

PREMIUM SCHOOL COUNSELING RESOURCE

College & Career Readiness Counseling Toolkit

Grades 9 – 12

Everything a school counselor needs for 4 years
of college & career advising

- ◆ FAFSA Prep Guide
- ◆ College Application Timeline
 - ◆ Scholarship Tracker
- ◆ Career Cluster Exploration
 - ◆ Gap Year Planning
- ◆ 4-Year Counseling Roadmap
- ◆ 12 Counseling Session Plans
- ◆ College Comparison Matrix

UM Printables

Premium Resources for Educators

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. 4-Year Counseling Roadmap** — Grades 9–12 comprehensive advising plan
- 2. FAFSA Step-by-Step Guide** — Complete financial aid application walkthrough
- 3. Scholarship Tracker** — Organize and track scholarship applications
- 4. College Comparison Matrix** — Side-by-side college evaluation tool
- 5. College Application Timeline** — Month-by-month application checklist
- 6. Career Cluster Exploration** — 16 career clusters and pathway planning
- 7. Gap Year Planning Guide** — Structured gap year decision-making framework
- 8. 12 Counseling Session Plans** — Ready-to-use session plans for grades 9–12

This toolkit is designed for school counselors working with students in Grades 9–12. All content aligns with ASCA National Model standards and best practices for college and career readiness advising. Reproduce for individual counseling use only.

SECTION 1: 4-YEAR COUNSELING ROADMAP

The 4-Year Counseling Roadmap provides a comprehensive, grade-by-grade framework for college and career readiness advising. Each year focuses on developmentally appropriate milestones that build progressively toward post-secondary success. Use this roadmap to plan your counseling calendar and ensure no critical steps are missed.

GRADE 9: FOUNDATION & EXPLORATION

Theme: *"Discover Who You Are"*

Primary Focus: Self-awareness, academic adjustment, early career awareness

Quarter	Key Activities	Counselor Actions	Student Deliverables
Q1 (Aug–Oct)	• Transition to high school orientation • Learning style inventory • Study skills assessment • Club/activity fair participation	• Conduct freshman orientation sessions • Administer learning style assessments • Introduce GPA/class rank concepts • Meet individually with at-risk students	• Completed interest inventory • 4-year course plan draft • Activity participation log
Q2 (Nov–Jan)	• Mid-year academic check-in • Career interest exploration • Community service introduction • Social-emotional wellness check	• Review Q1 grades with students • Introduce career cluster exploration • Present community service options • Conduct wellness check-ins	• Career interest profile • Community service plan • Self-reflection journal entry
Q3 (Feb–Apr)	• Course selection for Grade 10 • Personality type assessment • Career speaker series • Summer enrichment planning	• Guide course selection meetings • Administer personality assessments • Organize career speaker events • Share summer program lists	• Grade 10 course selections • Personality profile summary • Summer enrichment application(s)
Q4 (May–Jun)	• End-of-year reflection • Goal setting for Grade 10 • Portfolio organization • Summer planning confirmation	• Conduct end-of-year reviews • Help set sophomore goals • Review and organize portfolios • Confirm summer plans	• Freshman reflection essay • Sophomore goal sheet • Organized counseling portfolio

COUNSELOR NOTE

Freshman year sets the tone for the entire high school experience. Focus on building trust with students and families, establishing good academic habits, and planting seeds for future college and career exploration. Every interaction should reinforce: "Your choices matter starting now."

GRADE 10: DEEPENING AWARENESS

Theme: *"Explore What's Possible"*

Primary Focus: Career exploration, academic rigor, standardized test awareness

Quarter	Key Activities	Counselor Actions	Student Deliverables
Q1 (Aug–Oct)	• PSAT preparation & registration • Career cluster deep dive • Extracurricular commitment review • Academic goal-setting	• Register students for PSAT • Conduct career cluster workshops • Review activity commitment levels • Individual academic planning meetings	• PSAT registration confirmation • Top 3 career clusters identified • Updated activity resume
Q2 (Nov–Jan)	• PSAT testing & score review • College terminology introduction • Community service hours tracking • Dual enrollment information	• Administer/coordinate PSAT • Interpret PSAT scores with students • Introduce college vocabulary • Present dual enrollment options	• PSAT score interpretation sheet • College vocabulary glossary • Updated community service log
Q3 (Feb–Apr)	• Course selection (rigor analysis) • College campus visits (virtual/local) • SAT/ACT planning timeline • Career shadowing program	• Advise on course rigor balance • Organize virtual college visits • Present SAT/ACT timeline • Coordinate career shadowing	• Grade 11 course selections (rigorous) • College visit reflection form • Test prep plan • Career shadowing summary
Q4 (May–Jun)	• End-of-year academic review • Junior year goal setting • Summer college prep tasks • Leadership opportunity planning	• Review sophomore transcripts • Set junior year benchmarks • Assign summer preparation tasks • Discuss leadership development	• Sophomore reflection • Junior year goals • Summer task checklist • Leadership plan

COUNSELOR NOTE

Sophomore year is the bridge between exploration and action. Students should narrow their career interests to 2–3 clusters and begin understanding the connection between academic choices and post-secondary options. Encourage families to start college conversations at home.

GRADE 11: ACTION & PREPARATION

Theme: *"Build Your Path"*

Primary Focus: College/career research, testing, application preparation, financial aid awareness

Quarter	Key Activities	Counselor Actions	Student Deliverables
Q1 (Aug–Oct)	• PSAT/NMSQT registration & testing • SAT/ACT preparation plan • College list development (initial) • Resume building workshop • NCAA eligibility (athletes)	• Coordinate PSAT/NMSQT testing • Host test prep information sessions • Individual college planning meetings • Conduct resume workshop • Advise student-athletes on NCAA	• PSAT/NMSQT completion • SAT/ACT test date registration • Initial college list (10–15 schools) • Draft activity resume • NCAA eligibility worksheet
Q2 (Nov–Jan)	• SAT/ACT first testing window • College research & comparison • FAFSA4caster introduction • Scholarship search initiation • Teacher recommendation requests	• Administer/coordinate SAT/ACT • Guide college research process • Introduce FAFSA4caster tool • Launch scholarship search strategies • Advise on recommendation requests	• First SAT/ACT scores • College comparison matrix (started) • FAFSA4caster estimate • Scholarship tracker (initiated) • Recommendation request letters
Q3 (Feb–Apr)	• SAT/ACT second testing window • College visits (in-person/virtual) • Course selection for senior year • Application essay brainstorming • Financial aid night (parents)	• Support test retake registration • Organize college visit opportunities • Advise on senior course selection • Host essay writing workshop • Coordinate financial aid night	• SAT/ACT retake scores • College visit summaries • Senior year course selections • Essay brainstorm worksheet • Financial aid overview notes
Q4 (May–Jun)	• Finalize college list (6–10 schools) • Draft application essays • Request transcripts & documents • Summer application prep • Senior meeting scheduling	• Review and refine college lists • Provide essay feedback sessions • Process transcript requests • Assign summer application tasks • Schedule fall senior meetings	• Final college list • Essay drafts (2–3) • Transcript request submitted • Summer task checklist • Senior year planning sheet

COUNSELOR NOTE

Junior year is the most critical for college and career preparation. This is when students transition from exploration to action. Ensure every student has a concrete plan by June, including a finalized college list, draft essays, and a clear understanding of financial aid. Schedule monthly touchpoints with all juniors.

GRADE 12: EXECUTION & TRANSITION

Theme: *"Launch Your Future"*

SECTION 7: GAP YEAR PLANNING GUIDE

A gap year is a purposeful, planned period of time (typically one year) between high school and college during which students pursue personal growth, work, travel, service, or career exploration. When structured intentionally, a gap year can enhance maturity, focus, and readiness for college. As a counselor, your role is to help students determine if a gap year is the right choice and, if so, how to plan it effectively.

BENEFITS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Benefits of a Gap Year	Considerations and Cautions
• Increased maturity and self-awareness • Clarified academic and career goals • Real-world work and financial experience • Service to community and global awareness • Prevention of academic burnout • Development of independence and resilience	• Must have a structured, purposeful plan • Financial cost of programs can be high • May lose academic momentum if not engaged • Financial aid implications (must re-file FAFSA) • Deferral policies vary by college • Peer group may advance ahead

TYPES OF GAP YEAR EXPERIENCES

Experience Type	Description	Examples
Service & Volunteer	Domestic or international service focused on community development, conservation, or education.	AmeriCorps, Peace Corps Prep, City Year, Habitat for Humanity, WWOOF
Work & Internship	Paid or unpaid employment to gain professional skills and financial resources.	Local internships, retail/office jobs, career-specific shadowing, freelance work
Travel & Cultural Immersion	Structured travel programs focusing on language acquisition, cultural exchange, and global awareness.	CIEE Gap Year, Where There Be Dragons, Rustic Pathways, language immersion programs
Outdoor & Adventure	Wilderness and adventure-based programs building leadership, resilience, and environmental stewardship.	NOLS, Outward Bound, National Outdoor Leadership School, conservation corps
Academic & Pre-College	Post-graduate academic programs to strengthen skills, explore subjects, or improve college applications.	PG year at prep schools, community college courses, specialized certificate programs

GAP YEAR PLANNING TIMELINE

Phase	Timeline	Action Steps
-------	----------	--------------

SECTION 8: 12 COUNSELING SESSION PLANS

These 12 ready-to-use counseling session plans provide a structured framework for college and career advising across all four high school years. Each plan includes a clear objective, detailed activities, discussion questions, and follow-up tasks. Adapt these plans to meet the specific needs of your student population and individual students.

GRADE 9 SESSIONS

Session Title	Objective	Key Activities	Deliverables
Session 1: Welcome to High School & Goal Setting	Help students transition successfully and set academic/personal goals.	• Icebreaker: "Where Do I See Myself in 4 Years?" • Discuss GPA, class rank, and transcript basics • Complete the "High School Goals" worksheet • Review the 4-year course plan template	Goals worksheet, 4-year course plan draft
Session 2: Learning Styles & Study Skills	Identify learning preferences and develop effective study strategies.	• Administer learning style inventory (VARK) • Match learning styles to study techniques • Create a personalized study schedule • Introduce academic support resources	Learning style profile, study schedule, support resource list
Session 3: Career Awareness & Interest Inventory	Introduce career exploration and identify broad interest areas.	• Complete career interest inventory (e.g., Career Clusters Interest Survey) • Explore O*Net and career browsing tools • Identify top 3 career clusters • Connect interests to high school course options	Interest inventory results, top 3 career clusters list

GRADE 10 SESSIONS

Session Title	Objective	Key Activities	Deliverables
Session 4: PSAT Prep & Testing Plan	Prepare students for the PSAT and establish a standardized testing timeline.	• Review PSAT format, timing, and strategies • Complete PSAT practice questions together • Discuss SAT vs. ACT differences • Create a personalized testing timeline for junior year	PSAT prep checklist, SAT/ACT comparison sheet, testing timeline
Session 5: Career Clusters Deep Dive	Explore specific careers within top clusters and identify required education/training.	• Research 2–3 occupations within top clusters • Identify education/training requirements for each • Complete "Day in the Life" reflection activity • Plan a career shadowing or interview experience	Career research worksheet, shadowing plan, education requirements list

Thank You for Choosing UM Printables!

Your support means the world to us! If you found this **College & Career Readiness Counseling Toolkit** helpful and valuable for your students, please consider taking a moment to leave a review on Teachers Pay Teachers.



Your honest feedback helps us improve and create more premium resources for school counselors and educators. It also helps other counselors find quality tools for their programs!

How to Leave a Review:

1. Go to your "My Purchases" page on TPT.
2. Find this resource and click the "Leave a Review" button.
3. Share your feedback and earn TPT credits toward future purchases!

UM Printables | Premium Resources for Educators