

# The Journey Begins Now

With all the financial aid forms, teacher recommendations, and the vast array of colleges out there, many students don't know how to start the daunting process of applying to a four-year university. Clicking on [www.firstinthefamily.org/checklist/](http://www.firstinthefamily.org/checklist/) can help. Students can download "planning checklists," which detail what goals and objectives college-bound students should achieve each year, from 9th through 12th grade. For instance, the ninth-grade checklist (part of which is shown below left)

suggests students let their teachers know they plan to go to college and make sure their courses are considered "college prep" by checking with their guidance counselor. The list encourages students to read as much as they can to become better thinkers and to get involved in activities they care about in or after school. It also recommends that ninth-graders begin to research colleges that match their interests. The 11th-grade checklist (part of which is shown below right) includes reminders such as checking test schedules for the PSAT, SAT, or ACT and offers additional tools like the College Board's "My Organizer." The checklist also features a valuable tip: If students can't afford to pay the fees for tests like the SAT or ACT, they should ask their counselor to help them apply for a waiver, so they can still take the test.

—EDITORS

## Your Planning Checklist

From *First in the Family: Advice About College from First-Generation Students – Your High School Years*, by Kathleen Cushman (Next Generation Press, 2005)

Grade 9

- Let your teachers know that you plan to go to college.
- Are your courses considered "college prep"? If you don't know, ask your guidance counselor to make sure they are.
- TIP** Colleges like to see challenging courses on your record, even if you get lower grades in them.
- TIP** If you want to play sports in college, you should know that college athletic teams have requirements about what high school courses you take.

Let your teachers get to know you better. For a start, write down the names of the ones you

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

Do you know other students like you who are planning to go to college? It helps to share. Write down the names of the ones you trust or admire most:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

Read as much as you can this year. It will give you new ideas, make you a better reader. Start a list of things you enjoy reading:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

Get involved in activities you care about—at school and after school (including clubs, group, jobs, etc.). List the ones that most appeal to you:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

Think about your current interests. What career fields might match up with your interests?

YOUR INTEREST

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

## Your Planning Checklist

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Grade 11

- At the start of the year, make a special folder marked "College." Keep everything connected to your college planning here—information, schedules, forms, and anything else.
- Check test schedules for PSAT, SAT or ACT, and register yourself for tests on "My Organizer" at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com).

**TIP** Many college entrance tests like these charge a fee. If you cannot afford the fee, ask your counselor to help you apply for a waiver, so you can take the test anyway.

- Find out where "test prep" courses are given, and sign up for them.

**TIP** The more familiar you are with college admission tests, the better you will do on them. Take practice tests as often as you can.

- Attend a college fair to get more information about colleges. You can also write, telephone, or use the Internet to ask colleges to send you materials.
- Don't delay college planning because your family cannot afford to pay for college. Low-income students receive funding—ask your school counselor about it.

Colleges want to see demanding courses on your grade 11 schedule. Use this space to list the most challenging courses that you can take this year:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_ 6. \_\_\_\_\_

- Junior year grades are very important in college admissions. If you are having trouble with your schoolwork, ask for help. If the teacher does not have time for you, ask another adult or a student who is doing well in that class.
- At the end of your junior year, you will need to ask two teachers to write you a letter of recommendation to go in your school file. Choose the teachers who know you the best (even if you didn't have them this year), and write their names here:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

**TIP** Don't be shy about asking for a recommendation. Just say, "You were an important teacher for me, and I wonder if you would consider writing me a college recommendation and giving it to my guidance counselor." (Only the college and the guidance office, not you, are allowed to see the recommendation.)

- Stay involved in the activities you most care about—at school, after school, and in the summer. Which ones do you most care about this year? List them here, along with any leadership role you have in them:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_