

4

SESSION 4: GOING TO COLLEGE STARTS NOW: EXTRACURRICULAR INTERESTS AND ACTIVITIES

## ACTIVITY # 3: UNDERSTANDING THE BIG PICTURE

### *Opening Discussion:*

It is important for students to understand that each year in high school will count towards preparing for college. They should be aware of important events to be sure that they are taking advantage of every opportunity to be ready for applying to college by the fall of their senior year.

### *Activity/Handout:*

#### **College Planning Checklists—Grades 9–11**

### *Instructions:*

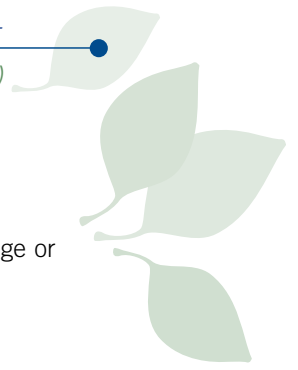
1. Give each of the students a copy of the “College Planning Checklist” and ask them to read it carefully, putting check marks where appropriate.
2. After giving them time to thoroughly read the Checklist, allow time for questions.



# COLLEGE PLANNING CHECKLIST

## FRESHMAN

- Plan a challenging program of classes to take.
  - The courses you take in high school show colleges what kind of goals you set for yourself. Are you signing up for advanced classes, honors sections, or accelerated sequences? Are you choosing electives that really stretch your mind and help you develop new abilities? Or are you doing just enough to get by? Colleges will be more impressed by respectable grades in challenging courses than by outstanding grades in easy ones.
  - Keep in mind the courses that colleges expect you to have completed for admission; your schedule should consist of at least four college preparatory classes per year, including:
    - Four years of English
    - Four years of math (through algebra II, trigonometry or higher)
    - Two–four years of world language
    - Three–four years of laboratory science
    - Two–four years of history/social studies
    - One year of fine arts
    - One year of electives from the above list
- Create a file of important documents and notes.
  - Copies of report cards, lists of awards and honors, and lists of school and community activities in which you are involved, including both paid and volunteer work, and descriptions of what you do.
- Get involved with academic enrichment programs, summer workshops, and camps with specialty focuses such as music, arts, and science.
  - Keep in mind that learning doesn't happen only in the classroom.
- Stay active in clubs, activities and sports that you enjoy.
  - Colleges look at more than just your academic record for admission. It's important that you demonstrate your abilities outside of the classroom too.



## SOPHOMORES

- Learn what resources are available to help you plan for college by meeting with your school's college or school counselor. Ask about catalogs, guidebooks, college search programs, and college websites.
- Begin your college search and visits.
  - Create a list of colleges and universities in which you are interested and discuss it with your parents and school counselor.
  - Find out about the different types of schools. Decide which characteristics are most important to you, such as the size of the school, distance from home, cost, and extracurricular activities.
- Continue extracurricular activities, as admission officers look at students' extracurricular activities when considering them for admission.
- Continue participation in academic enrichment programs, summer workshops and camps with specialty focuses, such as music, arts and science.
- Update your file of important documents and notes.
- Prepare for standardized testing.
  - Ask your counselor about taking the PLAN or PSAT test in the fall. These are valuable tests to help you prepare for the actual ACT and SAT, two college entrance exams, which you can take during your junior year.
  - Review PLAN or PSAT test results with your parents and school counselor.
  - Many students take SAT Subject Tests for college admission as early as sophomore year. These tests help you show colleges your proficiency in different subject areas.
- Sign up for junior year courses keeping in mind that you will want to challenge yourself with tougher courses. It will pay off in the long run not only by making you smarter, but by impressing colleges and helping you win scholarships.
- Talk to your counselor about registering for AP courses next year. AP, or Advanced Placement, courses grant college credit for achievement in exams during high school covering different college-level subjects.



## JUNIORS

### August

- Start your year off right by talking with your school counselor about the year ahead. Be sure to ask about test dates for the PLAN, PSAT, ACT, and SAT. You'll need to register up to six weeks ahead of time.
- Start investigating sources for financial aid. Take note of scholarship deadlines and plan accordingly.
- Develop a résumé—a record of your accomplishments, activities, and work experiences. This will be an important part of your college application.
- If you don't participate in many activities outside of class, now is the time to sign up. Consider clubs at schools, team sports, or even an after school job.

### September/October

- Take the PSAT. Even if you took the test during your sophomore year, taking the test this year will count towards National Merit Scholar consideration and will give you a better predictor for the SAT you take later this year or next.
- Sign up for ACT or SAT prep courses or use free test preparation resources on the Internet. If you can't find the best websites, ask your counselor. You will want to take the test at least once in the spring and again next fall during your senior year.

### November

- Sign up for the ACT and SAT, if you haven't already.

### December

- PSAT test results should be coming in. Review the results to learn more about your strengths and weaknesses and discuss them with your parents and counselor.
- Use My College Quick Start to access free personalized feedback, practice and college planning based on your PSAT/NMSQT results.

### January/February

- Meet with your school counselor again to develop your senior schedule. Ask how you can improve your college preparation.
- Talk to a counselor or teacher about registering for AP courses during your senior year.
- Register for a spring offering of the SAT and/or ACT
- Think about registering for SAT Subject Tests this spring. The final registration deadline for taking the test this academic year will be in April.



**March/April**

- Begin taking a more serious look at colleges and universities you are interested in attending. Make a file and gather information about academics, financial aid, and campus life to put in it. Go to college fairs and open houses and learn as much as you can from the Internet about schools so you can make the best decision possible.
- Begin planning college visits. Spring break is a good time because you can observe a campus when classes are going on. Even if they are not campuses that you think you would attend, it is important to get exposure to college campuses and the college experience.
- Think about lining up a summer job, internship, or co-op.
- If you are in AP courses, get ready for the AP exams next month.
- Develop a preliminary list of colleges that interest you. Contact them to request a viewbook and additional information.
- Take a look at some college applications and consider all of the different pieces of information you will need to compile.

**May**

- AP Examinations are given in high schools nationally this month. Make sure you are signed up and know the dates and times for your exams.
- Make a list of teachers, counselors, employers, and other adults who you might ask to write letters of recommendation for your college applications.