

# Chapter 1:

## Preparing for Higher Education

Most students and parents know that education after high school provides the skills you need to succeed both professionally and personally:

**Knowledge.** A college education teaches students to think critically and abstractly, to express thoughts and opinions, and to weigh options and make informed decisions. It helps them learn how to find and use information.

**Potential.** College helps students explore their interests and understand the issues that connect communities, the nation and the world.

**Opportunity.** Critical thinking and new technology skills are vital for success and advancement in today's workforce and provide students with more career and job options.

**Income.** A person with a college degree typically has a higher income and is less likely to be unemployed or underemployed than someone with less education.

But higher education doesn't just happen. It requires careful academic and financial preparation by both students and families.

### Career and Education Resources

There are many resources you can use to help students learn and understand the connection between careers and education, including two specific to Minnesota:

- The **Internet System for Education and Employment Knowledge (ISEEK)** is an online resource that provides information on careers and higher education options in Minnesota. Visit [www.iseek.org](http://www.iseek.org) to learn more.
- The Office of Higher Education website offers information on preparing, selecting and paying for college. Visit [www.getreadyforcollege.org](http://www.getreadyforcollege.org) to learn more.

## Recommended High School Classes

Too many students leave high school unprepared for college because they only take those classes needed to meet basic graduation requirements. Many college-bound students also avoid more difficult courses that might lower their grade point average even though a higher grade point average is less important than challenging coursework on a transcript. College admissions offices weigh grades and rankings against a course's level of difficulty.

### Language Arts

People who succeed are people who can read and write. Everyone must be able to speak clearly and write effectively. Students should prepare by taking as many classes in writing, speaking and literature as they can fit into their schedule. **Recommended: 4 years**

### Mathematics

Everyone uses numbers and logic to analyze the world, think logically and solve problems. All students should take two years of algebra and one year of geometry. **Recommended: 4 years**

### Science

Learning how things work. Understanding the natural world. And discovering the principles that guide our world. Biology, chemistry and physics are good subjects to prepare students for college, especially in scientific and technical careers. **Recommended: 3 years**

### Social Studies

Classes in geography, civics, history and economics will help students understand what is happening in the world and their place in it. **Recommended: 3½ years**

### World Language

Studying another language helps students understand how other people live and think, learn more about their own culture, and connect with people from all over the world in college and in life. **Recommended: 2 years of a single language**

### The Arts

Art allows students to explore and appreciate their creativity as well as the creativity of others. Encourage students to take the opportunity to express themselves through music, drama, dance and the visual arts. **Recommended: 1 year**

### Electives

High school gives students the opportunity to explore their interests through optional classes. These classes allow students to explore and learn more about things that may interest them.

Make sure students also take at least one computer class. It may not be required for graduation, but all students need to know how to use computers in today's world.

## Earning College Credit While in High School

There are several ways high school students can earn college credit while in high school. Most of these programs are free to the student. Such programs provide advanced study to students who need more challenging courses, and it exposes them to the level of work that will be expected of them in college. It also can help reduce the overall cost of attending college. Some students have entered their freshman year with enough credits to be college sophomores.

**Advanced Placement (AP)** is a free program administered by The College Board that allows juniors and seniors to take free college-level courses at their high school. College credit can be earned by scoring high enough on a fee-based exam. In Minnesota, the exam is \$15 for qualified students who demonstrate financial need; otherwise, the student must pay \$87 per exam. For more information on AP courses, visit [www.collegeboard.com/ap](http://www.collegeboard.com/ap).

**College Level Examination Program (CLEP)** allows students to earn college credit by exam for what they already know by demonstrating college-level achievement. The tests are no longer free to Minnesota students. Colleges may have different rules about accepting credits for prior learning so students should check with the schools they are considering. For more information on the CLEP program, visit [www.collegeboard.com/clep/](http://www.collegeboard.com/clep/).

**International Baccalaureate (IB)** is a free two-year pre-college diploma program that helps prepare students age 16 to 19 for higher education in the United States and overseas. Students take the classes at their high school and choose the academic level (standard or advanced) at which they study each IB subject. Students are assessed internally in nearly all subjects as well as by external examiners and must complete a 4,000 word research essay, take an interdisciplinary theory of knowledge course, and participate in artistic pursuits, sports and community service work outside their regular academics. College credit earned through IB can be used internationally. For more information on the IB program, visit [www.ibo.org](http://www.ibo.org).

**Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO)** allows Minnesota high school juniors and seniors to take courses at a college at no cost (includes textbooks). Students attend class and complete the same assignments required of regular college students. The PSEO program is useful if your school has limited advanced courses or if students do not feel academically challenged by their regular high school classes. For more information on PSEO, visit [education.state.mn.us](http://education.state.mn.us); under *Student Success*, click on *College and Career Readiness* and then *Postsecondary Enrollment Options*.

- **College in the Schools (CIS)** is a form of Postsecondary Enrollment Options that allows juniors and seniors to take free college-level courses at their high school through partnerships between high schools and colleges and universities. Check with your local college or university to see if it participates. For general information on how most CIS programs work, visit [www.cce.umn.edu/College-in-the-Schools/](http://www.cce.umn.edu/College-in-the-Schools/).

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A handout comparing these programs is available at [www.getreadyforcollege.org/materials](http://www.getreadyforcollege.org/materials).

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## Aptitude or Assessment Tests

Aptitude or assessment tests (or interest inventories) are a helpful way for students to learn who they are, what they like and what they're good at. Such tests can help students determine which careers may be a good (or bad) fit based on their personality, interests and abilities.

### Common Tests

**Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)** helps students learn more about themselves to identify and explore possible civilian and military careers, and helps them develop a strategy to achieve their goals. For more information, visit [www.asvabprogram.com](http://www.asvabprogram.com).

**Campbell Interest and Skill Survey** is a career assessment that helps people explore how they fit into the world of work. For more information, visit [www.pearsonassessments.com/ciss.aspx](http://www.pearsonassessments.com/ciss.aspx).

**The Career Key** measures skills, abilities, talents, values, interests and personality to help people identify career possibilities. For more information, visit [www.careerkey.org](http://www.careerkey.org).

**Interest, Determination, Exploration and Assessment System (IDEAS)** is a short, self-scored inventory used to help people learn about their interests and personality, become familiar with careers and explore career paths that match their interests and aptitudes. IDEAS is available through the Minnesota Career Information System (MCIS), which is licensed to most high schools. For more information, visit [www.pearsonassessments.com/tests/ideas.htm](http://www.pearsonassessments.com/tests/ideas.htm).

**Keirsey Temperament Sorter (KTS)** examines personality and temperament to help people understand their learning styles and explore future career paths. A student version is available. For more information, visit [www.keirsey.com](http://www.keirsey.com).

**Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)** is a personality assessment instrument that helps people identify the natural strengths and personality preferences that guide their behavior, including how they interact with others, how they gather information and learn, how they make decisions and what types of activities energize and motivate them. For more information, visit <https://www.cpp.com/products/mbti/index.aspx>.

**O\*NET Career Exploration Tools** are a set of self-directed career exploration and assessment tools to help people consider and plan career options. The assessments include an ability and interest profiler. For more information, visit [www.onetcenter.org/tools.html](http://www.onetcenter.org/tools.html).

**Strong Interest Inventory** measures a broad range of interests and then compares these interests to those of people successfully employed in a variety of occupations. The results help students identify occupations that might be of interest to them as well as those in which they might excel. For more information, visit [www.cpp.com/products/strong/index.aspx](http://www.cpp.com/products/strong/index.aspx).

**It's important to stress to students that there are no right or wrong answers.** The purpose of an assessment is to help them understand themselves.

# College Counseling Calendar

For students with families unfamiliar with the higher education process, teachers and counselors may be the only source of advice and guidance regarding higher education. The following will help you guide all high school students on their path to college.

## Freshman Year (9th Grade)

### September - December

- Help students outline their curricular and extracurricular plans, and plot an academic program for their high school years that will prepare them for education beyond high school.
- Alert students to resources that can help them be academically successful (teacher/counselor help, peer tutors, community volunteers, library/Internet resources and so on).
- Assist students in practicing good study skills, either on their own or as part of the school curriculum.

### January - June

- Repeat student activities from previous years that relate to understanding the benefits of higher education, college options and the concept of financial aid.
- When possible, organize meetings with families and larger groups of parents to discuss college options as well as career and financial planning.
- Conduct career exploration activities with students.

## Sophomore Year (10th Grade)

### September - December

- Re-emphasize the resources available to help students with their high school academic and postsecondary planning.
- Have students attend the National College Fair as well as local college and career fairs.
- Help each student check high school graduation requirements. Make sure students take the high school courses that support their long-term goals.
- Make sure students take the ACT's PLAN test.

### January - June

- Schedule family meetings to discuss course selection, review academic progress and educational options, and answer any college-related questions.
- Help students understand the use and importance of college admissions tests.
- Help students identify a testing location for the College Board's PSAT/NMSQT.
- When possible, organize meetings with families and larger groups of parents to discuss college options as well as career and financial planning.
- Encourage students to explore Advanced Placement Courses, College in the Schools, International Baccalaureate, and Postsecondary Enrollment Options.

## Junior Year (11th Grade)

### September - December

- Have students attend the National College Fair as well as local college and career fairs.
- Help each student check high school graduation requirements. Make sure the student is taking the recommended high school courses.
- Help students register for the College Board's PSAT/NMSQT.

### January

- Help students gather information about their options and identify alternatives.
- Help students weigh the pros and cons of each alternative.

### February - June

- Encourage students to visit the colleges or universities they are considering.
- Provide information on the ACT, SAT or other admissions tests.
- Encourage students to explore Advanced Placement Courses, College in the Schools, International Baccalaureate, and Postsecondary Enrollment Options.

## Senior Year (12th Grade)

### September - December

- Have students attend the National College Fair as well as local college and career fairs.
- Help each student double-check high school graduation requirements.
- Remind students to take (or retake) the ACT or SAT.
- Remind students to double-check the application deadlines and entrance requirements for all colleges under consideration.
- Answer any questions students may have about applying to college.
- Encourage students to submit applications to their chosen colleges as soon as possible.
- Give each student or parent a free copy of *Paying for College: State & Federal Financial Aid Guide* or encourage them to visit [www.getreadyforcollege.org](http://www.getreadyforcollege.org).
- Have students apply for scholarships.

### January

- Direct students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid at [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov).

### February - April

- Remind students and parents to complete and submit the FAFSA.
- Encourage students to apply to college if they haven't already done so. It may not be too late.
- Remind students to keep track of all communications to and from schools, reply promptly and meet all deadlines.

### May - June

- Remind students to notify the colleges they have applied to but don't plan to attend.
- Make sure students have their final transcript sent to the college they plan to attend.

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Student and parent college planning guides are available in **Appendix B**.

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## Narrowing Down College Options

Choosing a college is an important and difficult decision. In the United States alone, there are more than 6,500 public and private institutions. To help narrow their options, it's useful for students to explore what they are looking for in a school. Common selection criteria include:

- academic program offerings and course selection
- athletics
- campus safety
- campus setting
- extracurricular activities and events
- faculty experience and expertise
- financial aid options and deadlines
- financial stability of college
- geographic location
- housing options and cost
- length, time and location of classes
- number of students enrolled
- percentage of graduates employed within one year
- percentage of students who graduate
- percentage of students who return the following year
- school facilities and equipment
- school or program reputation
- student body makeup
- student-to-faculty ratio
- support services
- transferring credits
- transportation options and cost
- tuition and fees

It's also important that students find a good academic fit. Students do best at a college where other students share similar academic abilities and objectives. The grade point average and admissions tests scores of entering freshmen from previous years may provide a good indication.

**If students are still having trouble deciding what's important**, ask them to think about and possibly write answers to the following questions:

- Why do I want to go to college?
- What do I want to get out of college?
- How will college help me work toward my goals?
- Which college will best/least help me work toward my goals?
- What are the advantages/disadvantages of going now rather than later?
- Does it matter how many students are enrolled with me?
- Do I want a student body with diverse ideas, viewpoints and backgrounds?
- In which type of setting am I most/least comfortable?

It's important that students don't eliminate schools solely because it's outside their comfort zone. The challenge of dealing with the unfamiliar can help the student grow as a person.

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A handout on choosing the right college is available in **Appendix B**.

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## Special Considerations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities and their parents need to be aware that the laws governing disability services for colleges and universities differ from those for high school, especially in the area of accommodation. Colleges are not required to provide the same level of accommodation as high schools, even if requested.

In college, it is the student's responsibility to request accommodation and provide documentation of the disability. The student must be his or her own advocate and work with the college disability office to determine which accommodations are necessary and reasonable. Students may be required to notify the instructor of each class when they require some form of accommodation.

A number of excellent resources have been developed to help students transition to college, including *Guidance and Career Counselors' Toolkit: Advising High School Students with Disabilities on Postsecondary Options* ([www.heath.gwu.edu/assets/33/toolkit.pdf](http://www.heath.gwu.edu/assets/33/toolkit.pdf)). The College Board's *College Counseling Sourcebook* ([store.collegeboard.com](http://store.collegeboard.com)) also includes a section with detailed information relevant to students with disabilities.

### Online Disability Resources

HEATH Resource Center	<a href="http://www.heath.gwu.edu">www.heath.gwu.edu</a>
Association on Higher Education and Disability	<a href="http://www.ahead.org">www.ahead.org</a>
National Center on Secondary Education and Transition	<a href="http://www.ncset.org">www.ncset.org</a>

### Choosing a College

Like non-disabled students, students with disabilities should search for colleges that fit their interests and career goals. Once they have identified several schools, students need to learn which types of disability accommodations and services those colleges provide. Some may provide comprehensive services while others may only provide basic services required by law. Because the college search involves additional steps, students with disabilities should begin their college search early in their junior year of high school.

Two college guidebooks have been published specifically for students with disabilities:

- *Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities or ADD* (Peterson's)
- *The K&W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities* (Princeton Review)

Students should not feel limited to the colleges included in these guides. All colleges are required by law to provide reasonable accommodation to students with disabilities.



## College Fairs

College fairs allow students to talk and interact with admission representatives from local and sometimes national colleges and universities. Fairs are a great opportunity for students to get answers to their admissions and financial aid questions, pick up school materials and to learn about the many education options that are available.

### Before the College Fair

Before students attend a college fair, it's helpful for them to do a little thinking and planning ahead of time. Encourage students to make a list of the colleges they are considering and the questions they need answered.

### During the College Fair

Once at the fair, students should visit with and pick up material from those colleges and universities that match their criteria, but they also should browse other similar schools that meet most of their criteria. It's important that students also take notes.

Make sure students also pick up information on financial aid. Most college fairs will have a financial aid area of some kind. If this is not available, the college admissions representatives may be able to provide basic financial aid information to the students. For detailed financial aid information, direct students to [www.getreadyforcollege.org](http://www.getreadyforcollege.org) or give them a copy of *Paying for College: State & Federal Financial Aid Guide*.

### After the College Fair

Encourage students to review and organize their notes and college information while it is still fresh in their minds. The longer they wait to do this, the harder it will be to remember details and distinguish one conversation from another. A good way to help students remember and digest information is to have them talk about it with friends or family.

Students also should follow up on what they learned by sending away for more information if they haven't already signed up for this while at the fair.

### Where to Learn About College Fairs

To learn about college fairs held in Minnesota, visit [www.mn-acac.org](http://www.mn-acac.org) (rollover *College Fairs* and select *Minnesota Education Fairs*) for a list of regional fairs or [www.nacacnet.org](http://www.nacacnet.org) (rollover *Events/Training* and select *College Fairs*) for information on the National College Fair held in the Twin Cities every fall.

If there isn't a college fair in your area, consider inviting college representatives to your school or arranging your own college fair.

## College Visits

Once students have identified what they want in a college, they can narrow their list of possible colleges down even further with a college visit.

### Online Visits

An online tour can provide students with a broad overview of the school's programs and facilities. It allows students to "visit" a large number of colleges in a short amount of time and eliminate those that are not of interest to them. It may include sights and sounds of college activities, interviews with students and faculty, a tour of the facilities, live webcams of different parts of the campus, interactive campus maps, blogs and more.

An effective online tour should give a student most of the information he or she needs to decide which colleges or programs deserve a closer look. The student can then schedule an affordable number of in-person tours to gather more information to make his or her final decision.

### In-Person Visits

An in-person tour allows the student to get an in-depth understanding of the personality and character of the college. It provides an opportunity for a student to gather all the information required to properly evaluate the school.

Campus visits are a vital part of making an informed selection of a school or college. No matter what a college or school program looks like on paper or online, there's no substitute for actually walking around campus, talking to professors and visiting the dorms. While campus visits aren't necessary, they are highly recommended, and most schools have organized visit programs.

Students shouldn't be afraid to wander around on their own to get a feel for the place and the people. Students also should check if the school has an extended campus visit program where prospective students stay overnight in the dormitory.

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A campus visit checklist is available in **Appendix B**.

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## Preparing for College Athletics

Students interested in playing college sports need to plan ahead academically and pay close attention to eligibility guidelines.

### National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

All high school athletes who want to compete at a four-year college must register with the Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse. The online registration should be completed and a transcript sent after the student's junior year of high school. Students should have ACT or SAT scores sent directly to the clearinghouse each time the tests are taken.

To be eligible for **Division I** athletics or to receive an athletics scholarship, students must:

- Graduate from high school;
- Complete the core courses (below);
- Earn a minimum required grade-point average in their core courses; and
- Earn a combined SAT or ACT sum score that matches their core-course GPA.

To be eligible for **Division II** athletics or to receive an athletics scholarship, students must:

- Graduate from high school;
- Complete the core courses (below);
- Earn a 2.0 grade-point average or better in their core courses; and
- Earn a combined SAT score of 820 (verbal and math scores only) or an ACT sum score of 68.

Division I	Division II
<b>4 years of English</b>	<b>3 years of English</b>
<b>3 years of math</b> (algebra I or higher level)	<b>2 years of math</b> (algebra I or higher level)
<b>2 years of natural or physical science</b> (including 1 year of lab science if offered by high school)	<b>2 years of natural or physical science</b> (including 1 year of lab science if offered by high school)
<b>1 additional year</b> of English, math or natural/physical science	<b>2 additional years</b> of English, math or natural/physical science
<b>2 years of social science</b>	<b>2 years of social science</b>
<b>4 years of extra core courses</b> (from any category above, or in a foreign language, non-doctrinal religion or philosophy)	<b>3 years of extra core courses</b> (from any category above, or in a foreign language, non-doctrinal religion or philosophy)
<b>16 Required Core Courses</b>	<b>14 Required Core Courses</b>

**PLEASE NOTE:** Beginning August 1, 2013, students planning to attend a Division II institution will be required to complete 16 core courses.

For more information, visit [www.ncaaclearinghouse.net](http://www.ncaaclearinghouse.net).

## National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA)

All high school athletes who want to compete at a two-year college should discuss their eligibility with the athletic personnel at the college where they want to attend. However, all entering student athletes must be either a high school graduate (or equivalent) or have completed one college term (12 credits) with a 1.75 GPA or higher.

Students must satisfy **one** of the following four requirements to be athletically eligible for the upcoming term:

- Pass a minimum of 12 quarter/semester hours with a 2.0 GPA or higher during the previous term of full-time enrollment.
- Pass an accumulation of quarter/semester hours equal to 12 multiplied by the number of quarters/semesters in which the student-athlete was previously enrolled full time with a GPA of 2.0 or higher.
- A first season participant must have a minimum accumulation of 36 quarter credit hours or 24 semester credit hours with a 2.0 GPA or higher for the initial term of participation, regardless of previous term or other accumulation requirements.  
(NOTE: This only establishes eligibility for the initial term, not subsequent terms.)
- A first or second season participant must have a minimum accumulation of (1) 54 quarter credit hours or 36 semester credit hours for a fall sport, (2) 63 quarter credit hours for a winter sport, or (3) 72 quarter credit hours or 48 semester credit hours for a spring sport with a 2.0 GPA or higher, regardless of previous term or other accumulation requirements.

Prior to the second season of participation in an NJCAA certified sport, student-athletes must have a minimum of 36 quarter credit hours or 24 semester credit hours with a 2.0 GPA or higher. If the student-athlete has been enrolled in two quarter terms or less, the second season requirement becomes 28 quarter hours with a 2.0 GPA or higher.

For more information, visit [www.njcaa.org](http://www.njcaa.org).

## National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)

The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics offers 13 sports and has 60,000 student-athletes participating at nearly 300 member colleges and universities throughout the United States and Canada. To be eligible, students must meet **two** of the following three requirements:

- Achieve a minimum score of 18 on the ACT or 860 on the SAT. The SAT score of 860 must be achieved on the Critical Reading and Math sections of the exam only. The test score must be achieved at a single test sitting. Residual tests are not acceptable. The ACT/SAT test must be taken prior to the beginning of the term in which the student initially participates.
- Achieve a minimum overall high school grade point average of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale.
- Graduate in the upper half of the student's high school graduating class. This is interpreted to mean the class ranking listed on the student's final high school transcript. High schools that do not rank students may elect to certify that the student has met this requirement.

For more information, visit [www.playnaia.org](http://www.playnaia.org).

## ROTC

Reserve Officers' Training Corps prepares students to become military officers in the Army, Navy, Air Force or Marines; the Coast Guard does not have a program. ROTC allows students to complete basic and officer training at the same time they are completing their college education. After graduation, ROTC students commit to serving in the military as a leader in active, reserve or guard. The length of service commitment varies, but is typically four years.

Each branch of the military offers competitive, merit-based scholarships up to the cost of tuition. The scholarships do not pay for room and board. ROTC students also receive a monthly stipend to pay for books, fees and living expenses. Students can apply during their junior or senior year of high school or during their freshman or sophomore year of college.

For more information, visit the following websites:

Air Force ROTC	<a href="http://www.afrotc.com">www.afrotc.com</a>
Army ROTC	<a href="http://www.goarmy.com/rotc/">www.goarmy.com/rotc/</a>
Navy & Marines ROTC	<a href="http://www.navy.com/navy/joining/education-opportunities/nrotc.html">www.navy.com/navy/joining/education-opportunities/nrotc.html</a>