

ARMSTRONG HIGH SCHOOL COLLEGE PLANNING PACKET

2025

Robbinsdale Armstrong High School

What's inside?

- Your senior year timeline
- Picking colleges that fit you
- What goes into a college application
- Resources and people who can help



SENIOR YEAR COLLEGE APPLICATION TIMELINE

August & September: Pick a challenging schedule for your senior year. Talk with your counselor if you are taking PSEO classes.

October: Research and pick 3-8 colleges. Attend college rep visits to ask questions about each college. Re-take the ACT (if a college requires test scores). Request letters of recommendation from your teachers and counselor in Xello or Common App. Start to have financial conversations with your family.

November: Identify college application deadlines and application materials that each college requires (pro-tip: some colleges require official test scores be sent directly to them). Work on your essay and colleges' additional essays. Request transcripts through Xello or Common App.

November-January: Submit your applications. Check your application status with every college about 1-2 weeks after you've applied to double-check that all required materials have arrived. Work hard in your high school classes. Submit the FAFSA with your family.

February: Check with your counselor to make sure your fall semester grades have been sent to every college you applied to. Apply for scholarships.

March: Receive decisions and financial aid packages. Visit colleges. Apply for scholarships.

April: Visit colleges and compare. Contact financial aid offices if you need to appeal your financial aid. Talk with your family and counselor for support.

May: Decision time. Many 4-year colleges require you commit by May 1st. Email your other colleges and let them know you're not enrolling.

June: Graduation! Request your final transcript be sent to your college.

* October is **Minnesota College Knowledge Month**. Many colleges don't have application fees if you submit your application in October. Email your counselor for help getting your applications together.

* Don't forget to check out local scholarships listed in **Xello!**

* It is never too late to think about college! Many 2-year colleges like North Hennepin Community College, Minneapolis College, and Hennepin Technical College have **summer application deadlines**.

ARMSTRONG HIGH SCHOOL

FINDING YOUR FIT

There are over 3000 colleges and universities in the U.S. How should a senior choose which colleges to apply to?

We recommend that students start reflecting on what matters to them during their junior year. By the fall of their senior year, we recommend narrowing down their long lists, researching colleges that meet their interests and needs, and applying to 4-8 colleges.

Why apply to 4 or more colleges?

At least **1** LIKELY

A college you're confident you can get into and would be happy to attend.

At least **2** GOOD FITS

Colleges you have a pretty good chance of getting into and would be happy to attend.

At least **1** REACH

A college that you have a chance of getting into, but it is a stretch.

Applying to two colleges instead of one makes it

40%

more likely

that you'll enroll in a 4-year college.

More options means more opportunity to comparing financial aid and make a smart choice.

2 Year Colleges

Over 40% of college students in the U.S. attend 2-year colleges.

Costs: On average, tuition and fees at public two-year colleges are lower, only about \$5,569 a year in MN. Financial aid is also available.

Transferring: 2-year colleges can prepare students to transfer to 4-year colleges.

Careers: If you want to start working sooner, you can earn a certificate or degree in a career-oriented field, such as firefighting or nursing assisting in only 2 years.

CRITERIA TO CONSIDER WHEN RESEARCHING COLLEGES

- Location (urban, suburban, or rural), distance from home, and weather
- Size of student body, size of classes, and physical size of campus
- School type (2-year or 4-year and research university or small liberal arts college)
- Academic options like majors and popular programs, graduation requirements, and learning environment (rigorous, competitive, or relaxed)
- Housing options (dorms, apartments, living at home)
- Campus life including sports and clubs, sororities and fraternities, campus traditions, and level of school spirit
- Student atmosphere including diversity of the student body, diversity of political opinions, religious affiliation of the college, and religious practices of students
- Financial aid, scholarships, and the amount of debt you are comfortable having after graduation
- Application requirements like additional essays

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU MAKE A LIST

[Big Future](#): College Board's college search engine

Xello: available to all AHS students

Fiske Guide to Colleges (book)

Colleges that Change Lives (book)

The Hidden Ivies (book)

[The ACT's College Comparison Worksheet](#)

BOOKS FOR YOUR FAMILY

- *Admission Matters* by Springer, Reider, and Vining Morgan
- *Who Gets In and Why* by Jeffrey Selingo
- *The Gatekeepers* by Jacques Steinberg
- *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be* by Frank Bruni
- *How to Raise an Adult* by Julie Lythcott-Haims
- *Teach Your Children Well: Why Values and Coping Skills Matter More than Grades, Trophies, and "Fat Envelopes"* by Madeline Levine



GPA, CLASS RANK, & TEST SCORES*

GPA Calculations

A = 4.0	D+ = 1.34
A- = 3.67	D = 1.0
B+ = 3.34	D- = .67
B = 3.0	NC = 0.00
B- = 2.67	P = credit earned,
C+ = 2.34	no honor points
C = 2.0	I = incomplete
C- = 1.67	

GPA stands for Grade Point Average. At Armstrong we use an unweighted 4.0 GPA scale. Colleges use your GPA to summarize and understand your grades in high school.

Class rank helps colleges understand how a student did compared to their classmates. Typically, students are ranked #1 if they earned a 4.0 GPA (all A's).

Standardized tests scores like the ACT, SAT, AP exams, and SAT II tests help colleges compare students to other

students from high schools across the country and world.

Pro-tip: ask your counselor for a copy of your transcript to check your GPA and class rank before you submit your first applications.

* Many colleges no longer require the ACT or SAT. Check with each college to understand their requirements.

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more

SAT®

The ACT®

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Letters of recommendation from your teachers and counselor can highlight your strengths as a student, help tell your story, and make a case for why a college should admit you. Many colleges do not require letters of recommendation, for example, the U of M: Twin Cities does not require them. However, colleges like UW: Madison, Northwestern, Carleton, Macalester, and St. Olaf do require letters.

Who should you ask for a letter? At least one English, math, social studies, science or world language teacher who taught you in 10th, 11th, or 12th grade. Ask teachers who know you best.

What should you do to get "good" letters? Ask your teachers early, give them at least 4 weeks before your application deadlines to write your letter. Also give them help. Be prepared to give

them a copy of your resumé or college application essays. They might also ask you to fill out a questionnaire that gives them more information about your strengths and high school career highlights. Be thoughtful when you fill out the questionnaire.

Is it rude to remind teachers? It isn't rude to remind teachers before application deadlines. Remind them to submit their letter one week before the deadline.

Remember to give teachers at least 4 weeks to write a letter of recommendation.

Don't forget to thank them!

THE ESSAY: MYTHS AND FACTS

Your college essay will help the admissions officers reading your application to hear your voice and personality. Your essay might be the first or last thing they read before making their decision. First, your essay must say something important about you. A common mistake is writing an essay that doesn't allow your personality to show through. As you write your essay drafts ask yourself, "What does this

essay say about me?"

Myth 1: Colleges essays should look and sound professional.

Fact 1: It is okay for your essay to not sound like a school essay. This is a completely different assignment than a persuasive five paragraph essay. Colleges essays fit somewhere between nonfiction, self-reflection, and diary entry. The best essays are written

by being thoughtful and highlighting what makes you You.

Myth 2: Colleges are only interested in sob stories or exciting people. What if nothing interesting has ever happened to me?

Fact 2: Some of the best essays are about "simple" topics like cooking a meal with your family or a small moment that sparked a shift in your life or your thinking.

Your essay doesn't need to be about the most dramatic or tragic thing that has ever happened to you. Everyone has interesting stories and perspectives to share in their college applications.

Myth 3: No one even reads these.

Fact 3: Colleges spend months making decisions because they take the time to have their staff read each application and essay. Good, thoughtful essays humanize applicants and make them rise above others. Make your essay count!



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COLLEGE APPLICATION ORGANIZER

	College 1	College 2	College 3
Applications			
Application Platform			
Deadline			
Essay(s) Complete			
Application Complete			
Date Submitted			
Recommendations			
Teacher 1			
Date Rec 1 Submitted			
Thank You Note Sent			
Teacher 2			
Date Rec 2 Submitted			
Thank You Note Sent			
Counselor			
Date Couns Rec Submitted			
Thank You Note Sent			
Transcripts			
Requested Transcript in Xello			
Or Common App?			
Date Transcript Submitted			
SAT/ACT			
Official Scores Required?			
Date Scores Sent			
Requested NO Scores?			
Financial Aid			
FAFSA Sent			
CSS Profile Sent			
Fin Aid/Scholarship Deadline			

[Editable spreadsheet](#) version can be found on the counseling website