Financial Aid Timeline

This is a general progression of events related to the financial aid process. It begins with a student’s senior year of high school; however, some students have also completed some of these steps during their sophomore or junior year.

August

- Request applications and information from colleges.
- Visit school campuses throughout the fall to help narrow your choices.
- Look into overnight or weekend college visitation programs.

September

- Mark your calendar for college fairs and admissions representatives’ visits.
- Consider meeting with the school counselor to develop a college admissions plan.
- Register for the SAT or the ACT. Investing in a preparation course for either test may help you to become more comfortable with the testing process and to perform better on the exam.
- Consider early decision/early action programs.

October

- Create a schedule of admissions and financial aid deadlines.
- Begin completing college applications and essays.
- Request transcripts and letters of recommendation.
- Explore college or scholarship information or apply to colleges online (some campuses may charge an extra fee; however, some campuses waive fees, since online applications speed up processing).

November

- Follow up to ensure that letters of recommendation are submitted.
- Complete essays and applications.
- Submit applications for early decision/early action programs.

December

- Complete, photocopy, and submit college applications.
- Obtain any other financial aid forms that may be required by your target schools.

January

- Obtain a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) from your school counselor or through the Department of Education (DOE). To complete the FAFSA, you will need your family’s (estimated) income tax information for the year. Your parents should complete taxes early to help in filling out the FAFSA. Keep a copy of this information, as some
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- Complete the FAFSA online or fill out, photocopy, and then submit it by mail.

February

- Contact the college’s financial aid office to see if financial aid programs exist on a state or campus level. These programs may involve forms and deadlines that exist independently from federal programs and may require additional applications or information from you or your parents.
- Submit all the necessary paperwork or applications for any private or outside scholarships you may have identified in October.
- Be sure that you have submitted all required forms: the college admissions application, the FAFSA, any private scholarship applications, and any state or campus forms required for financial aid programs outside the federal student aid programs.

March

- Ask your high school counselor about Advanced Placement (AP) exams offered for college credit and about the cost of the exams. Contact the registrar’s office at the college or school you plan to attend to find out what score is necessary to receive the college credit. If you will be taking an AP exam, consider starting an AP preparation course for the tests in May.
- Watch the mail for the Student Aid Report (SAR). The SAR is the DOE’s reply to your submitted FAFSA and summarizes your financial aid eligibility for any federal programs.

April

- Receive admissions notification(s).
- Compare your financial aid awards to cost of school attendance.
- Make a final enrollment decision and submit the enrollment deposit, if requested.
- Notify any schools that you have chosen not to attend that have accepted you that you will not be attending.
- Sign and return financial aid forms for the school you will be attending.

May

- Take any applicable Advanced Placement (AP) exams.
- Send final transcript and student loan application(s) to your chosen college.
- Contact the college’s financial aid office to check your financial aid package status.

June

- Complete any remaining financial aid forms.
- Plan for college orientation, transportation, and housing.

July

- Finalize college transportation and housing for the fall.

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