

Winter Park High School College & Career Center

Junior Year College Search Guide

(modified *Junior Year College Preparation* by Allen Grove on www.about.com)

Rising high school juniors have an important year coming up. Junior year is the last for which colleges will see a year's worth of grades, and ideally those grades will be as good as (if not better than) freshman or sophomore year. Your application will look best if your grades are trending upwards, not down.

Junior year is also a time for advanced placement courses, the PSAT, a first run at the SAT or ACT, and deeper involvement in extracurricular activities. It will be early in senior year when you apply to college, so you can't put off strengthening your credentials until your final year of high school.

Visit the WPHS College and Career Center in room 109 and fill out a yellow information card. Explore the College and Career Center web page (www.wphs.ocps.net; the center is listed under the *Guidance* tab) for links to common forms and helpful articles. Be sure to "like" WPHS College and Career Center on Facebook for up-to-date resources and information. The volunteers in the Center are here to help you with your questions.

1. On October 14, 2015 Take the PSAT

Colleges will not see your PSAT scores, but a good score on the exam can translate into thousands of dollars. The exam will give you a good sense of your preparedness for the SAT. Take a look at some college profiles and see if your PSAT scores are in line with the SAT ranges listed for the schools you like. If not, you still have plenty of time to improve your test-taking skills. As a junior, you must register in September and pay to take the PSAT.

2. Take Advantage of AP and Other Upper-Level Course Offerings

No piece of your college application carries more weight than your academic record. If you can take AP courses in 11th grade, do so. If you can take a course at a local college, do so. If you can study a subject in greater depth than what is required, do so. Your success in upper-level and college-level courses is a clear indicator that you have the skills to succeed in college.

3. Keep Your Grades Up

Junior year is probably your most important year for earning high grades in challenging courses. If you had a few marginal grades in 9th or 10th grade, improvement in 11th grade shows a college that you learned how to be a good student. Many of your senior year grades come too late to play a big role on your application, so junior year is essential.

4. Stay or Get Involved in Clubs and Activities that Spark Your Interest and Passions

Create and/or continue to update your high school resume. A template for this resume can be found on the College and Career Center web page (www.wphs.ocps.net; the center is listed under the *Guidance* tab). Your resume should highlight your activities, talents, honors, leadership positions, interests, and job experience. Continue with community service activities.

5. Assume a Leadership Role in an Extracurricular Activity

Leadership demonstrates commitment and motivation, as well as potential collegiate involvement. Think about ways that you can contribute to your organization or community. There are ways to demonstrate leadership beyond elected positions.

6. Take the SAT and/or ACT

Keep track of SAT and ACT registration deadlines and test dates. It is a good idea to take the SAT and ACT in your junior year. The SAT and ACT are different exams, structured a bit differently from one another. It is not uncommon for a student to do better on one than the other. Refer to the ACT/SAT concordance table and determine which test is your best test. Many competitive colleges require two SAT Subject Tests. Take these soon after your coursework so that the material is fresh in your mind.

7. Consider College Majors You May Wish to Study

Research careers that may spark interest in a specific major; talk with your parents and other adults. Some helpful sites include www.mymajors.com, www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org, and www.mynextmove.org.

8. Research and Visit Colleges

Take advantage of every opportunity to visit a college campus. Drive by and visit local colleges to get a sense of the different types of colleges. For example, Rollins is a small private college and UCF is a large public university. Make appointments to go on campus tours, preferably when the colleges are in session.

Register in the College and Career Center to attend presentations by visiting colleges. A listing of all of representatives, dates and times is located in the College and Career Center. Dress for success and come with questions about the campus and programs. Send a thank you note to the representative.

Explore the websites of specific colleges as well as other college information sites. Some helpful websites include www.cappex.com, www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org, www.mycollegeoptions.org, and www.collegeanswer.com. Carefully and honestly consider your interests, strengths, and weaknesses.

Valencia will host over 130 colleges each fall at their annual College Night on Thursday, October 8, 2015 at the West Campus. For more information, visit <http://valenciacollege.edu> and search for "college night." Visit <http://www.nacacnet.org> for a schedule of college fairs across the nation. Prepare mailing labels to take with you to the College Fair – it will save you time when filling out the college information reply cards. Include your name, phone, email, address, high school and year of graduation.

9. Student Athletes, Educate Yourself on Eligibility and Marketing

If you are a student athlete, register with www.ncaaclearinghouse.net and/or www.naia.org, if you have not already done so. Explore these websites and others to learn how to increase your eligibility and to market your athletic abilities to college coaches. Some online networks include www.takkle.com and www.berecruited.com.

10. In the Spring, Meet with Your Counselor to Review Senior Course Selection and Draft a College List

Once you have some junior year grades and your PSAT scores, you'll be able to start predicting which colleges and universities will be reach schools, match schools and likely schools. Look over the college profiles to see average acceptance rates and SAT/ACT score ranges. Develop a balanced list of colleges that includes likely, match, and reach schools, both academically and financially. If you are looking for university-sponsored merit scholarships, consider that you should be in the top 10-15% of the college's applicant pool. You will want to narrow down your list to 3-8 colleges by the end of the summer before senior year. Check your senior year class schedule to make sure you are taking the classes you will need for your top-choice colleges.

11. Evaluate Your Financial Picture and Discuss with Your Family

Sit down and discuss with your parents what they will realistically be able to pay toward your college education. Together, fill out the FAFSA4caster online at www.FAFSA4caster.ed.gov. This will give you and your parents an idea of what the federal government determines your estimated family contribution will be based on income and non-retirement assets. In general, this is the amount your family will be expected to contribute.

12. Research Financial Aid and Scholarships

What are the financial aid policies of the colleges on your list? Do they guarantee to meet full need? Do they offer merit-based aid that does not consider need? Start checking our WPHS scholarship database weekly for updates and additions at www.winterparkptsa.com/scholarships. Review the test, GPA, and community service requirements for the Bright Futures scholarships at www.floridastudentfinancialaid.org.

13. Talk with Your Senior Friends

By May, your senior friends will have just completed the college admissions process and will have lots of good advice for you. Listen!

14. Make the Most of Your Summer

You will want to visit colleges in the summer, but don't make that your entire summer plan. A well-spent junior summer can take many forms -- employment, volunteer work, travel, summer programs at colleges, sports or music camps. If your summer plans introduce you to new experiences and make you challenge yourself, you planned well.