

# GPS to College - 12<sup>th</sup> Grade

*Adopted by ICAN*

## **August Tips**

- Your senior grades really do matter. Colleges look at your overall grade point average (GPA) through all four years of high school. It's not too late to improve your GPA.
- Are you unsure of your future career path? Learn about that steps you should take to choose a career.
- Gather information and research the colleges you may be interested in attending. Request information from the Admission Office and visit the college's website.
- Take note of admission and financial aid deadlines.
- Beware of scholarship search and financial aid service organizations that charge a fee for service. Check with your high school counselor or search at no cost.
- Let EducationQuest or the Iowa College Access Network assist you through the college planning and financial aid process at no cost.

## **September Tips**

- Register to take the Oct. SAT<sup>®</sup> and/or the Oct. ACT<sup>®</sup> if you have not already taken them. You may also retake the test if you are unhappy with your previous score. Check with your high school counselor or college admissions office before you retake the test.
- Research scholarship possibilities at the library and high school counseling office. Ask your teachers, high school counselor and/or employers to write letters of recommendation for your admission and scholarship applications.
- Attend college fairs in your area and meet with college representatives who visit your high school.
- Continue gathering information about colleges that interest you and begin a list of those that you may like to attend.

## **October Tips**

- Are you narrowing your college choices? Have you completed an admission application? Are you aware of admission deadlines and application requirements at the colleges? Procrastination may cause you to miss out on your first college choice or on valuable scholarship dollars. Be sure to stay on top of these tasks!
- Did you register in September for the ACT<sup>®</sup> or SAT<sup>®</sup> tests? Are you ready to take the SAT or the ACT? If you decide to retake the ACT or SAT to try for a higher score, visit with your high school counselor first.

## **November Tips**

- Look into financial aid options. Continue to research and apply for private scholarships.
- Be aware of deadlines. Begin or continue to send in applications for admission. Most colleges accept online applications, and some may waive the application fee for applying online. Keep copies of paper applications and write down the date you submit online applications.
- Beware of scholarship search and financial aid services that cost money. Much of the information is available at no cost. Check with your high school guidance office or search without charge on our website. We can also help you through the financial aid process.

## December Tips

- Finish your college admission applications you haven't already completed.
- Save your year-end payroll stubs. (This goes for your parents, too.) You may need them for estimating information on the FAFSA. Also, schedule an appointment to have your taxes prepared early.
- Learn more about the financial aid process that will begin soon after Jan. 1.
- If you plan to file the FAFSA online, request a PIN at [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov). The student and one parent will each need a PIN.

## January Tips

- Happy New Year! Start it off right by filing the FAFSA\* (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) as soon after Jan. 1 as possible. Watch the FAFSA priority filing deadlines at the colleges of your choice. The deadline is the date the FAFSA needs to be received at the processing center, not the postmark date. See a list of FAFSA deadlines at Iowa colleges.
- Complete your tax returns as soon as possible. If you have to for college deadlines, you may use estimated tax information on the FAFSA. Remember to make copies of your completed FAFSA and tax returns.
- Have your high school send your first semester transcripts to the colleges where you've applied.

## February Tips

- Make sure your first semester transcripts have been sent to the college(s) you've applied to.
- If you haven't already submitted your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), you should do so as soon as possible.
- Watch out for deadlines, including your college's priority filing deadline and any scholarship deadlines that apply to you.
- Keep copies of your completed federal tax returns handy. Be prepared to mail them to your college(s) if they are requested. Promptly respond to document requests made by colleges.
- Expect your Student Aid Report (SAR) one to four weeks from the time you file your FAFSA.

## March Tips

- By now you should have sent in your FAFSA. If you haven't, complete it as soon as possible. You should also check with your college(s) to determine if other financial aid applications are required.
- Decide which college you'll attend in the fall. Submit any required paperwork to confirm your decision with the college. Be sure to let the other colleges on your list know immediately that you won't be attending.
- If you gave an e-mail address on your FAFSA, you should receive a link to your SAR (Student Aid Report) via e-mail.
- When you get your SAR, look it over carefully. If you need to make corrections, contact the financial aid office(s) at your college(s). If there are no corrections needed, keep your SAR for your records.
- Keep copies of all the forms you send to the financial aid office at your college(s).

## April Tips

- If required, sign and return your award letter to the college you plan to attend. If you need to take out a student loan, make sure you complete required applications/promissory notes. Borrow wisely. Your award letter will tell you the maximum amount you can borrow. You don't have to borrow the entire amount. Create a budget so you borrow only what you need.
- Finish strongly – make your final grades a top priority!

- If you submitted your FAFSA, watch for your financial aid package(s) from the college(s) you're applying to. If you're considering several colleges, you should compare your award letters.

### **May Tips**

- If you haven't decided which college to attend, do so as soon as possible.
- Make sure you've turned in all necessary documents to the financial aid office at your college of choice, including loan applications and promissory notes. Make sure you return the forms on time if your college has a deadline.
- Finalize your summer job or volunteer plans. Jobs related to your future career and volunteer work will be great experiences you can add to your resume.

### **June Tips**

- Find out if your college offers orientation sessions and if so, plan to attend.
- Let your college's financial aid office know about any scholarships you've received that weren't part of the college's financial aid package.
- Ask your high school to send your final transcript to the college you've chosen.
- Save money from your summer job. You'll be glad you did.

### **July Tips**

- Attend any orientation sessions that your college offers. They're a great opportunity to meet people and get to know the campus.
- Turn in any loan applications and promissory notes if you haven't already done so.
- Contact your roommate. Get to know each other and start planning for your room. Decide who will bring the fridge, microwave, TV and other shared items.
- Beware of credit card offers! It's easy to get in over your head. You may, however, want one card for emergencies. Discuss options with your parents and be sure to educate yourself.