

**FROM SCHOOL TO COLLEGE:  
A TRANSITION ACTIVITY CALENDAR FOR STUDENTS  
WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED**

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## Introduction

Students who are blind or visually impaired, as well as those who are sighted, share similar concerns when preparing to attend college for the first time. If they are properly prepared, college can be an exciting and positive experience, but if they are not adequately prepared, college can not only be frustrating, but may lead to unexpected failures. For most students, going away to college will be the first time they have truly been out on their own. There are many things they must do to succeed academically and socially. College students must learn new systems, decide on majors, register for class, find their way around a completely new campus environment, meet new people – students, faculty and administrators, make new friends, adjust to a newfound freedom, manage their time, and determine all they need to do to keep up with a heavy academic load, complete their assignments, get good grades and pass their courses.

Students who are blind or visually impaired share all these concerns and a few more which are unique to their visual impairment. They have to become self-advocates with faculty, order accessible textbooks early, figure out how to make a chemistry class accessible, and manage time with the additional challenges that using Assistive Technology (AT) can bring. They may need an orientation and mobility specialist to work with them on routes around campus. They need to develop a plan to manage their reading workload, find and hire readers, if necessary, set up and utilize AT, negotiate a crowded food court, arrange for special testing conditions, get a ride to the grocery store, and find a date for the football game. How will they deal with these and other issues? What support systems will they have when they leave home, possibly for the first time?

If they planned ahead, when arriving at college they will have already visited the campus at least twice, once when they were looking at schools, and again with their orientation and mobility specialist to learn their primary routes around campus. If offered, they may have already attended a freshman orientation and met with the staff from the Office for Disabled Students. They have the AT they need and know how to use it. They have good independent living skills. They have already worked with the Disability Services Office in areas where they may need assistance, like testing accommodations, and contacted their roommate over the summer. They have also learned strong self-advocacy skills during middle and high school and have a clear sense of self-determination, enabling them to get through all the new challenges college brings.

This Transition Activity Calendar designed by the National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University (NRTC) lists tasks that students who are blind or visually impaired need to complete as early as middle school to be ready to attend college. From taking the right courses, to learning to use appropriate assistive technology, to career exploration and finding the colleges best suited to the intended course of study, to campus life considerations, the demands of

good preparation start early and continue through 12<sup>th</sup> grade and the summer before the fall semester when college starts.

It can be exciting to get involved in considering possible career options as early as possible, even though career goal may change along the way. It might even change in college as the youth is exposed to new courses of study and develops new employment interests in this fast-paced era of technological growth.

College will still be demanding, but a student who has completed the tasks outlined in the Transition Activity Calendar will be prepared to meet the challenges of college academics as well as campus life.

## **The Expanded Core Curriculum**

Both children and youth in transition who are blind or visually impaired have the benefit of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) to provide instruction in specific areas that will aid them to become successful after high school is completed.

If you are not aware of the components of the Expanded Core Curriculum (<https://www.perkins.org/understanding-the-expanded-core-curriculum/>), it consists of the following:

- Compensatory or functional academic skills, including communication modes  
Orientation and mobility skills training
- Social interaction skills
- Independent living skills
- Recreation and leisure skills
- Career education
- Use of assistive technology
- Sensory efficiency skills and
- Self-determination

## **The Transition Activity Calendar**

The Transition Activity Calendar covers the time period from middle school through the summer before college. It is intended to provide guidelines for when important tasks should be completed in preparing for the transition from school to college. There may be some special timelines at your high school and the colleges to which you chose to apply. You are encouraged to make inquiries and personal contacts with the colleges you are interested in attending. This calendar is designed to provide guidelines for most of the core activities required for a smooth and successful transition to college life.

## The Younger Years

There are skill areas that students should have already covered before they enter middle school. If you are interested in information about these areas check out these websites:

Family Connect: <https://familyconnect.org/education/expanded-core-curriculum/>

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired:

<https://www.tsbvi.edu/programs/ecc#:~:text=The%20term%20expanded%20core%20curriculum,learn%20incidentally%20by%20observing%20others>

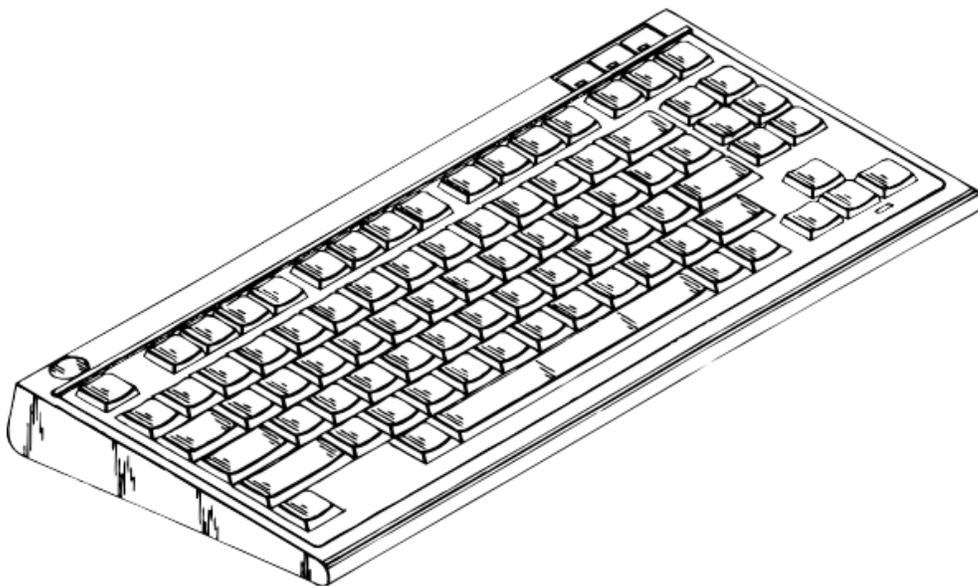


## Middle School

- Start thinking about possible careers you are interested in exploring, assess your skills and abilities, and think about what you would like to do in the future. You might want to explore the Career Advantage for V.I.P.s program on the NRTC website at <https://www.blind.msstate.edu/our-products/career-advantage-vips>
- Discuss your interests and capabilities with your parents, vision teacher, school guidance counselor, or another trusted teacher or adult. Read books and articles, watch videos, and listen to podcasts about what people do for careers. Attend career fairs and talk with people in your community about their careers and the educational training that prepared them. For information on successful adults who are blind, check out Success Stories from Career Connect at

<https://aphcareerconnect.org/succeed-at-work/our-stories/> along with written stories (<https://www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/spotlights>) and podcasts (<https://www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/consumers/webinars-podcasts>) from the National Technical Assistance Center on Blindness and Low Vision

- If you have not done so before, now is a good time to learn how to download books and learn to read both audio books using a narrator, and e-text using synthesized speech. If you want to go to college, the vast amounts of reading will require this skill to keep up even if you are a Braille or large print reader. Now is the time to start practicing if you have not already done so.
- When you are 14, ask about Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services in your state. Find out who your rehabilitation counselor would be, call and introduce yourself, and learn about available services and how old you have to be to apply. There is a list of contacts for state vocational rehabilitation agencies at <https://rsa.ed.gov/about/states>. Explore your VR agency's website. VR is not a required program for people with disabilities, and you have to be found eligible based on severity of vision loss and future employability. VR can be very beneficial to assist you in getting the training and skills needed to succeed. They can even help finance college and assist you in finding a part-time or summer job while you are still in school.
- Create and regularly contribute to a college savings fund. Even if VR services provide funding for college tuition, you may have to pay for other expenses. For example, VR may not be able to cover housing, food, some adaptive equipment, books and supplies.
- If you have not already learned to use the assistive technology you need before middle school, now is the time to start.



## Ninth Grade

- Check to see what transition services are available in your area. You may be ready for transition services as early as age 14, but certainly by age 16 or any time in between. These services will help you plan for the transition from high school to college.
- Create a personal four-year plan of study to include preparatory classes for college. Review the plan with your guidance counselor, parents and/or Teacher of the Visually Impaired (T.V.I.) to ensure you have all the requirements you need to graduate and fulfill the entrance requirements of the school you would like to attend.
- Check with your T.V.I. or guidance counselor to ensure they have ordered standardized achievement tests in your preferred accessible format and registered you for special accommodations if you need them. Become aware of the process of requesting accommodations for different tests. The website for the College Board is [www.collegeboard.com/ssd/student/index.html](http://www.collegeboard.com/ssd/student/index.html).
- Find the Vocational Rehabilitation Agency that provides services to persons with vision loss in your area. Contact a vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselor and determine the VR agency's eligibility requirements. Let them know that you will be a future client who plans to attend college. Ask about any transition or college preparatory programs they may have available.
- Include career exploration activities and broad vocational goals in your annual individualized educational plan (I.E.P.).
- Participate in vocational assessment activities. Some basic information about Vocational Assessment is available at <https://study.com/academy/lesson/career-assessments-types-benefits.html#:~:text=There%20are%20four%20major%20types,skills%20assessments%2C%20and%20value%20assessments.>
- Develop the skill of reading with audio materials. Explore the use of audio or e-text materials for study, even if you typically use large print or Braille. Information on reading devices and resources appears at <https://www.teachingvisuallyimpaired.com/accessing-audio-books.html>. You may need this option as the workload and reading assignments increase in the last grades of high school. You may need to rely heavily on audio materials in college because of more extensive reading assignments.
- You want to develop proficient listening skills to get your assignments done quickly. Learn a method to organize your reading materials, take notes from audio materials, and organize a system to keep track of your notes. You don't

want to have to reread a whole book before a test!

- ❑ Stretch yourself to read a variety of materials, especially in areas where you have interest in exploring or developing career knowledge.
- ❑ If you have not already done so, ninth grade is a good time to apply for services from your State Library for the Blind and Print Disabled. Contact information is available at <http://www.loc.gov/nls/>.
- ❑ If you have a Teacher of the Visually Impaired (T.V.I.) or a Special Education Teacher, tell them you would like to become more involved in ordering your textbooks. You will likely need to do this when you get to college, so it is good to know what sources to use and what media formats you will need for what subjects. For example, you may want Braille for Chemistry, large print for math, and audio materials for English Literature.
- ❑ Explore registering with Learning Ally at [www.learningally.org](http://www.learningally.org). There is an annual fee to join Learning Ally and you need to make arrangements with your family or school to pay for this service. They provide textbooks but you want to be sure you will use this service before you sign up.
- ❑ Register for Bookshare to download e-books that may include texts you will be using for high school or college. Bookshare is free for students with visual impairments, but there may be fees associated for non-students. (<http://www.bookshare.org> )
- ❑ Around the beginning of the year, work with your TVI, special education teacher or counselor to be in contact with teachers for classes you will take next year, so that you can find out what textbooks need to be ordered. Find out when book orders go in, usually by March, so that you can receive them in a timely manner. If you have not gotten your books at the same time as other students, find out why. This is a right that you have.
- ❑ Select one of your classes and try using e-texts or audio books instead of or in addition to large print or Braille books to prepare to use them in college. Experiment with compressed speech to learn to read at faster reading speeds.
- ❑ If you are a Braille reader, be sure you are skilled in the use of either the Nemeth Code or the Unified English Braille Technical Code to access math and science materials. Check out these tutorials from the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) at <https://www.aph.org/product/ueb-math-tutorial/> and <https://nemeth.aphtech.org/>.
- ❑ Enroll in a summer enrichment or college prep program through either VR or your school transition program. Some of these are run by private agencies serving people who are blind and visually impaired. You want one that will teach you

skills you will need in college, such as Braille, Nemeth code, keyboarding, word processing, computer use if not already developed, and also orientation and mobility (O&M). Some also teach independent living skills such as cooking, housekeeping and personal management.

- Especially if you are college bound, you have probably been using a computer for some time. Most students learn to use computers very early in school. Make sure you know how to take a print document, scan it and put it into a format that is useful for you – large print, Braille or e-text.
- You will also need to become proficient in other skills to be successful in your years in high school and in preparation for college. Make sure you know strategies for specific tasks such as:
  - study skills
  - note-taking skills
  - methods for test taking
  - report writing
  - time management, and
  - organizational skills
- You can practice these skills over the summer, especially time management and organizational skills.



## Tenth Grade

- Step up your efforts to seek out career exploration resources. Numerous resources are available online, many provided by the federal government, such as the Bureau of Labor Statistic's Career Outlook (<https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/home.htm>) and My Next Move (<https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/home.htm>).
- A.P.H.'s CareerConnect (<https://aphcareerconnect.org/>) is an online employment resource you can utilize. It provides employment information, career exploration tools, and job seeking guidance for job seekers who are blind or visually impaired.
- Use the Internet to investigate careers as well as begin to look at colleges online and find out what their disability services office has to offer students who are blind and visually impaired. Services will vary considerably.
- There are a number of factors in considering in selecting a college including:
  - The major you want to study (Biology, Engineering, Psychology, etc)
  - Size of the campus
  - Services available for students with disabilities
  - State colleges vs. religious or private colleges
  - Costs and financial aid availability (Sometimes more expensive colleges have good financial aid packages)
  - Requirements for entrance such as grade point average (G.P.A.) or high school courses completed.
  - Distance from home
  - Community College vs. residential colleges
  - And lastly, the athletic program – do NOT make this the deciding factor for your college experience.
- You may already have a career or two in mind, but continue to discuss possible occupations with your T.V.I., guidance counselor, and parents or guardians.
- Talk with other people such as other family members, friends of your parents or neighbors about their jobs and the educational training required for these positions.
- Make sure you are selecting a career that is appropriate for you based on your skills, and interests. Consider what accommodations might be necessary because of your vision impairment. Your VR Counselor may be able to help you decide what skills and training you will need to do a particular job. Information from those you have spoken with can help you in considering your career choice(s).
- Find out what accommodations are necessary for a person with your level of vision loss in the careers you are exploring. The two major consumer groups, the American Council of the Blind (A.C.B.) and the National Federation of the Blind

(N.F.B.) have special career interest groups such as blind teachers, blind lawyers, blind business persons, blind computer programmers, etc. Consider going to your state A.C.B. ([www.acb.org](http://www.acb.org)) or N.F.B. ([www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org)) chapter meetings. Also the American Printing House (A.P.H.) has a registry to contact workers and mentors who are blind through Career Connect <https://aphcareerconnect.org/>.

- If you have never met a working adult who is blind, consider going to a state or national meeting of the American Council of the Blind (A.C.B.) or the National Federation of the Blind (N.F.B.). This is a great opportunity to meet people who are blind or visually impaired who are working in different areas.
- To find information about where some people who are blind or visually impaired work, visit <https://aphcareerconnect.org/explore-careers/careers-for-blind-and-visually-impaired-individuals/>
- Participate in extracurricular activities, clubs, and organizations at school, in the community, or both. Practice meeting new people and inviting fellow students to go do things together. You may have to arrange for transportation or ask if they can drive. This is a good skill to practice.
- Make sure you know the accommodations you need to take standardized tests required for college admission, such as the SAT or ACT that you will take in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Many students take these test early (even as early as 9<sup>th</sup> grade) to allow for extra practice
- Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) of the College Board can assist any student who has documentation of a disability. The College Board provides an SSD Student Eligibility Form that must be filled out by both the student and the school and be signed by a parent or guardian. Your school should have the forms or you can go on line to the College Board at [www.collegeboard.com/ssd/student/index.html](http://www.collegeboard.com/ssd/student/index.html). The forms should be completed a year before you take the test.
- Some young people who are blind or visually impaired do not think they can work a part time or summer job. If you are one of these people, take a hard look at why you feel that way. Talk with your family or others in your network of support. Most people find summer or after school jobs through someone they know. It is important. The most difficult part of working is taking that first step toward finding a job. Without work experience or even the experience of looking for work, you will have limited job search knowledge and skills. You will also have limited knowledge of the world of work in general.
- If you have difficulty obtaining a part-time job during the school year, try doing some volunteer work. This may be a good first step to show you have some experience in a working environment to help you land that first job.

- Plan a strategy for looking for a summer job in the early spring. Have an idea of the types of jobs you feel you would be confident doing and what, if any, accommodations you will need even for a summer job. Talk to your parents and other adults you know to see what might be available. Babysitting, pet sitting, visiting with an older person, washing cars, or doing yard work are good jobs to start. You may get lucky if you plan ahead to find a job along the same lines as your career interest, but even if not, it is good to have work experience.
- If you are able to find employment, be sure to regularly contribute some of your income into your college savings fund.
- Investigate how to enroll in a summer enrichment or transition program through your school or VR that will teach you skills you will need in college. This is something you will want to do in the summer before your junior or senior year.
- If you have not done so already, develop a tentative list of colleges to investigate. Obtain catalogs from college admissions offices, and contact the colleges' Office for Students with Disabilities to see what services they have available. Services vary considerably.
- Check out a guide to help you plan for college at [http://www.tucollaborative.org/sdm\\_downloads/going-to-college-with-a-disability/](http://www.tucollaborative.org/sdm_downloads/going-to-college-with-a-disability/).
- Make sure you know what accommodations or assistance you will need in college. This includes accessible books and class materials, testing accommodations, note-taking, and advocacy assistance.
- It is important for you to acquire effective self-advocacy skills – speak up for yourself to teachers and learn to explain effectively what you need to participate alongside your sighted peers. Learn more by downloading the document about [acquiring Self-advocacy skills](#) on the NRTC website.
- All the new and exciting technology available makes it possible for you to work alongside your sighted peers in school, and often creates interest among other students who are fascinated with your technology. Take advantage of that in developing social relationships more easily.
- Continue to investigate career choices. You may change your mind as you learn more about various careers.
- Reevaluate and adjust your high school course of study as needed if you decide on a different career path. There is still time in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade to take the courses you need.
- Outline your curriculum schedule to meet the highest standards of any school to

which you are considering applying. Continue to study hard.

- Complete a career interest inventory. This can be done through your school, but also consider doing one designed for students with vision impairments such as Career Advantage for V.I.P.'s on the NRTC website <https://www.blind.msstate.edu/our-products/career-advantage-vips> which is available to assist students in this area.
- Complete an independent living evaluation. This is to assess your abilities to take care of your daily living needs, such as doing laundry, cooking, personal organization, etc. You can arrange for this through your VR Counselor. When you complete the evaluation, you may want to start meeting with an instructor or plan to attend a summer intensive training program after your junior year.
- Review the results of these evaluations with a guidance counselor, T.V.I., special education teacher, your VR Counselor and/or your parents.
- Complete standardized achievement tests and review the results with teachers and guidance counselors. If needed, arrange for tutoring.
- Contact the Social Security Office ([www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)) and determine your eligibility for services. Apply for a Social Security card if you do not already have one. Memorize this number. You will need it before you start working and you will need it for college.
- Meet with your VR counselor to discuss your college plans. If you have a regular IEP or 504 planning meeting, include relevant goals and invite your VR Counselor to attend with you. See <https://nfb.org/sites/default/files/images/nfb/publications/fr/fr36/2/fr360202.htm> for more information about the IEP process and <http://specialchildren.about.com/od/504s/f/504faq1.htm> for more information about 504 plans.
- Learn how to use a library both in person and online. If you are not yet comfortable finding materials in the library get the librarian to assist you. This experience is very different from the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled. You will need to learn to use a library to obtain materials to prepare a written assignment or paper. This would include journal articles as well as books. Many college libraries are available online and you might explore the library website of the colleges you are considering to see if they are easily accessible. The MSU library is an example and you can check it out at <http://library.msstate.edu/>
- Become an expert at using the resources on the Internet to complete writing assignments. Learn about the format for citations and references for ideas you use from your readings that are already in the literature, written by someone else.

Your English teacher will likely cover this in class.



### Summer before the Eleventh Grade

- Register to take the PSATs and be sure to request the accommodations you require to complete the test successfully.  
(<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/psat/about.html>)
- Be sure to explore summer employment.

## Eleventh Grade

### September

- ❑ At age 16, or the driving age in your state, apply for a photo identification card from a state agency – typically the Department of Motor Vehicles.
- ❑ Transition Services: By your 16th birthday, you are ready for transition services if you have not already started. Apply to your local Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency. Some state agencies start at age 14, and some wait until age 16. This usually requires completing an eye exam, physical exam, and sometimes a vocational evaluation.
- ❑ Continue to contact the Office of Students with Disabilities at specific colleges and ask about services they provide to students with disabilities, particularly students who are blind or visually impaired. If you initiated contact in the tenth grade, this may be a follow-up call. Be specific about asking what they know about accommodating a student who is blind or visually impaired. Let them know what you will need if you attend college there.
- ❑ Meet with the guidance counselor to review courses of study and to plan for your senior year. Continue to study hard.
- ❑ Continue involvement in extracurricular activities. Eleventh grade is a good time to consider joining a club or running for office in a club or student government.
- ❑ Take a part-time job or perform volunteer work.
- ❑ Download the free 4to24 app developed by the NRTC for more tips to help you prepare for employment and independent living including college life. Learn more at <https://www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/consumers/4-24-app>.

### October

- ❑ Take standardized admission tests such as the PSATs. Taking the PSATs in 11<sup>th</sup> grade gives you a good idea of the type of test it is. It will prepare you to take the SATs in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade to improve your score.
  - Your junior year score is used to qualify for National Merit Scholarships.
  - Check out the S.A.T. accommodation requirements at <http://sat.collegeboard.org/register/for-students-with-disabilities> and <http://www.collegeboard.com/ssd/student/>. Note your accommodations

must be approved in advance of the test, and no accommodations will be approved if the request is made less than 2 weeks before the test date.

- For students who are blind or visually impaired there are several accommodation options:
  - Large print exam and answer sheet
  - Computer availability only for the essay section
  - Audio or reader
  - Additional testing time
  - Braille editions and
  - Extra or extended breaks
- If you are planning to take the ACT, check out information on their website at <http://www.collegeboard.com/ssd/student/> and their accommodations section at <http://www.act.org/aap/disab/index.html>. Testing times and places may be different for you depending upon your accommodation requirements.
- Continue to investigate possible careers by participating in job fairs, career days, and field trips. As you are exposed to more careers, you may change your potential career path. If so, be sure to adjust your course of study accordingly.
- Arrange regular times to meet with your vocational rehabilitation counselor.

## November

- Continue to review college catalogs and their websites and other student recruiting materials from the colleges you are considering. Make sure the colleges you like are strong in the areas that you want to study, and remember, not just the ones with the best football team!
- Determine the support services you will need and identify schools that provide them. This may be useful information in helping you to narrow your choice of colleges.
- Contact admissions, financial aid, housing, and student support services for necessary assistance in the application process.

## December

- Master your computer access skills and learn to use smart phone and social networking sites. This will be important to your social life.

## January

- ❑ Discuss with your parents or guardians the costs of attending the colleges you have decided interest you.
- ❑ Investigate possible scholarship opportunities by contacting college financial aid offices and your guidance counselor.
  - Possible sources include state chapters of the American Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind, corporations, labor unions, professional associations, religious organizations, credit unions and fraternal and community service organizations such as Lions and Kiwanis Clubs.
  - A list of organizations providing scholarships for students with blindness or low vision is available at <http://www.collegescholarships.org/scholarships/blind.htm>
- ❑ If you are considering a college that your parents attended you are often eligible for some reduced tuition costs. If this is a possibility for you, explore it further.

## February

- ❑ Finalize the list of colleges to which you want to apply. Keep in mind that there are fees involved in applying for colleges which might determine to how many you apply. There is no set number, it is up to your needs and interests, but be sure to apply to at least one where you are sure you will be accepted, like a state or community college.
- ❑ Decide if you want to live on campus or if you will be commuting from home. Either way, you will need to be sure you have good independent living skills like cooking, laundry, marking clothes, organization and time management. You should be working on the skills that were identified in the independent living skills assessment you had earlier.
- ❑ Over spring break, visit schools with your parents to determine what type of school you would like to attend. Check out information on choosing a college at <https://mappingyourfuture.org/collegeprep/selectcollege.cfm> and <https://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/dream-match-safety-schools>. Be sure to contact the Disabled Students Office for a tour and to see what types of services are available. Typically more services are available in community colleges and large schools.

## March

- ❑ Continue to be involved in school activities, and explore taking on a leadership role if you have not done so already.

- Prepare for the S.A.T.'s or A.C.T. with the study guides available. There are a number of websites that offer examples. Do a Google search and find some that are good for you.

## April

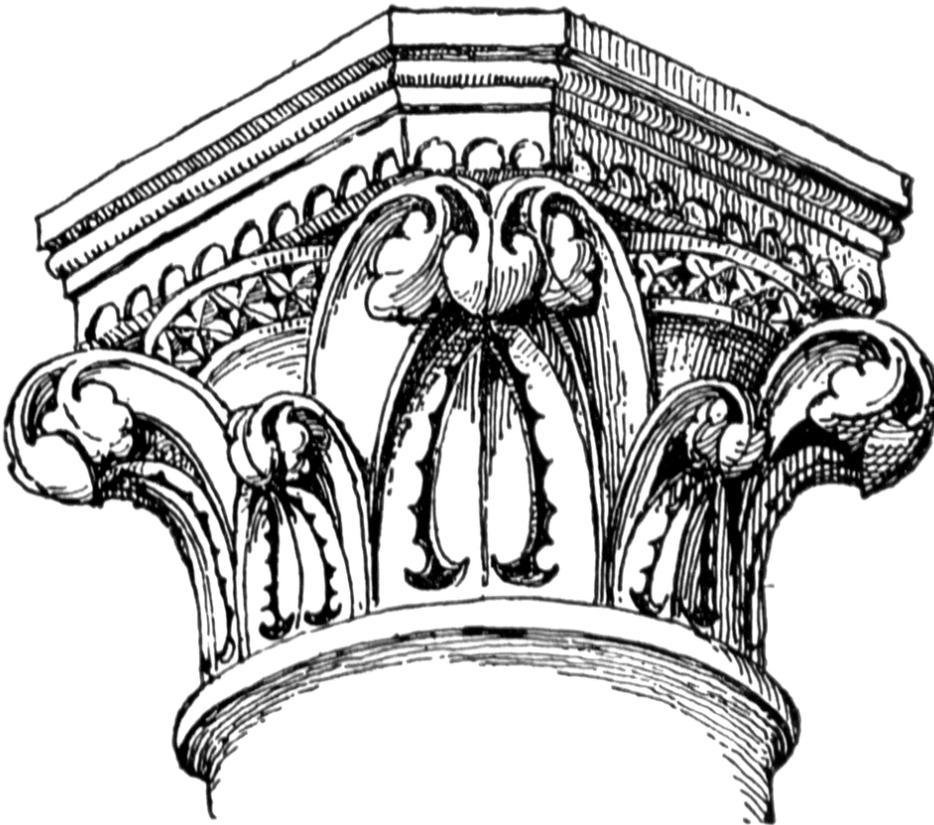
- In the spring, usually April, take the S.A.T. Reasoning Test, A.C.T., or both. This is extremely important if you are applying for an Early Decision or Early Action. Early decision letters are sent out in December of your senior year. When you apply for early decision, the college/university expects you to answer quickly. For more information on this go to <http://www.collegeboard.com/parents/apply/college-applications/21342.html>.
  - You will want to consider these options based on you and your family's financial circumstances.
- Obtain college application forms and inquire about application procedures, time frames, financial aid, etc.
- If you have academic strengths in some areas, you can take tests to exempt you from some college classes. These are College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests <http://clep.collegeboard.org/>. Check into this if it may be a possibility for you.
- Meet with teachers and order your own books for the twelfth grade from Learning Ally, Bookshare.org, NLS and/or the American Printing House for the Blind (A.P.H.). These books are often ordered through an Instructional Media Center in your state. Procedures for ordering books vary, but try to be as actively involved in the process as you can.

## May

- Continue to read, interview people, and use computer searches and other information sources to learn about specific colleges.
- Enroll in a summer enrichment program or register for tutoring if you are having difficulties with some classes.
- If you are excelling at the fast pace in a particular subject(s) you may be eligible to take an advanced placement course in twelfth grade. For more information check this out at <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/about.html>.

## June

- Take your S.A.T. subject tests in June. If they are available in your area enroll in a summer college preparatory program that includes taking a college class. You can find out about these from your school or VR Counselor.
- Work hard on time management skills. Learn tips to help at <https://www.teachingvisuallyimpaired.com/time-management.html>
- Continue training in word processing and computer access technology as needed.
- Complete an interest inventory, vocational evaluation, and independent living evaluation. Review the results with your vocational rehabilitation counselor.



### Summer between 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Grade

- If you have not already done so, arrange with your parents to visit the college campuses you plan to apply to in the fall.
- If your state special education or VR program has a transition program that

includes juniors, sign up.

- Register to take the S.A.T.'s in October.
- Contact colleges for interviews in the fall.
- Consider setting up information interviews with persons who are already working in areas that are of interest to you to further explore a career goal.
- Use the study guides to study for the S.A.T.'s during the summer and through September.
- Some students go through high school graduation, but delay college for a year to work on independence skills such as getting a dog guide and honing their technology and independent living skills. If this is something you want to do, then now is the time to decide. You don't want the expense involved to apply to colleges and then decide to wait a year. Some students want to attend rehabilitation training programs that can take up to a year. If this is something you feel you need, talk with your parents and VR counselor about your options. It can make a huge difference in your ability to succeed in college.
- Some other students have been so busy with their academic programs that they decide to delay graduation to take a 13<sup>th</sup> year before graduation to better prepare them for college. These programs are more commonly offered at residential schools for the blind. If you are struggling with your grades, your adaptive skills in blindness, your computer skills or your independent living skills, you might consider this option to discuss with your parents and guidance counselor. When you go to college, you need to have all the skills necessary to succeed.

## Twelfth Grade

### September

- Reduce your list of possible colleges now that you have visited them. The suggested number varies considerably depending on your chances of being accepted. If you are applying to most competitive schools, you probably should increase your number. If you are applying to a local community college, you probably don't need to apply to more than just that one. Normally, a good number is between 2 and 6 colleges. Opinions on this vary considerably.
- Obtain necessary letters of recommendation from your teachers. Provide them with the contact information for where to send these letters or have them sent to you to include with your application. Be sure to thank them for their extra help.

- Create a checklist of application deadlines for the colleges of your choice and stick to it. Deadlines are not waived for people with disabilities.
- You may want to make a list or chart of the colleges you have applied to and include all pertinent information such as application deadlines, tests required, costs, financial aid availability, freshman orientation deadlines, and any specifics they may require.
- Send in your college applications. Make sure they are complete.
- Meet with your VR counselor to review support services available to you while in college and to obtain information about state and national organizations that may have scholarships. Most states have their requirements and policy concerning college training or post-secondary training on-line. Samples from Texas and Illinois are available on-line. Check out these links or the one for your state.  
<https://www.twc.texas.gov/vr-services-manual/vrsm-c-1300#c1302-1>  
<https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=117408>
- If you have not already done so, develop an individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) with your VR counselor. This is the plan you and your counselor will use to direct your program of study. In order to have a plan, you have to determine a vocational goal. It can change, but VR will not help sponsor you for college if your vocational goal does not require college skills.
- If you anticipate learning some new or upgraded assistive technology or electronic equipment for college, start planning for that now. You may have equipment that you have used in high school that will need to stay with the school, and you will want to talk with your VR Counselor about what they can do to assist you with obtaining the equipment you need and the training to use it.
- Continue to contribute to a college savings fund.

## October

- Take the S.A.T.'s and be sure to have your scores sent to the colleges to which you are applying.
- Write necessary application essays; consult with your English teacher as needed.
- Meet with visiting college representatives and inquire about financial aid and scholarships.
- Register for scholarships, including financial assistance for students with visual

disabilities. If you are male, you must register for national military service through the Selective Service System ([www.sss.gov](http://www.sss.gov)) by 30 days after your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. You may register any time after age 17 years and 3 months.

- If you and your Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Specialist decide a dog guide is appropriate for you, obtain application forms from the appropriate schools. There are always waiting lists and you want to get trained and to be working with the dog before heading off to college. A list of dog guide schools is available at <https://guidedogusersinc.org/resources/guide-dog-training-schools/>
- You may also decide to use an electronic travel device or wayfinding G.P.S. system. Talk with your O&M Instructor and VR Counselor about obtaining the mobility system and orientation tools that are right for you. It is good to get training with whatever system is best while still in high school so that you will be proficient with it before you go to a college campus.
- Make your college choice as early as possible after you have received acceptance letters to allow time to register for classes, consult with college professors, and order textbooks. Remember even if the Office for Students with Disabilities helps some, this will all be your responsibility in college. Many colleges have very limited experience in working with students who are blind or visually impaired, so you need to be the expert on your own accommodations.

## November

- File early financial aid forms for funding from non-federal sources. There are a number of scholarships available for students who are blind or visually impaired and the deadlines for applying are between February and April. You can find a list at <http://www.collegescholarships.org/scholarships/blind.htm>. Explore options to see if you might be eligible for any and be sure to request the necessary applications.
- Complete college interviews and visit any college campuses you did not visit in the summer.

## December

- Early decision letters are sent out in December of your senior year. When you apply for early decision, the college/university expects you to answer quickly.
  - If accepted, this can make you feel secure in going to your first choice. However, on the negative side, it does not allow you to decide which college to attend if financial aid or scholarships are important in funding your education.
  - You will want to consider these options based on you and your family's

financial circumstances.

- Complete federal financial aid applications to be mailed when your family's tax information is complete. Encourage your parents to file early. If your parents are divorced, both parents will need to submit their tax forms. Check the application process for details.
- Submit all financial aid applications by their deadlines.

## January

- Finalize and mail federal financial aid applications as soon as your parent's or guardian's tax return is completed.
- Recheck that you are taking the senior courses and credits needed for graduation.
- Arrange to have mid-year reports sent to colleges, if necessary.
- Schedule a low vision evaluation if you still have usable vision. Your ability to use your vision may fluctuate with large lecture halls and the strain of additional reading assignments in your senior year and in college. Be prepared for distance, mid-distance (T.V.), computer distance, and near reading. If you are going to be getting new aids or electronic magnifications systems, you want to be sure to be able to use them comfortably. Remember sometimes adjusting to new aids may cause some eye fatigue.

## February

- Rank colleges once acceptances begin to arrive.
- Revisit your top college choices if geographically feasible and review their available resources for students who are visually impaired.
- Inquire at these colleges about additional financial aid and scholarships, including assistance available from corporations, labor unions, professional associations, religious organizations, and credit unions.
- You should apply for financial aid by February. The website is <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>. The later you apply, the less is available. As stated before, your parents should plan to complete their tax submission to the I.R.S. as early as possible. A copy of their return will be required to complete your financial aid packet. VR will require you to apply for all available financial aid before they declare any sponsorship assistance.

- Investigate transportation options, both for getting to and from campus, and for getting around on campus or back and forth to the store.

## March

- Make your college selection as early as possible.
- If possible arrange for an O&M session at college. If you are going out of state ask your VR counselor about options to assist you with this process. Become familiar with routes when other students and distractions are present. If you go to campus in the summer, it is a very different environment with fewer students and activities.
- Pay all deposits, complete all forms, and submit housing applications. Make sure you include information about the special equipment you will have in your housing applications so that if there are various sizes of accommodations you may be able to be in a larger room. Tell them about your visual impairment. There are often dorms in various places throughout campus and some may provide better access to your classrooms than others.
- Decide if you want a roommate or not. Many people who are blind have difficulty sleeping at night and may qualify for a single room. There are advantages both ways. If sleep is challenging for you, talk with your doctor about possible solutions. If you have a roommate, you may find it easier to meet people on campus. However, if you are up Brailleing at all hours, you may make a fast enemy!
- Notify your VR counselor about your decision when you decide on a college. Keep your counselor informed of dates, budgets, and college requirements. Complete the required vocational rehabilitation forms.
- Contact the Office of Students with Disabilities at the college of your choice letting them know that you will be attending and discuss your specific needs. If possible, obtain recommendations of classes or instructors to take. They often know the most accommodating instructors. If possible do not register for a class taught by a graduate student. They often have little if any experience with accommodations.
- Register for fall classes during early registration. Some schools allow students using special textbook formats to lock in early registration with athletes. This will enable you to start ordering books as soon as possible without fear of losing your classes.
- Contact college professors and discuss your accommodation needs. Obtain textbook lists, including correct edition number, for the fall semester. Also find out if the instructor is going to be using any other instructional materials that may be

visual in nature. For example, a Fine Art Survey class may depend on a series of slides that need to be identified.

- Place Braille or orders for recorded, scanned or large print textbooks as early as possible for fall semester, especially for math and science texts.

## April

- Fight "Senioritis." Your final grades do count.
- Meet all health and immunization requirements for college.
- Apply for reduced fare cards for transportation systems in and around campus if they are available.
- Order recorded books from Learning Ally, Bookshare.org, or NLS in order to receive them by the fall semester and possibly during the summer. Provide Learning Ally with your home and college mailing addresses if known. If books are not available or need to be recorded, you may need to contact the publisher about getting an e-book. Contact your VR counselor about payment options prior to ordering texts. VR may be able to help with some of these expenses.

## May

- Assess personal finances and plan how your college tuition and other costs will be paid.
- Notify your guidance counselor to send final grades to your college.
- Enjoy your high school graduation. Congratulations!!!

## June

- If you have not already done so, take advantage of any Transition or College Preparatory Programs designed for students with Visual Impairments. If possible, enroll in a college preparatory program which places you in one or more actual college classes.
- Participate in orientation classes for new students and parents at the college of your choice. When you register to attend be sure to let them know you are visually impaired or blind. You may want to coordinate this through the Office for Disabled Students.
- Visit campus housing and determine its suitability for your equipment storage

needs and O&M needs.

- Become familiar with access technology available on campus. Some colleges have accessible computer labs, others do not.
- Make transportation arrangements and become familiar with campus.
- If using a dog guide, revisit the college as early as possible with your dog guide and an O&M instructor or competent person so that you can learn how to get to your specific classes and places like the cafeteria, bookstore or library. Using a guide dog is very different and takes some adjustment time.

## **July**

- Obtain school supplies, clothes, living supplies, etc.
- Contact your roommate. Most colleges encourage you to exchange letters in the summer. It will be up to you whether or not you want to disclose your vision impairment. There are pros and cons either way.
- Practice independent living skills and O&M skills so you are able to function independently on campus. In other words, do you own laundry, fix some of your own meals or fix meals for your family. If you cannot do these things, then you need to be sure to learn before you go. A steady diet of Ramen Noodles will not give you the best brain efficiency!
- Recontact professors and verify that there has been no change in textbooks.

## **August**

- Depending on what part of the country you are located, college may start anytime between early August to late September. Make a list of things you want to take if you are going away to school and start packing! You don't want to get on campus and realize you have forgotten something important – like your cell phone charger, bed linens, or medications. If it will be Christmas break before you return home, consider what clothes you will need as the weather changes.
- Most colleges require Freshmen to live on campus. Find out from the school what items are provided – refrigerators, linens, pillows, toilet paper, etc. Also find out what is permitted such as hot plates, rice cookers, coffee pots, etc.
- Although some dorms have shared kitchens, not all do. Students usually can't afford to always eat out, so they may buy canned soup and use rice cookers to warm it up. Find out what the culture is on campus for things like this. Find out what the eating options are.

- Plan a shopping trip to a nearby store with your parents when you get to campus for things like paper towels, snacks, drinks, and other last-minute items.
- If you want to pledge a sorority or fraternity, find out when rush is – usually it starts a few weeks or days before school starts.
- Now take a deep breath and step out into the beginnings of a great new adventure! Stay positive and plan ahead. Remember, it is up to you to manage your time and stay prepared.

Many other resources are available on the NRTC's Websites:

<https://www.blind.msstate.edu/our-products>

<https://www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/>

For more information contact about the Transition Activity Calendar contact:

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