

## Section II: Before You Begin

### A. Understanding the Overall Timeline

*Understanding the overall timeline, and how all the tasks in the CSA process fit together, is key to your success. The process sections of the Journal outline the specific tasks required in each **phase** of the process. This section will outline the major tasks for each **year** of high school. The tasks listed in the timeline are cross referenced with a specific section in the Journal that provides more detail on the topic. The Comments column is provided to track key dates and note your progress for each task.*

*The Journal's timeline is not specific to your school's policies and deadlines. Make certain to strictly follow any guidelines and/or timeline provided by your high school.*

"Knowing when and what to expect took the surprises and stress out of the college process..."

**Taylor Rooke**  
Senior, Chestnut Hill Academy

#### Freshman Year

The first year of high school is a great opportunity to experience many different school activities to determine where your interests lie (e.g., sports, theater, student council, community service). As you progress through school, you may begin to narrow your activities in order to gain a deeper experience and explore leadership opportunities within fewer activities.

Task	Section	Comments
1. Challenge yourself academically and get the <b>best grades</b> possible.	II.C, Key Criteria	
2. Participate in varied school and community <b>activities</b> . • Create a log to track activities/hours/contact information.	II.C, Key Criteria	
3. Meet with school counselor to discuss academic interests and choose sophomore <b>curriculum</b> (identify potential AP courses).	II.C, Key Criteria	
4. Meet with parents to discuss <b>funding</b> for college.	III. Financial Aid	
5. Supplement your summer reading to <b>enhance vocabulary</b> .	II.D, Standardized Testing	
6. Plan <b>summer employment</b> and activities. • Consider taking summer classes or enrichment programs.	II.C, Key Criteria	
7. Understand key <b>college criteria</b> (i.e., what colleges look for in their applicants).	II.C, Key Criteria	

### Planning the Campus Visit

It is important that you thoroughly plan for your visit so that you can make the most of your time on campus.

The following table outlines the important tasks involved in planning the campus visit. This checklist is repeated in *Section VII: College Progress Notes* in order to track the planning of campus visits for each college.

"In your journal, keep track of the non-guidebook facts and reactions to bring the college **back to life** after your trips."

**Constance T. McEvoy**  
(Director of College Counseling at  
The Agnes Irwin School)

Use the additional lines provided to document other "To Do" items you identify. Use the Comments column to document your status or track important dates (e.g., visit date scheduled for mm/dd/yy).

To Do	Comments
1. Call the Admissions Office or check the college website between Spring of your junior year and Fall of your senior year to: • Check to see if the college has an Open House. • Schedule the visit date. • Inquire about a guided tour. • Inquire about an information session. • Schedule an interview (if possible). • Make arrangements to sit in on a class. • Identify what to bring to campus visit (e.g., transcript, brag sheet).	
2. Plan an <b>overnight stay</b> (on campus if possible). • Plan flights and/or get directions to the college. • Make hotel/sleeping arrangements for parents.	
3. Prepare a <b>list of questions</b> for the Tour Guide ( <i>see Section IV.B, Conducting the Campus Tour</i> ).	
4. Bring a <b>camera</b> for visual documentation of the campus.	
5.	
6.	

- What are the **big issues** on campus?

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Most guides stay after the tour to finish answering questions. This is an excellent time to ask any additional questions about the guide's personal college experience.

After the tour, *explore the campus* on your own and ask questions of random students. You can also look at bulletin boards for examples of what is happening on campus.

"...talk to real people, faculty and students who you select at random during your visit and who are not put in front of you by the admissions staff."  
**Dr. Robert Massa**  
 (Vice President of Dickinson College)

### Maintaining Your College Contacts

Depending on the number of campus visits you conduct, it is difficult to remember all the details from each college. Documenting your campus contacts and overall impressions of each college will be extremely valuable when making your final decision.

Use the table below to consolidate your contact information for each college. You can document or staple *business cards* to the page. This table is repeated in *Section VII: College Progress Notes* to maintain the contact information for each college.

#### Contact information:

College \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) Visited: \_\_\_\_\_

Campus Contact		Contact Information
1.	Admissions	
2.	Financial Aid Contact	
3.	Student Tour Guide	
4.	Faculty	
6.	Students	
7.	Other	

### Assess Each College Against Your Requirements

To further refine your list of colleges, you may find it helpful to rate each college against your key requirements. For example, College 1 may have the culture and campus life you desire, whereas College 2 is a bit smaller than you wanted but has offered you significantly more financial aid.

"When selecting a college, stay committed to your goals and focus on the right fit. Colleges come in many different shapes and sizes. However, there are no wrong or right colleges, just good or great matches."  
**Bill Michuda**  
 (College Advisor)

Review the key requirements listed below and identify additional characteristics that may impact your decision. Next, rate each college against each requirement and analyze your results.

#### Legend

0 = Not Applicable

1 = Does not satisfy your requirements

2 = Partially satisfies your requirements

3 = Completely satisfies your requirements

Key Requirements		College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4	College 5
1.	Academic programs/availability of major					
2.	Location					
3.	Affordability/financial aid package					
4.	Culture/campus-life					
5.	Extracurricular activities					
6.	Size					
7.	Other:					
8.						
9.						
10.						

While the table allows you to rate each college, it does not consider the *value* that each person assigns to that characteristic. For example, one characteristic such as *availability of a specific major* may outweigh a college that better meets several other requirements. Therefore, it is important that you use the tool to *guide* your analysis instead of as a simple mathematical equation.