

Your Planning Checklist

Grade 12

From **First in the Family: Advice About College from First-Generation Students – Your High School Years**, by Kathleen Cushman (Next Generation Press, 2005)

- Your “College” folder will become quite large this year, so keep it organized! If you want, turn it into a file box, containing separate folders for testing documents and score reports, applications for admission, applications for financial aid or scholarships, copies of your income tax forms, notes for your application essay, completed planning checklists from grades 9 through 11, and so forth.
- Choose challenging courses this year, and work hard in them. Your performance senior year shows admissions people that you can go on to succeed in college.
- Register for the SAT Reasoning Test, SAT Subject Tests, or ACT tests given in the fall or early winter. Don’t forget to ask for your scores to be sent to the colleges on your list.
- In fall of senior year, attend another college fair to gather information about colleges and talk to their representatives. If you find new ones that interest you, use the chart below to revise the list you made on your Grade 11 planning checklist:

TOP CHOICES

IN BETWEEN

SAFETY

1. _____	2. _____	3. _____
1. _____	2. _____	3. _____
1. _____	2. _____	3. _____

- Take every chance to actually visit the colleges that interest you. Call the admissions office and see if you can arrange an interview—colleges do not require them, but it can help your chance of getting in.
- Find out your Social Security number (and/or your green card number, if you are a legal immigrant), which you must have for your college applications. If you do not have a Social Security number, but you qualify for one, contact the closest Social Security office (www.ssa.gov) as soon as possible to obtain a number. Write your number here:

1. _____

- Decide six colleges you are actually going to apply to. Write their names in the chart below, and check whether you will apply online, use the Common Application (www.commonapp.org), or send in a paper application. Then write the deadline for each college—not all colleges have the same deadline!

COLLEGE NAME	Apply online?	Mail in paper application?	Use common application?	DEADLINE
1. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
2. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
3. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
4. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
5. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
6. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

TIP Most colleges charge you an application fee, but some colleges waive that fee if you apply online using the Common Application. If you cannot afford the fee, ask your guidance counselor for a fee waiver, or call the college admissions office yourself and explain the situation.

- For each college on your list, make sure you complete all applications for financial aid. Every college requires the FAFSA (www.fafsa.ed.gov), and some colleges also require a form called CSS PROFILE (find it at www.collegeboard.com). Many colleges even have another form of their own to fill out. Use the chart below to keep everything straight, including the deadline for each different application.

COLLEGE NAME	FAFSA		CSS PROFILE		College fin. aid app	
	Deadline	Completed	Deadline	Completed	Deadline	Completed
1. _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

TIP In January, you and your parents should file your income taxes, because you will need them in order to fill out the FAFSA and other financial aid forms. If your family does not file taxes because its income is too low, indicate that when you complete the FAFSA application. Then telephone each college's financial aid office to request a waiver form, which you can send them instead of your income tax forms.

TIP Financial aid applications always ask for your parent's signature. If your situation does not permit this for any reason, call the college financial aid office to explain, and they will tell you what to do.

- Apply for as many scholarships as you can find. (Use www.fastweb.com, and ask your guidance counselor for local scholarships from businesses or organizations.) On the chart below, write down the names and deadlines for the ones you qualify for, and keep track of deadlines:

ORGANIZATION THAT GIVES THE SCHOLARSHIP	DEADLINE	COMPLETED
_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Meet with your guidance counselor to go over your grades and other information you will need to fill out the college applications. Ask your counselor to check if the teachers who said they would write recommendations have done it yet. (If not, go back and ask them again—they probably just forgot.)

TIP Write thank-you notes to those who write recommendations and keep them informed of your decisions.

- Get together with a friend who is also applying to college, and spend a day filling out application forms. If possible, meet in a place with access to a copy machine. Bring fine-tipped black pens, white-out to cover up any mistakes, and extra paper for making drafts and notes. Use your best printing when you fill out the forms. You should complete the "personal essay" section on another day—it is a project in itself. (See next page.)

TIP From your “College” folder, pull out the lists you made in grades 9, 10, and 11 about your activities, reading lists, etc. They will help you as you fill out your applications.

- Take a few hours to prepare for writing the personal essay you will need on your college applications. Think back on your whole life up to this point, and make a list of moments that you remember especially well. Whether they were happy or difficult times for you, write down notes about each of them here. (Use extra space if you need it.)

1. _____ 2. _____
 3. _____ 4. _____
 5. _____ 6. _____

- Take another hour or two to yourself, and pick just one moment from the list you made of life memories. Then write down everything about it—what it felt like, what it looked like and sounded like, who was there, what felt important about it. Write freely, not stopping to worry about grammar or form, as if you were writing in your private journal. Then save those pages. Later, they will help you write the actual essay.

- Set aside a day or two to write the personal essay for your applications. (You can use the same essay for most applications.) Using some of the free writing you did about your life memories, describe one important moment to you in essay form. Use as many concrete details as you can—the college really wants to see how you notice and think about things. After you have something written, show it to your English teacher, your mentor, or anyone else you trust, and ask for feedback. Then revise, revise, revise through many drafts.

TIP Some colleges ask for more than one essay. Usually one of them is more personal, and the other asks about your reading, your activities, or why you want to go to that college. For the second essay, look back at your list of memories, but also look through your Portfolios for grades 9, 10, and 11.

TIP Somewhere in one of your application essays, let the reader know that you will be the first in your family to go to college. If it doesn't fit anywhere else, put it at the end, connecting the experience you describe to your hopes for college.

- Once you start getting letters accepting you to college or putting you on a waiting list, you do not need to decide right away. Use this chart to compare the offers you receive:

COLLEGE NAME	Accepted or waitlisted?	Total costs for the year	Total financial aid offered (grants + loans)	Subtract your financial aid from the total costs, to get your actual costs for the year	College notified of your decision (by May 1)
1. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

TIP If your first-choice college puts you on its waiting list, write another letter to the admissions office, making clear that they are your first choice and that you would attend if they accept you. If you have any new activities or accomplishments since you sent in your application, describe them, too.

- By May 1, make your decision about what college you will go to, and let that college know. Also notify other colleges whose offers you are turning down.

Celebrate! You are going to be the first in your family to go on to college!