

Focusing on Your Future
Preparing for
College
Starts Today



**Northern Illinois
University**

Stay on Track

Smart planning ensures a smooth transition into college.
Use our checklist to keep your future in focus.

Freshman Year

Start **Strong**

- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **Connect 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. go.niu.edu/careers

Sophomore Year

Do Your **Research**

- ✓ Although many colleges still require standardized scores, we've gone test-blind! Starting with the fall 2021 freshman class, **we'll no longer consider ACT or SAT scores** for general admission or merit scholarships.
- ✓ **Take the PSAT and/or PLAN® in October.** These standardized exams will help prepare you for the SAT or ACT next year.
- ✓ Check out 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.
- ✓ **Explore!** Visit college campuses this summer—take a tour, chat with an admissions counselor, connect 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**

- ✓ Although we'll no longer consider ACT or SAT scores for general admission or merit scholarships starting with the fall 2021 freshman class, **you may need to provide your scores for certain other scholarships**. There are seven SAT and six 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**, reach out to the college and career center, and connect with your NIU admissions representative.
- ✓ **Connect with your high school 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.
- ✓ **Use the FAFSA4caster** to help determine how much, if any, federal financial aid you qualify for. fafsa.ed.gov
- ✓ **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

Apply, Apply, Apply!

- ✓ **Connect 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 Oct. 1. You can apply online at fafsa.ed.gov. Call 1-800-4FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) for assistance completing your 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 1. Once you have decided which college you will attend, submit any forms and payments to guarantee your spot next fall.

Middle School

You don't need to know what you want to study in college in order to prepare for a university education. But now is the best time to build good study habits and explore all sorts of subjects and activities. Developing these skills 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.
niu.edu/summercamps
- College is the best investment you can make for your future. Ask your parents or guardians 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

3 years

(algebra, geometry, algebra II, trigonometry or higher)

Science

3 years

(at least one year lab science)

Social Studies

3 years

(at least one must be U.S. History or U.S. Government)

Foreign Language, Art or Music

2 years



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 fifth through 12th-grade — from science and the arts, to athletics and activism.
niu.edu/summercamps

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

