list, begin to narrow it down. Delete any schools you wouldn't actually happily attend. Shoot for 5 to 9 schools to apply to. Include some reach, probable, and safety schools, based on GPA and test scores as well as cost. Don't rule out schools because of cost, though; financial aid is often available. Check to see how much merit aid your schools offer.

Scholarships

Most financial aid will come from the school you attend. Check to see if you're automatically considered for scholarships when you apply or if a separate application is required. Consider applying to Honors programs at your schools. Be aware of outside scholarship opportunities. Many have fall deadlines.

Apply to College!

October-January: All the pieces are in place. It's time to apply. Complete the application online (on Common App, Coalition App, school's website, etc.), attach the essay or essays, choose your recommenders (they will have uploaded their recommendations to your Common App account), take a deep breath, and hit "submit." Note that each school on the Common App has a separate application fee, although waivers are available—see your counselor.

Send Test Scores and Transcript

Have your ACT or SAT scores sent to each school you apply to (if you didn't designate a school when you took the test, log into your ACT or SAT account to request scores be sent, for a small fee). Visit Parchment to send your transcript to each school (this is free).

Pay Close Attention to Application Deadlines

Early Action (EA) and Early Decision (ED) deadlines come as early as mid-October. Regular admission deadlines are usually around the first of the year. Don't wait until the last minute. Remember that EA is not binding, but if you apply to a school ED and are accepted, you are obligated to attend.

SPRING

Hear from Colleges

EA or ED applications usually receive a response before winter break (GA Tech's EA responses don't go out until January). If you're accepted ED, you must withdraw other applications. You'll continue to hear about Regular Decision applications throughout the spring. Celebrate every acceptance!

Financial Aid

When you receive a letter of acceptance, you should receive a financial aid package as well. Each school will offer you a combination of scholarships or grants (which don't have to be paid back), loans (which do), and possibly work-study. Call the financial aid office with any questions. Ask if there are other scholarships you can apply for or if there's any more aid available; schools can sometime find more funds, especially if your financial situation has changed.

CSS Profile

In addition to the FAFSA, some private schools also require the CSS Profile, which is a more in-depth picture of your financial situation than the FAFSA. Check the deadlines at your schools—it's often due around February 1.

HOPE and Zell Miller Scholarships

If staying in-state, verify whether you are eligible for a HOPE or Zell Miller Scholarship. Make sure Grady has your social security number; this must be on file before the end of the school year in order for you to receive HOPE.

Pell Grants and Achieve Atlanta Scholarships

These are need-based grants. If you're eligible, you can receive up to \$6,195 per year for a Pell Grant (a federal program), and \$5,000 per year for an Achieve Atlanta Scholarship (for APS students). Complete FAFSA to be eligible.

Private Scholarships

If there is a shortfall between the financial aid a school offers and what you can afford to pay, look for additional scholarships. There are thousands available. Many require an essay and have to be renewed each year. There are many search engines, such as Fastweb, College Board, and others, to help you find them. Never pay to do an online search. Check the CCC website for links.

Make Final Visits

If you didn't get to visit all your colleges earlier or if you want to visit your top picks again, plan a spring break trip to the colleges where you've been admitted.

Make Your Decision

May 1: Congratulations! You've received your decisions and compared financial aid packages. It's time to make your final decision and pay a deposit to your chosen college. Don't forget to visit Parchment and send your final transcript.