

# During the Academic Year

## SEPTEMBER: IMAGINE YOUR FUTURE AND PREPARE FOR IT

September is the time to make decisions about life after graduation. Whether you're interested in college, an apprenticeship, a certificate program or the military, you will need to work now toward your goal.

### 1. Meet with your counselor or adviser

- Talk about your different opportunities. Many paths lead to similar careers. You could earn a certificate, complete an apprenticeship or earn an associate or bachelor's degree. Investigate what each one may cost and what salary you can earn with different credentials.
- Ask your counselor about fee waivers for college applications and SAT/ACT tests. Your parent/guardian can authorize your school to use your USDA Free and Reduced-Price Meals status for SAT/ACT and college application fee waivers. Not sure if you qualify? Check with your school.

### 2. Obtain necessary documentation

- Males have to register with Selective Service within 30 days (before or after) of their 18th birthdays. If you do not register, you will not be eligible for federal financial aid for college.
- Memorize your Social Security number. You will need it often. Don't have one? Talk to your school counselor.
- Apply for a driver's license or state ID card if you don't have one. You may need one for financial aid verification.

### 3. Be professional – it matters

- Control privacy settings on your social media accounts so your personal photos and posts don't jeopardize your chances of getting admitted or receiving a scholarship. After viewing the video [Cleaning Up Your Online Act \(bit.ly/OwnFuture\)](#), use the self-assessment on that web page to check out your online presence.



- Ensure that your email address is professional and appropriate for communicating with colleges, lenders and employers. Stick to using your name, such as [firstnamelastname@gmail.com](#). Be sure to check your email often because this is how colleges, financial aid offices and scholarship administrators will communicate with you. Do not use your high school email address because it deactivates when you graduate.

- Request or follow up on letters of recommendation for your college applications. Include a copy of your accomplishments for the letter. Don't forget to send thank-you notes.

### 4. Register and study for the SAT or ACT

- Check with your target colleges to see if they require the ACT, or SAT subject tests. Take them in the fall. You can retake the SAT to improve your scores.

- Sign up for the ACT or SAT if you haven't taken it or want to retake it. Go to [collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register](https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register) for the SAT or [actstudent.org/regist](https://actstudent.org/regist) for the ACT.
- Prepare online at [actstudent.org/testprep](https://actstudent.org/testprep) or [khanacademy.org/sat](https://khanacademy.org/sat).

## 5. Finalize your essay

- Write an essay about you, your qualities and your aspirations. For inspiration, read the tips and watch the video prepared by the Princeton Review, ([bit.ly/UnforgettableEssay](https://bit.ly/UnforgettableEssay)), and the College Board ([bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays](https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays)). Check out the Common Application essay prompts: [bit.ly/TheCommonApp](https://bit.ly/TheCommonApp)
- Share your essay with parents, teachers or other trusted adults. They can offer feedback to craft the strongest essays possible.



## OCTOBER: TAKE THE FIRST STEPS

October may be one of the busiest months in your college preparation.

### 1. Work on the FAFSA

- Start the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). Complete the FAFSA between Oct. 1 and March 1 to maximize the financial aid you may receive. Go to [fafsa.ed.gov](https://fafsa.ed.gov). Add the schools that you are applying to on your FAFSA. This is a FREE application. You and your parent will each need a Federal Student AID (FSA) identification to get started (see page 15 for instructions on getting an FSA ID). You will need information from your parents, including tax returns.
- Check the FAFSA priority deadlines. Schools have different deadlines. Submit your FAFSA by those dates. Funds are limited and may be awarded on a first-come basis.

### 2. Continue to search and apply for scholarships

- Start at [scholarships.delawaregoestocollege.org](https://scholarships.delawaregoestocollege.org). You should complete your FAFSA by March to meet most scholarship deadlines.

- Complete the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE® (required by some programs and colleges) to see if you qualify for grants and scholarships. Check to see if you will need to complete this for where you are applying. Applications open Oct. 1. Go to [student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile](https://student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile).
- Review SEED/Inspire deadlines. Delaware high school graduates must start college in the fall following graduation to be eligible.
  - SEED Scholarship: You need at least a 2.5 GPA and can go tuition-free for your associate degree at the University of Delaware or Delaware Tech (up to six semesters).
  - Inspire Scholarship: You need a 2.75 GPA and can receive approximately \$3,900 per year (up to eight semesters) at Delaware State University. [delawaregoestocollege.org/step-2-find-state-aid](https://delawaregoestocollege.org/step-2-find-state-aid)

### 3. Start applying to colleges

- Designate time to work on college applications. Delaware College Application Month runs from mid-October through mid-November. All Delaware colleges waive their application fees during this month. Your school will hold events so you can learn more about college, and will designate time for you to work on college applications during the school day. Be aware of college application deadlines. If you are applying Early Decision or Early Action to a college, those dates are earlier than regular application deadlines.
- Have all of your information available when applying. See pages 15-19 for a list of information that you will need.

### 4. Attend college fairs and consider options

- Delaware college fairs are listed at [delawaregoestocollege.org/college-fairs](http://delawaregoestocollege.org/college-fairs). Military, certificate and apprenticeship programs will be represented.

- If you are considering the military, talk to recruiters. You will need to consider branches, careers, time commitments and education offerings. You'll also need to take the ASVAB test. Plan to apply to a few colleges as a backup.
- If you are considering a trade or apprenticeship program, attend an info session. Learn what type of career the program will lead to, the salary you can expect and what the cost will be. Meet with an adviser to schedule your entrance exam and complete other requirements. Remember to ask about job placement to choose the best option.
- Be sure to track your research about each school, including deadlines.

## NOVEMBER: FINALIZE YOUR COLLEGE CHOICES

November is when you need to finalize which colleges and/or programs you will apply to. Choose colleges and/or programs that will challenge you but also help you succeed.

### 1. Continue applying to colleges

- Finalize your list of three to five colleges or programs and note the deadlines. Remember to think about Safety, Good Fit and Reach. Note what is required in addition to your essay and list of accomplishments.
- Apply to Delaware colleges for free. All Delaware colleges are waiving application fees from Oct. 16 through the end of November. Attend events at your school to learn more about college and fill out applications during your school's College Application Week.
- Consider the Common Application. More than 500 colleges use this form. Many colleges waive application fees if you have a fee waiver or explain that you can't afford it. Check [commonapp.org](http://commonapp.org) for the programs and colleges you are considering.

- Check out the Academic Common Market. You may be able to pay in-state tuition at out-of-state universities. Learn more at [delawaregoestocollege.org/acm](http://delawaregoestocollege.org/acm).

### 2. Remember, details count

- Ask your counselor about the process to send your transcript to your selected schools.
- Send your SAT, ACT, and AP scores. These scores can help with scholarships, course placement, or selection for certain programs or majors.
- Check your email often (including your spam folder). Pay attention to deadlines and information about scholarships, financial aid, deposits, orientation, medical forms and housing. Deadlines are important.

### 3. Go to a financial aid information night

- Attend a Financial Aid Information Night at your school in November or December. Look for fliers at your school or visit [delawaregoestocollege.org/events](http://delawaregoestocollege.org/events).

## DECEMBER AND JANUARY: STAY ON TRACK

Enjoy your winter break, but remember to stay on track. Finish lingering applications, continue to apply for scholarships, submit the FAFSA, and start thinking about the summer.

### 1. Continue to apply

- Submit remaining applications for college, job training or other post-high school plans.
- Organize regular decision applications and financial aid forms, and pay attention to deadlines.

### 2. Update your list of potential scholarships

- Continue to add to your list of possible scholarships and deadlines.

### 3. Reminder: complete the fafsa

- Submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid as soon as possible after Oct. 1 to be eligible for federal grants, loans and work-study funds. The sooner you complete it, the sooner you will have an idea of your financial aid options.
- Attend a FAFSA Completion workshop held at your school. Visit [delawaregoestocollege.org/events](http://delawaregoestocollege.org/events) for details.

### 4. Apply for more scholarships

- Update your list of scholarships you plan to apply for.

### 5. Plan for the summer

- Start to think about how you will spend the summer after graduation. Consider applying for a summer camp or program at a university, or an internship or job in a field you're interested in. Many college orientations take place in the summer, so include them in your plans.

### 6. Check with your counselor

- Make sure you're doing everything needed to graduate.
- Ask your counseling office to send first semester transcripts to schools where you applied.



## FEBRUARY: PREPARE FOR THE NEXT STEP

February is a month of uncertainty as you wait for acceptance letters and financial aid offers. Keep on track and continue working on your to-do list.

### 1. Stay focused in the classroom

- Keep your grades up. The college that you do attend will want to see your second semester transcript. Colleges expect you to finish 12th grade with strong grades.

### 2. Analyze your acceptance letters and financial offers

- Review your acceptances and compare financial aid packages.
- Use a chart to compare the offers you receive. Make sure you understand what items in your financial aid package are grants (you don't have to pay back) and what are loans (you have to pay back). Check out [bit.ly/CompareAidCalculator](https://bit.ly/CompareAidCalculator). See page 20 for a sample chart.

- Weigh the cost of attendance with the salary you might earn to choose the best fit academically and financially.

- Call the college with questions about what your financial aid will cover.

### 3. Take action if waitlisted

- Write to the admissions office if your first-choice college puts you on the waiting list. Explain that it is your first choice. Describe new activities that you have participated in or new accomplishments since you sent in your application.

### 4. Visit campuses

- Attend preview days for admitted students and get to know the campus and the people.

## MARCH: CONSIDER FINANCES

March is when you need to compile all your income sources so you have a clearer picture of how you will pay for your education after high school.

### 1. Confirm FAFSA info

- Review the Student Aid Report, a summary of what you filled out on the FAFSA. Make sure that all of the information is correct and make any changes (like updating tax information) if necessary by March 15.

### 2. Consider grants and work-study

- Look for grants, work-study opportunities and more scholarships before accepting a student loan.

### 3. Update your financial offers worksheet

- Continue to evaluate all financial aid offers carefully. Ask questions.

### 4. Find out your college's actual cost

- Use the Net Price Calculator with your parents to find out the potential for financial aid and the true out-of-pocket cost – or net price – of each college.

### 5. Discuss long-term plans for financing your education

- Examine your and your family's budget and cash flow. Figure out how you will afford your intended college for the years you will be attending.



## APRIL: MAKE THAT BIG DECISION

In April, you should decide what school or program to attend. Look beyond the price tag. Consider intangible factors, such as the success of graduates of your program of study.

### 1. Decide on a school

- Think carefully about the pros and cons for each school – consider size, academics, cost, extracurricular options and more.

### 2. Respond to each school

- Respond, in writing, by May 1 with an accept or regret notification.
- Submit enrollment deposit.

- Use your college portal to accept and/or decline your financial aid awards.

### 3. Review your financial aid plan

- Review financial aid award letters. Plan to make up for shortfalls.
- Contact the school's financial aid office with questions. Know how much aid you will be required to repay. You will need money for non-tuition items: housing, meal plans, books, transportation to/from school, lab/art supplies and computer. Plan for these expenses.

## MAY: FULFILL ALL ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

May is when colleges send information that you need to fill out by certain deadlines. Stay on top of all correspondence and respond as quickly as possible.

### 1. Get things done

- Determine if the school you want to attend requires or recommends immunizations before enrolling. Make the necessary appointments.
- Order final high school transcript for the college you plan to attend.

### 2. Enjoy graduation

- Celebrate your success.

