

# The College Quest Guide

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## Action Calendar



WHIZard

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# College Quest Today

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- The College Quest can be very stressful and competitive
  - Admission to better schools & financial aid at all schools
- Vital for each student to choose right college
  - Costs, transfer rate, graduation rate & job prospects
- Colleges prefer students with both strong academics *PLUS* meaningful extracurricular activities
- Every College Quest is unique
- Key is planning, attention to detail, and timely actions
- Best time to start is before the 10th grade
- Seek and take advantage of all available advice & help

# College Quest Calendar

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- **Vital to organize, record and track actions & due dates for each school**
- **Many sample calendars are available on the internet**
- **Your school guidance counselors can help**
- **Handout with calendarized actions adapted from personal experience and the following sources:**
  - [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)
  - [www.unigo.com](http://www.unigo.com)
  - [www.collegeview.com](http://www.collegeview.com)
  - [www.collegeprep101.com](http://www.collegeprep101.com)

# Before 10th Grade ...

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- Parents, start student *Brag Sheet*
- Meet with guidance counselor(s) to plan high school courses and optional activities for college preparation
- Enroll in most challenging courses appropriate, including foreign language, science, and math (“*The Math Track*”)
- Focus on courses to build GPA -- 9th grade counts!
- Apply & participate in optional academic programs, such as science fairs, speech contests, Duke TIP, robotics clubs, etc.
- Start or continue participation in extra-curricular programs, e.g., volunteer services, athletics, music & scouting
- Talk with friends about colleges and careers after college
- Broaden your “world view”: visit museums & art galleries, read, travel
- For “Academically Focused” students and families:
  - Begin SAT preparations; take SAT yearly
  - Target placement in best high school that ‘fits’ student

# In 10th Grade ...

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## September

- Talk with guidance counselor about taking PSAT, careers/ majors, course selection & optional enrichment activities

## October

- Take PSAT in October for practice

## Rest of Year

- Focus on building GPA; use/obtain additional help as needed
- Continue with optional academic & extra-curricular programs
- Consider taking the SAT in May (especially if taking Algebra II)
- Ensure you are enrolled in AP class(es) next year
- Start your own detailed *College Quest* Action Calendar
- Attend HS college fairs
- Consider enrolling in on-campus college summer program
- Start visiting colleges (no later than spring or early summer)
- Develop list of possible schools, majors and key HS courses
- Parents, update student *Brag Sheet*

# **In 11th Grade ...**

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## **September**

- **Talk with guidance counselor about credits needed to graduate; course selection, career options, SAT vs. ACT exams, scholarships & optional activities**
- **Continue with optional academic & extra-curricular programs**
- **Plan a testing schedule for the school year, including PSAT, AP exams, SAT, ACT, SAT Subject Tests; register for exams**
- **Focus on building GPA; this year's grades are very important**
- **Enroll in an SAT prep course (or take a refresher course)**

## **October**

- **Take PSAT (Best students can earn scholarships!)**
- **Take SAT exam (lock in a solid math score)**
- **Establish initial criteria for your college selection**
- **Athletes: Obtain NCAA initial eligibility forms**
- **Start search for financial aid and scholarships**
- **Update list of candidate schools and majors**

# In 11th Grade ...

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## December

- Receive results of PSAT; update financial aid plan
- Parents, update student *Brag Sheet*

## January - February

- Research & register for on-campus college summer programs
- Meet with guidance counselor to update status and plans
- February is Financial Aid Awareness Month. Participate & request information on scholarship criteria, deadlines, etc.

## Spring Break

- Visit colleges of interest. Be sure to meet with advisors in possible major fields of study.
- Draft list of candidates to write recommendation letters

## April

- Refine list of possible schools and majors
- Register for SAT, ACT and/or SAT Subject Tests in May or June
- Develop specific plan for financial aid

# In 11th Grade ...

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## May & June

- Take AP exam(s), SAT, ACT and/or SAT Subject Tests
- Meet with guidance counselor to update status and plans
- Request letters of recommendation from teachers
- Focus on doing well on final exams; get help as needed
- Update student *Brag Sheet* and create/update Student Resume

## Summer

- Visit top preferred schools. Meet with admissions representative & advisors in major fields of study. Send thank you notes afterward!
- Request school specific details on applications and financial aid
- Finalize short list of colleges: safety, match and reach (up to 8)
- Decide on regular admission versus early decision or action
- Update your *College Quest* Action Calendar with deadlines for each school, scholarship, and aid program
- Register for fall SAT, ACT and/or SAT Subject Tests
- Participate in extracurricular programs, volunteer, work part time, etc.
- Attend on-campus summer college program

# 12th Grade ...

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## September

- **Talk with guidance counselor about your graduation status, college list, deadlines, process for requesting HS transcript and recommendation letters**
- **Refine your college list**
- **Request (additional) recommendation letters**
- **Request HS transcripts be sent to top choice schools**
- **Start your application now, if you are planning on early decision/action or applying for financial aid**
- **Retake ACT (if chosen)**
- **Start your application essays; get pre-writing advice**
- **Update student *Brag Sheet* and Resume; provide to those writing letters of recommendation**
- **Continue to work on financial aid options; obtain all applications and understand deadlines**
- **Update your *College Quest Action Calendar***

# 12th Grade ...

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## October & November

- (Re)Take SAT and/or ACT (and SAT Subject Tests if needed)
- Have your transmittal letters and essays reviewed  
*“Even Hemingway had an editor.”*
- Complete and file early decision/action applications and regular decision applications (make copies before mailing); check that all application materials have been received
- Request test scores be sent to all colleges on short list
- Complete and file financial aid & scholarship forms as needed
- Keep your grade up - colleges will get your final transcript
- Send thank you notes to those writing letters of recommendation

## December

- Meet with guidance counselor to ensure all in on track
- Get a FAFSA form before holiday break
- Receive response to early decision/action application
- Schedule any required college admission interviews
- Complete and file all remaining applications

# 12th Grade ...

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## January & February

- **Contact schools to confirm that all application materials have been received**
- **Prepare parental Federal income tax returns early, so figures are available for use in FAFSA (you do not have to actually submit forms to IRS early)**
- **Complete FAFSA as soon after Jan 1 as possible**
- **Retake SAT or ACT if needed to improve scores**
- **February is Financial Aid Awareness Month. Participate and obtain information on scholarship criteria, deadlines, etc.**
- **Complete remaining financial aid applications, including scholarship applications, for each school**
- **Receive and review SAR (Student Aid Report). Correct any errors and return immediately.**

# 12th Grade ...

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## March & April

- **Maintain GPA ... avoid possible “senioritis”**
- **Start looking for summer jobs or internships**
- **Review admissions & aid decisions. Compare financial aid packages carefully; accept by deadline or appeal**
- **Visit schools again if needed to finalize your decision**
- **Meet with guidance counselor as needed**
- **Make final decision & mail enrollment forms with deposit by May 1**
- **Study for AP exams in May**

## May & June

- **Apply for housing at selected school**
- **Take AP exams**
- **If needed, pursue and complete college loan forms**
- **Ensure final HS transcript is sent to selected school**
- **Graduate! Celebrate! Be Safe!**

# Some Resources and References

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- [www.CFNC.org](http://www.CFNC.org) (College Foundation of NC; start here)
- [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) (SAT testing, calendars, advice, etc.)
- [www.act.com](http://www.act.com) (ACT testing, advice)
- [www.unigo.com](http://www.unigo.com) (student reviews & tours, advice)
- [www.collegeview.com](http://www.collegeview.com) (advice, search, calendars, checklists)
- [http://www.offtocollege.com](http://http://www.offtocollege.com) (advice, search, calendars)
- [www.collegeprep101.com](http://www.collegeprep101.com) (advice, calendars, checklists)
- [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com) (reviews, calendars, advice)
- [www.popecenter.org/studentguide](http://www.popecenter.org/studentguide) (guide to scholarships)
- [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) (financial aid)
- [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com) (financial aid)
- [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org) (financial aid)
- [www.salliemae.com](http://www.salliemae.com) (financial aid)
- [www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org) (learning disabilities)
- [www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org) (athletes)
- Town of Cary Parks & Recreation: Campus Crusin' 101

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**Good Luck on  
Your Personal  
College Quest  
from**



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