

11th Grade

It's Time to Get Serious

1. FOCUS ON ACADEMIC PROGRESS

While colleges do care about freshman and sophomore year grades, the junior year is the most important because these are usually the last grades on the transcript prior to applying for college in the fall of the senior year. Students should

- ❖ Strive to do their very best ever, academically; upward grade trends are important
- ❖ Prepare a solid Junior Project (this is frequently referenced in recommendation letters)
- ❖ Work hard in their courses and be engaged in learning (junior year teachers are the ones who most frequently write recommendation letters to colleges)

2. TAKE PSAT

The PSAT that juniors take in October is the one that “counts” in the National Merit Scholarship competition, so juniors should be sure to prepare for it by doing the practice tests provided in PSAT prep books. They will receive their scores back sometime between mid-December and early January.

3. SAT vs. ACT

Colleges typically accept either SAT or ACT admissions tests, and some colleges require SAT II tests, which are subject-specific tests. Students may take each of these tests multiple times, and colleges will typically take their best score from the exams. Some frequently asked questions about these tests include:

- ❖ *“What is the difference between the SAT and the ACT exam?”* The SAT exam consists of a critical reading, critical writing, and a math section; the questions asked are similar to those from each of these sections on the PSAT exam. The ACT consists of four sections: reading, math, English (grammar), and science reasoning.
- ❖ *“When should students take the SAT or ACT?”* These tests are only administered during the academic year (from October to June). I recommend that they take it at least once and preferably twice during the winter/spring of their junior year. Typically, the first time they take the exam, they don't score as well as they would like to and do significantly better the second time. Frequently, students will take it again once in the beginning of the senior year as well and see an improvement in their scores.
- ❖ *“Who should take the SAT II tests?”* Some colleges require the SAT II exams, which are subject-specific tests in the areas of writing, literature, mathematics, science, social science, and foreign language. Each test is only one hour long and three can

be taken on the same test date. I suggest that students take these exams at the end of their junior year of high school because they have just completed these courses and typically score quite well.

4. TALK ABOUT COLLEGE OPTIONS

Because there are approximately 3,500 colleges across the United States, it helps to narrow the choices by looking at the following criteria:

- ❖ Location (East Coast, Midwest, West Coast, urban, suburban, small town)
- ❖ Size (small, medium, or large)
- ❖ Cost (What are you as parents willing to pay? Is this a factor in your decision?)
- ❖ Available majors (Is there a specific major or program desired?)
- ❖ Reputation/Competitiveness (level of selectivity)
- ❖ Community (religious based, conservative vs. liberal)
- ❖ Extra-curricular programs (athletics, fine arts, study abroad)

Once you have answers to these questions, you can start putting together a list of schools to investigate.

5. SET UP COLLEGE VISITS

Both spring break and summer vacation provide wonderful opportunities to make college visits. Call at least two weeks prior to your trip and schedule a college tour as well as an appointment with an admissions counselor. To make the most of your visit:

- ❖ Research information about the college prior to your visits (the internet is an excellent resource)
- ❖ Prepare a checklist of questions to ask and things to note (based on the criteria you established under #4 above)
- ❖ Visit a dorm and eat in the cafeteria to get an idea about campus living
- ❖ Inquire regarding special programs your child is interested in (athletics, music, clubs, travel abroad, etc.)
- ❖ Ask about scholarship opportunities
- ❖ Pick up a student newspaper in addition to the admissions materials

6. PLAN SENIOR YEAR COURSES

When the course registration form becomes available, check to make sure that your son or daughter is on track to fulfill Crater's graduation requirements. Encourage them to continue taking academically challenging courses even though they may want to "take it easy" for the senior year.

7. CHOOSE MEANINGFUL SUMMER ACTIVITIES

Students should continue to stay active and participate in meaningful summer activities.

Some options include:

- ❖ Get a summer job
- ❖ Take an SAT prep class
- ❖ Engage in community service and volunteer opportunities
- ❖ Attend a summer program at a college
- ❖ Assist with or participate in an athletic camp

8. UPDATE THE “ACTIVITIES AND AWARDS” FILE

If you haven't already done so, now is the time to prepare a high school résumé outlining the various activities, awards, and community service projects the student has accomplished since freshman year.