Freshman Year

- Start your high school career strong. Schedule college preparatory classes and get off to a good start academically as all grades impact your GPA and class rank.
- Get involved! Participate in extracurricular activities—these groups, clubs or teams are fun and help make you a well-rounded student.
- Begin creating a list of all of your academic awards, achievements and certificates as well as extracurricular activities and community service outreach.
- Meet with your guidance counselor to discuss your interests and goals.
- Explore our Career Services page to see how you can turn your interests into a career.

gn.niu.edu/careers

Sophomore Year

- Take the PSAT and/or PLAN® in October. These standardized exams will help prepare you for the SAT or ACT next year.
- Visit colleges to determine where you want to apply. Join us for an open house.
openhouse.niu.edu
- Sign up for Advanced Placement (AP) and/or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses. These courses not only prepare you for college-level work, but you can earn college credit if you score well on the final exam. Those credits will definitely save you money and may help you finish your degree sooner.
- Hit the road! Visit college campuses over the summer—take a tour, meet with an admissions counselor, talk with current students and even attend a summer open house. We’d love to show you why NIU could be a great place to build your future.

niu.edu/visit

Junior Year

- Take the SAT and/or the ACT. There are 7 SAT and 6 ACT test dates each academic year, registration begins in September. Be sure to include NIU on your SAT (code: 1559) or ACT (code: 1109) to automatically send your official test scores to get information specific to your interests.
- Visit colleges to determine where you want to apply. Join us for an open house.
openhouse.niu.edu
- Attend college fairs or information days at your school, visit the college and career center and meet with your NIU admissions rep when they visit your high school.
- Meet with your guidance counselor and determine which colleges you will visit (if you haven’t already) and decide which of those colleges you’ll apply to in the fall.
- Sign up for AP and IB courses for your senior year.
- Start researching scholarships. This is where your extra-curricular activities may give you an extra boost. Check out the U.S. Department of Labor’s scholarship search tool at careerinfonet.org/scholarshipsearch and look into local and organization-based scholarships.
- Begin working on your application essay and letters of recommendation if the schools you are applying to require them.

Senior Year

- Meet with your guidance counselor to make sure that you are on track to graduate.
- Apply for admission to the colleges you have chosen early in the fall semester. Pay close attention to deadlines and ask your counselors and teachers to submit any required documents (official transcripts, letters of recommendation) to your list of schools. We sincerely hope NIU will be one of them! Apply at niu.edu/apply.
- Keep your grades up! Remember that your senior year still counts and that second-semester grades can affect your scholarship eligibility and your admission decision.
- Complete and submit your FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) as soon as possible after October 1st. You can apply online at fafsa.ed.gov. Call 1-800-4-FED-AID for assistance completing the application.
- Complete any outstanding scholarship applications.
- Review your college acceptances and compare the various financial aid offers.
- Decision time! Confirm your acceptance to the college of your choice and also notify each of the schools that you will not be attending—National Decision Day is May 1st. Once you have decided which college you will attend, submit any forms and payments to guarantee your spot next fall.
Focusing on Your Future
Preparing for College
Starts Today

We have something for students of all ages. Have fun, indulge your interests, discover something new or take lessons to improve—all before you reach college.

Our Community School of the Arts provides individual music, voice and art lessons as well as opportunities to play or sing with ensembles. csa.niu.edu

We offer more than 40 Summer Camps for students in 5th through 12th grade, from science and the arts, to athletic and activism. niusummercamps

NIU STEAM Works offers many ways to engage in your favorite subject. niu.edu/p20

Middle School
You don’t need to know what you want to study in college in order to prepare for a university education. Now is the best time to build good study habits and explore all sorts of subjects and activities! Developing these habits now will help you decide what you really love to do and may make choosing a college and a career easier for you.

Here are some easy things you can do to make sure you’re on the right track:

• Think about college as an important part of your future.
• Develop strong study skills.
• Get involved in activities that let you explore your interests—science, arts, writing, music, etc. Try one of our summer camp programs. niusummercamps
• College is the best investment you can make for your future. Ask your parents to visit collegesavings.org to learn about state savings plans to help fund your education.

High School
Now that you’ve found hobbies and subjects that you’re interested in, work them into your schedule and start exploring them a little more deeply through extracurricular activities. Not only do universities look for bright students, we want to see that you’re engaging in your learning, developing yourself and embodying teamwork. In addition to keeping your high school GPA as high as you can, follow our checklists to prepare for college grade by grade.

Required High School Curriculum

- English 4 years
- Mathematics (algebra, geometry, algebra II, trigonometry or higher) 3 years
- Science (at least one year lab science) 3 years
- Social Studies (at least one must be U.S. History or U.S. Government) 3 years
- Foreign Languages, Art, or Music 2 years

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