

# **Finding Your Direction:**

## **A Guide to College & Career Planning For High School Seniors**



**New Mexico School for the Arts Guidance Office  
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# SENIOR YEAR



## September

1. Use a calendar/planner to stay organized and keep track of important dates.
2. Narrow your college choices; see your school counselor for assistance; see list of college search websites in this packet.
3. Request application materials from schools/programs to which you want to apply. Most are available online. Be sure to check whether your schools take the Common Application!
4. Register for October 26 ACT and/or November SAT I or SAT II tests. The deadline to register for the ACT is September 27. NMSA high school code: **320641**
5. Be sure to check with colleges to determine if you need the SAT, and if so, which subject area tests are needed. Highly selective schools have very specific requirements.
6. Participate in ACT or SAT Prep course. Takes place over 8 consecutive Saturdays, starting September 1 for ACT and September 29 for SAT. Cost is \$150, registration forms can be picked up in the Guidance Office.
8. Focus on your academics and activities!
9. College recruiters from all over the country will be frequently visiting our campus; this is a great opportunity to gather information about different programs and schools.
10. Plan to allocate time for college searches and applications. It is a process that takes time; it can't be done in a few minutes.



## October

1. Register for December ACT or SAT if you decide to take them again.
2. Ask teachers and/or counselors to complete recommendation letters for schools that require them. Make your requests at least 3 weeks in advance of due date.

3. Schedule college campus visits and/or interviews.
4. Begin writing essays required for some applications.
5. Begin scholarship search and applications. Popular free websites are listed in this packet. Many deadlines are in the fall so pay attention to those dates.
6. Register with Fast Web <http://www.fastweb.com/> or other scholarship search websites. (Fast Web and other websites provide FREE information on scholarships, college search, jobs and internships customized to the INDIVIDUAL student profile. See list of websites on page 9).
7. Plan to attend Financial Aide Night Wednesday October 23 at 6pm in the Large Rehearsal Hall to learn more about the different types of financial aide and how you can get money to pay for college.
8. Have a frank discussion with your parents/guardians about college costs and how much they're planning to contribute, and how to apply for financial aid.
9. Familiarize yourself with deadlines for schools or programs to which you are applying; some deadlines are as early as November 15.



## **November**

1. If you are applying early action or early decision, complete your applications; deadlines are usually between mid-November and December 1. Make sure all materials are sent completed and on time, with necessary signatures, letters of recommendation if needed, and transcripts and test scores.
2. Give your counselor Secondary School Reports to complete if your application requires them (at least 3 weeks in advance of due date).
3. Continue scholarship search and applications!



## **December**

1. You should try to finish your ACT and/or SAT testing by the end of this month.
2. Turn in completed college applications to Guidance Office for mailing. If you are applying online you still must have a transcript sent from our office. If we are mailing your application please be sure to include a check for application fees if needed.

3. Do not expect the counselor or teachers to write recommendations or see that your applications are mailed after school is out for Winter Break. Some applications have January 1 deadlines; remember school is not in session until AFTER January 1.
4. Visit colleges during Winter Break.
5. Continue scholarship search and applications!
6. Begin to work on your FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) so you can complete it as soon as possible after January 1.



## January/February

1. Complete and submit your FAFSA as soon as possible. This must be done online. You must register online for a PIN number prior to submitting your information.
2. Give your counselor Mid-Year School Report Forms if required by the institution to which you are applying.
3. If you need to, register for the February or April ACT.
  - Registration deadline is January 10 or March 7, 2014
  - NMSA H.S. Code #: **320641**



## March

1. Complete and submit your housing information.
2. Continue scholarship search and applications.
3. Work on your resume and begin a job hunt if you need to work part time!



## April

1. Take the April ACT exam if needed.
2. If you have been going through the college application process you will begin to receive admission decisions. Compare financial aid awards; you can sometimes negotiate a better financial aid package.
3. If you are ready, make a decision and send in your deposit.

4. Arrange summer activities early, including volunteering, an interesting job, internship or job shadow in a profession that interests you.



## May

1. Request final transcript be sent to chosen college/program.
2. Prepare for final exams. Remember colleges will see your final transcript and GPA.
3. Find a summer job.



## June—Congratulations, you made it!

### THE COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAY

1. There are few opportunities at this time to change the data in your application.
  - Your grades are fixed, and first quarter senior year will not change that dramatically.
  - Your teacher and college counselor recommendations are out of your hands.
2. The single place where you still exercise some substantial control is your college application essay, and it represents an opportunity you should **not** take lightly.
3. Most private colleges and universities require at least one essay; some of the more competitive state universities – Michigan, Colorado, Texas, Washington – are now requiring essays.
4. If a school indicates that an essay is optional, don't consider it optional; write one.
5. Check each application for the topic/topics it specifies and the number of essays each requires.
6. Pay close attention to the topic; while many fall into a “personal experience” or “personal statement” response, others will ask you to address everything from “Why do you want to go to our school?” to “Do something creative with this 8 ½ x 11 inch space.”
7. Write several drafts; the key to a successful application essay is – as with all sound writing – **revision**; write an engaging story about yourself, keep the focus narrow, and, above all, understand that the readers want to learn something about you from the essay, something that is helpful in understanding **who you are today**.
8. Try to keep the essay to one page; readers rarely turn to a second page. If you must use a second page, make sure the break is in the **MIDDLE** of a very interesting sentence in your narrative.
9. Have competent readers review the essay so that it “sounds like you.” Choose your readers wisely.

10. When you hand it to a reader, especially a teacher or another adult, make sure you indicate
  - The topic
  - The college or university to which it will be sentThese factors influence the approach you might take and the product you write.
11. Give the small paragraph responses some attention; do not dismiss them because they represent another opportunity for you to make a case for yourself.
12. **Above all, proofread;** do not embarrass yourself by leaving glaring errors for your readers to find and chuckle over.

### TEACHER RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **In early September**, you need to be thinking about whom you will approach for recommendations.
2. Those students **who are considering** or **know** they are applying early – rolling state admissions/Nov. 1/Nov. 15 deadlines – especially need to approach teachers in **very early September**.
3. Each school will indicate how many teacher recommendations are required so read the application carefully.
  - a. with some, you may choose whomever
  - b. with others, they will ask for an English teacher
  - c. with others, they will ask for a teacher from a discipline you're interested in pursuing
  - d. with a few, they will ask for a peer recommendation
4. In terms of whom you should approach, in some cases, it's very clear.
  - a. if they require an English teacher, then ask your junior English teacher or ask an English teacher you had sophomore year; to ask your current English teacher whom you've had only for one quarter is begging the reader of your application to ask WHY?
  - b. If they ask for a teacher in a discipline you are interested in, choose a teacher who knows you well, not necessarily a teacher for whom you merited an A.
5. If you have total choice in the matter, give some thought to whom you will ask.
  - a. if a teacher indicates – verbally or in writing – that he/she would like to write a letter for you, by all means pursue this offer
  - b. if you worked really hard for a grade with a teacher, particularly meeting outside of class, consider this teacher as he/she can make a case for your perseverance and initiative
  - c. if you are required to submit a peer recommendation, choose your friends wisely; make sure he/she can write and meet deadlines
6. If you are considering asking anyone from your scout leader, your athletic coach, club sponsor to an influential member of the community or a well-connected alum to write a letter for you, **please consult your counselor** about the **advisability** of such a move.
7. Many recommendation forms ask you to indicate whether or not to waive the right to review the information contained in the teacher recommendation. I **STRONGLY** urge you to waive (some teachers will not write if you don't waive) because a confidential letter has more **CREDIBILITY**.
8. When you approach a teacher for a recommendation, please do so diplomatically. Ask the teacher if he/she can write a strong letter for you. If there is any hesitation, then consider withdrawing the request and asking another teacher.

If a teacher agrees, then, at a convenient time, approach the teacher and give him/her

- A copy of your UPDATED RESUMÉ
- The recommendation form FILLED OUT at the top
- A STAMPED, ADDRESSED ENVELOPE [RETURN ADDRESS NMSA]
- on a post-it note, write out the DEADLINE

DO NOT SIMPLY DROP A FORM INTO A TEACHER'S MAILBOX OR EMAIL. Have the courage for a face-to-face encounter.

If you are using the Common App, make sure to add their contact information in the Recommenders section after they have agreed to write you a letter. They should receive an e-mail from the Common App which will provide them with the link to complete your recommendation online.

9. If you are asking the same teacher(s) to do more than one recommendation [they will write one letter], then present them with a folder in which you place your recommendation forms, your resume, your stamped and addressed envelopes and clearly marked deadline dates.
10. Write your recommending teachers a brief note of thanks. Writing recommendations is a time consuming task that all teachers take seriously so thank them, even before you get word on your status with the school(s).
11. It's a thoughtful gesture if you keep a teacher who's submitted several recommendations informed about your responses from schools.

## **POST-SECONDARY PLANNING WEBSITS**

### **TESTING INFORMATION**

- **The College Board**- Here's where you register online for the ACT and SAT:  
<http://www.collegeboard.org>
- **ACT** - Includes test registration and test-prep information: <http://www.actstudent.org>
- **My College Quickstart** – If you've taken the PSAT, you can access this site to check your scores, practice for the SAT, search for colleges and take personality quizzes that will match you with majors/careers: <https://quickstart.collegeboard.org>

### **COLLEGE RESEARCH SITES AND TOOLS**

- **US News and World Report** -Be wary of the rankings, but there is much to learn at this site.:  
[www.usnews.com/sections/rankings](http://www.usnews.com/sections/rankings)
- **College View** - A good source for information on all colleges, has an awesome search tool:  
<http://www.collegeview.com>
- **CollegeNET** - An all-purpose site with a host of useful links and programs:  
<http://www.students.gov/STUGOVWebApp/index.jsp>
- **Mapping Your Future** - General info site with a variety of information includes a sign-up for monthly e-mail reminders and a newsletter: <http://www.mappingyourfuture.org>

### **APPLICATION SERVICES**

- **The Common Application** - 500+ schools accept it and you should use it.  
<http://www.commonapp.org>

## FINANCIAL AID

- **The Financial Aide Information Page** – General information on different kinds of financial aid:  
[www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)
- **New Mexico Lottery Scholarship FAQ** – Info on the Lottery Scholarship, which covers 100% tuition for New Mexican high school graduates looking to attend New Mexican public colleges/universities: <http://www.hed.state.nm.us/LotterFAQ.aspx>
- **The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** - A must for anyone applying for need-based aid. You can apply on line: <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>
- **Get your PINs for the web-FAFSA** – [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov)
- **Quest Bridge** – A program that aims to match high achieving low income students with full scholarships to prestigious universities: <http://www.questbridge.org/>
- **Western Undergraduate Exchange – Information on the WUE, through which you may be eligible for reduced tuition at western colleges:** <http://www.wiche.edu/wue>
- **How Stuff Works** - Interesting and comprehensive site with loads of details and helpful tools:  
<http://money.howstuffworks.com/college-financial-aid.htm>
- **Comparing Financial Aid Awards** - A US News and World Report product that provides helpful charts enabling you to line up and compare awards:  
[http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/publications/student\\_guide/index.html](http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/publications/student_guide/index.html)

## SCHOLARSHIPS

- [www.scholarships.com](http://www.scholarships.com)
- [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)
- [www.gocollege.com](http://www.gocollege.com)

**Scholarship Scams** - A Federal Trade Commission-run site. It is always good to check on what you learn about on the web: [www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/scholarship](http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/scholarship)

## SPECIAL INTEREST

- **The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)** - <http://www.ncaa.org>
- **The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)** - <http://www.naia.org>
- **Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life** - <http://www.hillel.org>
- **Historically Black Colleges** - <http://www.blackhighereducation.com>

- **Jesuit Colleges** - <http://www.ajcunet.edu>
- **American Indian College Fund** – [www.collegefund.org](http://www.collegefund.org)
- **American Association of University Women**- [www.aauw.org](http://www.aauw.org)

#### **CAREER INFORMATION**

- **US Department of Labor** - All the numbers one could possibly hope for in career planning in the Occupational Outlook Handbook: <http://www.bls.gov/k12/index.htm>
- **Internship Programs** - Listings of +7800 programs and 200,000 positions: <http://www.internshipprograms.com/>

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#### **ALTERNATIVE AND YEAR-OFF PROGRAMS**

- **Study Abroad** - <http://www.studyabroad.com>
- **AmeriCorps** - National Service Program: <http://www.americorps.org>
- **City Year** - National Youth Service Organization - <http://www.cityyear.org>
- **Gap Year** - A host of travel and work ideas for students prior to heading off to college: <http://www.gapyear.com>
- **Global Routes** - Cultural Exchange and service trips: [www.globalroutes.org/college\\_main.htm](http://www.globalroutes.org/college_main.htm)
- **Eurolingua Institute** - Info on language immersion study abroad programs: <http://www.eurolingua.com>

**ACT Registration Information:** [www.act.org](http://www.act.org)  
**New Mexico School for the Arts Code: 320641**

<b>Test Date</b>	<b>Registration Deadline</b>	<b>(Late Fee Required)</b>
September 21, 2013	August 23, 2013	August 14-6, 2013
October 26, 2013	September 27, 2013	September 28-Oct 11, 2013
December 14, 2013	November 8, 2013	November 9-22, 2013
February 8, 2014	January 10, 2014	January 11-24, 2014
April 12, 2014	March 7, 2014	March 8-21, 2014
June 14, 2014	May 9, 2014	May 10-23, 2014

**SAT Registration Information--<http://sat.collegeboard.com/register/how-to-register>  
**New Mexico School for the Arts Code: 320641****

<b>2013-14 Test Dates</b>	<b>Test</b>	<b>Regular Registration Deadline (postmark/submit by)</b>
10/05/13	SAT & Subject Tests	09/07/13
11/02/13	SAT & Subject Tests	10/03/13
12/07/13	SAT & Subject Tests	11/08/13
01/25/14	SAT & Subject Tests	12/27/13
03/08/14	SAT only	02/07/14
05/03/14	SAT & Subject Tests	04/04/14
06/07/14	SAT & Subject Tests	05/09/14

## **College Visits**

Seniors are given excused absences for college visits. Your parent/guardian should be sure to excuse your absence, and you need to give your teachers advanced notice. Be sure to plan ahead and make up any class work you miss.

It is helpful to visit with college recruiters when they are here on our campus. They can often schedule your visit to their campus. Keep an eye on the websites of campuses you plan to visit for special weekend activities geared to high school seniors. It is best to plan visits during the school year so you can get the feel for the school while students are on campus.

## **ADMISSION POLICIES**

College and universities have varying admission practices. Information pertaining to the policy of a school will be found in its publications. Some of the most common practices are:

### **Early Decision**

Students who have demonstrated sound academic ability apply for admission to their first choice college during the summer or very early in their senior year. Notification of admission is given usually in December. Restrictive policies vary with each school and must be checked carefully to see if early decision works to the individual's advantage. Students who are accepted under early decision plans have an ethical commitment to attend the school. Only students who are very certain of their first choice school should go early decision.

### **Early Action**

This plan does not require the commitment to attend that early decision does. Some selective colleges are increasing the number of students accepted under early decision and early action, thereby decreasing the number of slots available for regular admission. However, students should be very certain of their plans before attempting early decision or early action.

### **Rolling Admission**

The college will notify the applicant as soon as the application has been processed. Most state colleges and universities fall under this category.

### **Deferred Admission**

Some colleges will allow students to wait up to a year before entering. If you plan to defer your enrollment, make sure this is okay with the schools you are applying to!

### **Open Admission**

Students are accepted upon application and only a high school diploma or GED is required for admission. Most community colleges and technical colleges have open admissions.

### **Deadline Admissions**

Specific application deadline and notification dates are established. If the student meets the application deadline (often Jan. 1, or Jan. 15, etc.), the student is then notified of an admission decision by May 1<sup>st</sup>.

## FINANCIAL AID

The primary responsibility for paying a student's educational expenses belongs to the family. However, family finances alone should not determine the choice of a college. Your child should also examine their desire and ability to attend a specific college or other post-secondary program. If you prepare and follow the steps to applying for financial aid, a partnership of parents, student, government and institution can provide a viable financial aid package for most students.

### Important Facts to Know About Financial Aid for College

- There are funds available to help all students who demonstrate need. You do not need to be poor to qualify for financial aid for college
- Schools with higher tuition costs are not necessarily more expensive. They sometimes provide the best financial aid.
- The expected family contribution remains the same regardless of the cost of the college. Because expenses at different colleges vary and the amount the family is expected to pay remains the same, you could be eligible for more aid at a higher cost college than at a lower cost college.
- Most financial aid is awarded on the basis of **demonstrated need** =

Cost of attendance *minus* expected family contribution *equals* financial aid.

- **In order to receive financial aid you must ask for it!** This means you must complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)\* form and other paperwork for scholarship applications. These forms must be completed each year a student wants financial aid.
- FAFSA forms should be filed as soon after January 1<sup>st</sup> as possible in your senior year. Make sure you are aware of deadlines at the colleges to which you are applying, and contact the financial aid office if you have questions.
- Approximately 6-8 weeks after you submit your FAFSA you will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR). This gives you your eligibility index for federal and state aid. Your SAR will be sent to the colleges you indicate on your FAFSA. Your colleges will notify you of your eligibility and amount of your financial aid package.
- Colleges will differ in the amount of aid offered to you. You are not obligated to attend a college if the financial aid offered is not sufficient to meet your needs. Also, it is possible to negotiate with the financial aid director at the college you want to attend if you feel more explanation would help in determining your financial aid situation.

\***Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** is used to analyze the family's financial standing in order to determine the amount the student's family will be expected to contribute toward college costs. The family needs to fill out the FAFSA as soon after January 1 in the senior year as possible. The Guidance Office has hard copies of the FAFSA worksheet, which your child may pick up at any time. Please note however, that all FAFSA applications must be submitted online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). Additional information about the FAFSA can be found at [www.finaid.com](http://www.finaid.com). ConnectEdu.com also has information that will help you with this process.

Information such as salary, size of family, and number of children in college is used in the evaluation of the financial statement. After your FAFSA is processed your family will be notified of their expected family contribution. The amount of the expected family contribution will be the same for all colleges. The difference between the expected family contribution and the cost of attending college is met by financial aid.

Financial aid is usually offered as a “package”. The financial aid package may consist of grants, loans, and student employment.

Check out this link to learn more about completing your FAFSA:

<http://dhe.mo.gov/documents/SevenStepsToApplyingforFinancialAid.pdf>

### **Some Financial Aid Tips**

1. If you're a financial aid candidate, fill out the financial aid form (FAFSA and/or CSS/Profile) and send it in as close to January 1<sup>st</sup> as possible.
2. Always apply to colleges in groups of two. In other words, two colleges of equal caliber. The reason being is, if you get into both of them, and one gives you a \$10,000 grant and the other gives you a \$7,000 grant, you could ask the \$7,000 grant school if they can raise it up to \$10,000 (if that's the school you really want to go to). Really, what you're doing is playing off financial aid packages, and many times, it works!
3. Have the STUDENT call the financial office if there are questions or negotiations- it shows maturity. Financial aid officers are always more impressed when the kid calls and not the parent.
4. Always complete a FAFSA and/or CSS/Profile form, even if you think you might not qualify for aid-you might be surprised. A private school looks at a parent's \$100,000 income as only "middle class".
5. **Complete the FAFSA and/or CSS/Profile forms as soon as possible after January 1st – do not wait until tax returns are done.** Estimate your FAFSA form based on last year's info as long as your income has not changed drastically in the last year.

### **Federal Financial Aid Programs**

There are several sources of financial aid for prospective college-bound students. One starting point is the link: [www.studentaid.ed.gov](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov). Here you will find descriptions of federal programs such as:

- Pell Grant
- Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG)
- Federal Work Study
- Federal Perkins Loan
- Federal Stafford Loan
- Federal Plus

### **Federal Tax Credits**

#### **The HOPE Scholarship Credit and the Lifetime Learning Credit**

There are two types of tax credits available to help offset the costs of higher education. Both are adjusted according to your income. The HOPE Scholarship Credit can be claimed for only 2 years per student, the Lifetime Learning Credit may be claimed for an unlimited number of years. For details about these tax credits more information is available at the following website link:

<http://www.irs.gov/publications/p970/ch02.html#d0e1317>

#### **IRAs and Other Tax Deductions**

Parents and grandparents can create **education IRAs or 527 College Savings plans**, and make penalty-free deductions from **other IRA's** for higher education expenses for their children, grandchildren, spouses, or themselves. Parents and students can also take a **tax deduction** for interest paid in the first 60 months of repayment on student loans.

Taxpayers should consult a qualified tax specialist for additional information and applicable regulations on any federal and state tax provisions. You can call 1-800-4FED-AID, or consult <http://www.irs.gov/publications/p970/>