



The Ultimate College Checklist:

Year-by-Year Guide for Applications, Scholarships, Exams, and Costs

FRESHMAN YEAR

- With family and teacher support, map out a year-by-year plan for high school, including classes, activities, and community service. (See a list of classes required by most colleges on [page 4](#).)
- Set specific personal goals for your grades and extracurricular involvement.
- Register for college preparatory or honors courses.
- To make your future college and scholarship applications easier, start keeping track of your awards, activities, leadership positions, and community service.
- Consider registering for Raise.me, a nationwide platform that allows you to earn “micro-scholarships” at many participating colleges and universities for everything from volunteering to earning As to taking an AP test. Details at spu.edu/raiseme

SOPHOMORE YEAR

- Find ways to work, volunteer, or participate in school, church, or community activities over the summer.
- Review your progress (academic and extracurricular) and discuss your goals.
- Take preliminary versions of entrance exams, such as the PSAT. **\$15 PSAT registration**
- Research which Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses are offered at your school, and how they fit into your class schedule and college plan.
- See if you can receive college credit at your top schools through the College Level Examination Program (CLEP). Seattle Pacific awards credit for certain scores on a number of exams.
- Research potential scholarships available for your activities, clubs, or groups.
- During the summer, focus on work, saving money for college, community service, extracurricular activities, or summer programs geared toward your desired area of study.

JUNIOR YEAR

- Take the PSAT again. This year’s scores will determine your eligibility for National Merit Scholarships. **\$15 PSAT registration**
- Review your year-by-year schedule. Will you be able to complete all graduation requirements?
- Make a list of what you’re looking for in a college. (See questions to consider on [page 4](#).) Find potential colleges through online research.
- To earn college credit now, look into programs like Running Start, concurrent/dual credit, or College in the High School.
- Attend college fairs and talk with admissions counselors. Ask your high school counselor if colleges of interest will be visiting your school.
- Visit your top schools. Many students say that experiencing campus and community in person is one of the most helpful steps in making a final college decision.
- Begin thinking about your college essays. What is your story, and how does it inform your plans for the future? What skills, interests, and experiences would help illustrate why you’re a good fit for each university to which you plan to apply?
- Spring: Take AP or IB tests to earn potential college credit. **~\$100 per test; details on [page 4](#)**.
- Spring: Take the SAT or ACT. Decide on which colleges you’ll send your scores. Depending on your major and college plans, you may want to take applicable SAT subject tests, as well. **~ \$60 per test; details on [page 4](#)**.
- Take any relevant CLEP exams, if you choose to. **\$85 per test, \$25 CLEP study guide, \$10 study guide for individual subject tests, details on [page 4](#)**.
- To see how much aid you might receive at Seattle Pacific University, complete the [Net Price Calculator](#).

SENIOR YEAR

THE SUMMER BEFORE:

- Review your plan, stay involved in community work, update your list of awards and achievements, and continue saving money.
- Explore your scholarship options, especially local scholarships. Use free web services like fastweb.com, but research how to avoid scams and don't pay scholarship search firms.
- Begin work on your personal statement for your various applications.

FALL AND WINTER:

- Apply to your top five colleges. Consider early admission (deadline is often November 1), particularly if it will give you priority status in admissions or financial aid. **Application fees can be up to \$90, depending on the school. The average fee is ~\$37, and a fee waiver may be available.**
- Figure out who you'll ask to be your references, and give them at least a month to complete recommendation forms.
- Carefully write your admissions essays, making sure each one is customized for the specific school. Have a teacher or parent proofread your work before you submit it.
- Retake the SAT or ACT if needed.
- Revisit your top college options, and consider an overnight visit. Continue applying for both local and national scholarships, and explore what grants and scholarships are available at your prospective schools. Begin examining housing options, meal plans, and course schedules.
- Submit your [Free application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) as soon as possible after October 1, and request that your potential colleges receive your information. Your family can help you collect financial documents and submit your FAFSA. Your last chance to submit is May 1, and you won't be eligible for state and federal aid without it.
- If you aren't eligible for the FAFSA, submit the Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WAFSA) at readysetgrad.org/WAFSA.
- After submitting your FAFSA, you'll receive your Student Aid Report. Review it for completeness and make sure your target schools have received it.

SPRING:

- Review your acceptance letters and financial aid packages and decide which university you will attend. National college decision day, **May 1**, is your final day to make your choice. You'll likely need to send a deposit (advance payment) to secure your spot. **Deposits can be ~\$200.**
- Talk with your family about how you'll pay for college. Once you've received your financial aid offer, figure out your quarterly costs (tuition, housing, food, room and board, books, other expenses, and personal spending money). Note how much is covered by your various scholarships and loans, and carefully research which potential loan options would be best for you.
- If you plan to work part time, explore your options. Your financial aid award may contain Federal, Washington State, and/or Institutional Work Study. You can work for a variety of on- or off-campus employers, and as an added bonus: The FAFSA doesn't consider your State or Federal Work Study earnings when determining your financial aid eligibility for the next year.
- Work with your family to create a budget for your various costs (college is full of activities and food, so personal spending money can disappear faster than you'd think).
- Take any remaining SAT subject tests or AP tests.
- Apply for housing. Your school will send information about applying for housing. **Deposits can be ~\$300.**
- Submit your final transcript to your intended university.

SUMMER:

- Attend an early registration program at your school. You'll sign up for classes, meet your future classmates, and have a chance to ask questions.
- Talk with your family about what you'll take to campus (car, laptop, other electronics, etc). Make a packing list.
- When you receive your housing assignment, reach out to your future roommate(s). Get to know them, and decide who will bring any shared items.
- Sign up for any orientation program your school may have for new students.

CLASSES REQUIRED BY MOST UNIVERSITIES:

Four years of English (grammar, composition, and literature)

Three years of mathematics (algebra I and above)

Three years of science (including both lab and physical science)

Three years of foreign language

Two years of history/social science (including one year of U.S. history)

EXAM COSTS

SAT: ~\$60*

SAT subject tests: ~\$26* (+ ~\$21* each additional test)

ACT: ~\$63*

CLEP: ~\$85 per test, ~\$24 study guide, ~\$10 study guide per test

AP test: ~\$92 per exam*

IB test: ~\$168 registration fee and ~\$116 per exam*

Are AP/IB courses right for you?

Visit the [AP college database](#) to see how much college credit your AP classes will earn at your target schools.

Search online to see the IB credit policy at your target schools. IB classes are either higher level or standard-level. Some standard-level classes may not earn you any college credit. To earn an IB diploma, you'll need to pass the class and exam for at least three higher-level IB courses.

Possible additional test-related costs: Registering late, rescheduling your test, sending test scores at a later date, etc.

**Fee waiver may be available.*

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN RESEARCHING COLLEGES:

Research online and talk with family, friends, teachers, and mentors to hear their experience, perspectives, and insight.

- What size of school?**
(Very small: less than 1,000 students, small: 1,000-5,000, medium: 5,000-15,000, large: 15,000-30,000, very large: 30,000+)
- Do you prefer a public or private school?**
- Are you interested in a faith-based institution?**
If so, what specific religious affiliations interest you? (Protestant, Catholic, specific denominations, nondenominational, etc.)
- What majors are you interested in?**
- What is the average class size?**
- How far away from home?**
Consider the various cost factors if you went to college in-state vs. out-of-state. If you went to college in-state, how far away from home would you prefer?
- What size and type of community?**
(Large city, suburban, rural, etc.)
- What demographics are important to you?**
(Male and female students, diversity, ethnic representation, etc.)
- What activities do you want to participate in?**
(Student government, media, music, athletics, academic/multicultural/interest clubs, volunteering, etc.)
- What is the cost to attend and what scholarships are available?**
- If you plan to work part time, what are the on- and off-campus job opportunities?**
If applicable, what public transportation is available?
- Are there specific fields in which you'd like to intern, job shadow, or do informational interviews?**
Would you like to intern with specific companies? Which colleges would be a good fit for this?
- In what ways are you interested in finding community or mentorships, and what programs or opportunities are offered?**
- What other characteristics are you looking for in a college?**

SPU ranked a
**“Best National
University”**

—*U.S. News & World Report*

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