

Junior Year College Admission Strategy – 14 Steps to Success –

There are several tasks that should be completed as part of your Junior Year Strategy. Completing these tasks will help build your student qualifications and prepare you for the college application and financial aid processes. Below is a list of the most important junior year tasks; it is highly recommended you review these tasks and make every effort to implement them during your junior year.

- 1. Study hard to earn top grades.** Junior year grades are the most important grades for getting accepted to college. They show college admission officers how well you are able to handle advanced, upper-level courses. Junior year courses are the highest-level courses you will take before applying to college in the fall of your senior year; you must challenge yourself, study hard, and earn top grades to show you are a serious student who wants to excel.

In addition, grades are used by colleges and organizations to determine which students deserve merit-based scholarships and grants (free money). Even if your grades haven't been the best, try hard to improve; college admission officers like to see upward trends in grades.

- 2. Take the most challenging course curriculum you can handle.** One of the most important factors college admission officers look for in student applicants is the difficulty of their curriculum. At many colleges and universities, the importance of students challenging themselves with difficult classes is second only to student's grade point average. Register for the most difficult classes you are able to manage and still earn A's; take as many Advanced Placement and Honors classes as you can (and International Baccalaureate classes, if offered by your high school).
- 3. Maximize the value of your extracurricular activities.** Extracurricular activities should demonstrate meaningful and long-term involvement in things you are passionate about (and ideally have been involved with during freshman and sophomore years). Colleges want students who demonstrate in-depth, consistent involvement in activities. Activities can be of any type because colleges and universities need committed students and leaders in every field of interest.

To maximize the value of your extracurricular activities in the eyes of college admission officers, be a leader in a few activities – lead a team, be an officer in a club or organization, start a project, or run for class office. Demonstrate initiative, commitment, and leadership. College admission officers love students with leadership skills and determination; including such qualities on college applications will be very impressive. Remember, college admission officers consider *leadership* to be the most sought-after student qualification.

Also, try to develop and demonstrate uniqueness through your activities. Doing this will increase your value to colleges and your chances for getting accepted.

- 4. Develop adult advocates.** Create and develop courteous, respectful relationships with high school teachers, counselors, coaches (if you play sports), and other adults. Building and maintaining excellent relationships with adults will lead to greater support from them during your senior year and to stronger letters of recommendation.

In addition, develop advocates during college campus visits; meet and discuss academic programs with professor(s) and demonstrate the personal qualities college representatives are seeking – be engaging, enthusiastic and caring.

- 5. Organization is a must.** During your junior year, you probably will receive and gather numerous college brochures, pamphlets, and other reference materials. Create filing systems to store both paper documents and electronic documents. This will enable you and your parents to easily store and retrieve information.
- 6. Students and parents: Take actions to maximize the potential for receiving scholarships and grants (free money).**

STUDENTS - Earn top grades; the higher your cumulative grade point average, the greater your potential for winning top-dollar scholarships. Excellent grades demonstrate to colleges and private scholarship sponsors you deserve to receive scholarship and grant awards. If your grades are not good, colleges will look at you as a disinterested high school student who will be an underachieving college student undeserving of scholarship and grant money.

Apply to all local and regional private scholarships in which you are eligible to apply as a junior and to only those national scholarships in which your qualifications match well with scholarship guidelines and the intent of scholarship sponsors.

PARENTS - Be aware of your family's financial situation and maximize your student's eligibility for need-based scholarships and grants. Defer income from calendar year - January 1 of junior year through December 31 of senior year - to the following calendar year. Also, reduce your family's cash reserves before submitting financial aid applications in November, December, and January of the senior year. The smaller your income and cash reserves are, the greater opportunity for your son or daughter to receive need-based scholarships and grants.

- 7. If possible, choose a college major to help with selecting which colleges to apply to next fall.** Having an idea of which subject(s) you want to study as a college major will help with selecting colleges. You will be able to focus your college search on colleges that offer your intended major(s) and eliminate colleges that

don't. This will make the college search easier and will speed up the entire college selection process.

Keep in mind choosing a major is not absolutely necessary; many students enter college with an "undecided" major.

- 8. Develop a student theme for next year's college applications.** A student theme is a clear, consistent and compelling picture of your personality and character. It is a portrait of who you are and what interests you. Your theme should show how your interests, strengths and character relate to your goals and achievements; it should clearly link your interests, activities, and college/career goals.

Your student theme should be a common thread used in every part of next year's college applications. Incorporating your student theme into all application materials will help college admissions officers focus on your key strengths, what makes you unique, and what assets you will bring to their college community.

For example, a college-bound student may be planning to major in biology with a pre-med emphasis. Ideally, this student's theme should paint a picture of an enthusiastic student with high achievements/honors in biology and other sciences, involvement with science organizations, volunteer service at a local hospital, and personal gratification from working and helping others. This student's theme should be included (to the extent possible) in every part of the application including:

- Essays
- Recommendations from adults
- Student Résumé
- Application itself (work the most important aspects of your student theme into the list of extracurricular activities, short answer questions, and leadership questions on each college application).

College admissions officers try to create campus communities diverse in talents and interests. Your student theme should show officers how you will fit in and how their college community will benefit from you being part of the incoming freshman class. Your student theme should demonstrate your individuality, best qualities, and spirit to college admission officers reading your application.

Work with your parents to select and develop a student theme you would like to convey to admission officers next year. Think about your best academic subjects and academic accomplishments, your favorite or most accomplished extracurricular activities, and future college and career plans. To create a student theme, begin brainstorming key words that identify your strengths. Jot down words such as scientist, leader, athlete, writer, responsibility, politics, communication, community service, etc. that indicate your interests and strengths.

This year (and next) work to complete activities and earn achievements to support a long track record of success that supports your student theme.

- 9. In the spring of your junior year, research and select 10 colleges and universities to apply to in the fall of your senior year.** Select colleges and universities based on factors you would like offered by your “ideal” college (such as geographic location, size of school, majors offered, available social activities, etc.). Select three “Safety Schools”, five “Best Match Schools”, and two “Reach Schools.”

Evaluate your potential for getting accepted to colleges and universities by comparing your grade point average, test scores, extracurricular activities and accomplishments to last year’s college freshman class.

- 10. Prepare for and complete standardized college admission tests (SAT® and ACT®) in spring of your junior year.** It is important to get the highest scores you can to increase the opportunities for college admission and to receive significant scholarships. Learn how to take tests, the types of questions to expect, and how to best use your time during the tests. Build your confidence by taking practice tests and learning strategies.

It is recommended to enroll in a class given by an expert instructor who teaches test-taking strategies and approaches for the SAT® and ACT®. The hands-on instruction you receive will serve you well on test day.

- 11. Plan to visit college campuses during spring break.** Plan ahead and research colleges to visit as per the recommendations provided on college search and selection in #9 above.

Four-to-six weeks before spring break, call the admissions office at colleges you wish to visit and make appointments to take campus guided tours and to interview with admission officers. Also, it is recommended to schedule a visit with department professors who teach subjects in your college major.

Plan to bring your parents along on campus visits; it will be good to talk with them about your impressions of each college and university.

- 12. Be professional in all interactions with college and university representatives.** You must be professional during all interactions with college and university representatives. This includes telephone and face-to-face conversations, written and E-mail correspondence, and writing on message boards and blogs. Your professionalism (or lack thereof) will be noted and factored into each college’s decision on whether to accept you for admission or not.

In addition, parents should be courteous and respectful in all interactions with college representatives.

- 13. Plan to participate in the “best” summer activities for you.** In April and May of your junior year, begin planning your summer activities. Summer activities should build your student résumé and help make your college and scholarship applications look great.

Summer activities should reflect meaningful and continued involvement in the things you are passionate about (and ideally have been involved with during your freshman, sophomore and junior years). Don't choose activities based on what you think colleges and universities are looking for on an application; colleges and universities don't care what you are involved in as long as you demonstrate long-term commitment and passion for the activities you do (refer to recommendations on extracurricular activities in #3 above).

Summer activities should allow you to continue pursuing your favorite activities AND should provide opportunities to move into higher levels of responsibility and leadership. For example, if you previously have been a volunteer with a community organization (such as the Boys & Girls Club), don't just volunteer in the summer, become a leader or take charge of a new project. Colleges like to see increased student responsibility, leadership, personal growth, and commitment.

- 14. Review and prepare to implement the Senior Year Application and Enrollment Strategy beginning June after your junior year.** The senior year application and enrollment strategy ties directly to the junior year approach for preparing students and parents for the college admission and financial aid processes. Familiarizing yourself with the senior year strategy in June will prepare you and your parents for using time-proven strategies for maximizing opportunities for college admission and receiving significant scholarship and grant awards.