Sohmer College Counseling

college counseling wherever you are

Glossary of College Counseling Terms

Applying to college is complicated.
It even has its own language.

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Updated June 2026

ACT: The ACT assessment is a curriculum-based test that includes required sections in English, Math, Reading. Each section is scored 1-36 and students also receive a composite score of 1-36, representing the average of the three individual scores. The optional Science section is not included in the Composite score for the three "core" sections. If a student chooses to take the Science section, it will appear as a "section score" separate from the Composite score. There is also an optional writing section of the ACT.

The ACT is administered up to 7 times per year, depending on the test center location. Additional information, including practice questions and registration forms, can be found at www.act.org, www.review.com and www.kaplan.com. Like the SAT which has transitioned to a digital format, the ACT began digital testing in April 2025 and is expected to be fully digital soon. Additional ACT updates include shorter overall test times and fewer total questions.

Accelerated Degree Programs: Some colleges offer combined programs to allow students to complete an undergraduate and a graduate degree in a reduced period of time. Examples include a combined BS/MD program, where a student would earn a BS and a medical degree (MD) in 7 years rather than the usual 8. Additional programs may allow students to qualify for early assurance paths to medical school or the ability to simultaneously study for their undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Acceptance Rates: Colleges publish this annual statistic to show what percentage of students whose applications were submitted were offered a place in the first year class.

AP Courses: Advanced Placement courses are offered in many high schools and can also be taken online. The courses are taught using a set curriculum and culminate in standardized exams that are administered each May. Based on their scores on the exam, students may qualify for college credit and/or the ability to skip introductory courses. AP courses are indicated as such on the student's transcript. Some high schools limit the number of AP classes that students can take per academic year.

AP courses that high schools may offer include: African American Studies, Art History, Biology, Business with Personal Finance,Calculus AB, Calculus BC, Chemistry, Chinese Language and Culture, Comparative Government and Politics, Computer Science A, Computer Science Principles, Cybersecurity, Drawing, English Language and Composition, English Literature and Composition, Environmental Science, European History, French Language and Culture, German Language and Culture, Human Geography, Italian Language and Culture, Japanese Language and Culture, Latin, Macroeconomics, Microeconomics, Music Theory, Physics 1: Algebra Based, Physics 2:

Algebra Based, Physics C: Electricity and Magnetism, Physics C: Mechanics, Precalculus, Psychology, Research, Seminar, Spanish Language and Culture, Spanish Literature and Culture, Statistics, Studio Art: 2-D Design, Studio Art: 3-D Design, Studio Art: Drawing, US Government and Politics, US History and World History.

Applications: Each college and university will require that students submit an application to be considered for admission. Applications are available online through each college's website and many are also available at www.commonapp.org or coalitionforcollegeaccess.org

Application Fees: Most applications require an application fee, with these fees ranging from $25-$100. Most colleges will provide fee waivers to students who have a demonstrated financial need. Students can request fee waivers themselves or counselors can request them by contacting the college or university office of admission. Application fee waivers are also available at www.nacacnet.org and through both the Common App and Coalition Application.

Application Review: Colleges have different methods for evaluating students' applications. While holistic review takes all elements of the student's profile into account, the decisions whether to require standardized test scores, if letters of recommendation are considered and other choices about how each student's profile will be reviewed will vary from institution to institution. Information about each college's requirements will be available in the admissions section of the website.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): AI platforms like ChatGPT, Canva and even SIRI are useful tools that can have a role in the college search and application process. For example,, students can use AI for research. AI should not, under any circumstance, be used to draft essays and supplements. Colleges value authenticity and the student's honest voice.

Athletics: High school athletes should include their experiences on their applications as evidence of athleticism, commitment, teamwork and leadership. Students who plan to participate in college athletics should also register with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) at www.ncaa.org.

College sports are separated into three "divisions" known as Division I, II and III. Students should remember that only Division I institutions can offer athletic scholarship awards.

Campus Culture/Campus Climate: Prospective students should evaluate the campus culture to see if they would feel comfortable and supported there. Elements of campus culture and climate might include the presence and acceptance of varied political groups, LGBTQ+ students and faculty, and students from diverse racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Representation of various groups in the student body, faculty, administration and staff is also an indicator of the campus culture and climate.

Campus Visit: Campus visits are recommended when they are geographically and financially feasible. Colleges and universities expect that students living a reasonable distance from campus will make an effort to visit, but if visiting the campus creates too much of a burden, the student or their counselor should contact the admission office directly to explain the situation. Visits should always be arranged through the admission office, and may be coordinated with the following:

- Interview: A one-on-one opportunity to speak with an admission counselor on campus. Some colleges and universities will offer alumni interviews and/or virtual interviews, while many colleges do not offer interviews at all.
- Group Session: Students and families who plan to visit campus may be able to participate in a group session where they will hear about the college and have an opportunity to ask questions.
- Tour: A guided tour of the campus is an important part of the college visit.

Campus Visits – Virtual: In Spring 2020, many colleges cancelled their on-campus visits in response to the coronavirus (Covid 19) pandemic. As a result, colleges began posting virtual tours on their websites, with additional tours available at www.ecampustours.com, www.youvisit.com and other similar sites. Virtual tours have remained available even though most in-person events have resumed.

Career Services: The career services office on campus will usually offer skills workshops and other programs to help students prepare for jobs before and after graduation. This office also coordinates internships for students, some as early as the first semester of freshman year. This office will also coordinate campus career fairs and other events to help students meet prospective employers.

CEEB Code (school code): A six-digit code assigned to each high school by ETS (Educational Testing Services) that must be included on all applications and all standardized testing forms.

Coalition Application: The Coalition Application was created in 2015 as an alternative to the Common Application (now Common App). As of the 2026-2027 admission cycle, the Coalition for College Access, Affordability and Success has over 150 member institutions, all of which agree to meet certain criteria in terms of graduation rates and financial aid. The Coalition Application also offers a set of college preparation tools and allows students to create an application "locker," where they can store their application materials throughout high school. For the 2026-2027 application year, the Coalition Application requires students to respond to one of the following prompts in 500-650 words:

- Tell a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.
- What interests or excites you? How does it shape who you are now or who you might become in the future?
- Describe a time when you had a positive impact on others. What were the challenges? What were the rewards?
- Has there been a time when an idea or belief of yours was questioned? How did you respond? What did you learn?
- What success have you achieved or obstacle have you faced? What advice would you give a sibling or friend going through a similar experience?
- Submit an essay on a topic of your choice.

College Degrees/Diplomas: Students who graduate from college receive a diploma which shows the year of graduation and the degree earned.

- Associate of Arts (A.A): usually for majors in non-STEM fields and designed to be completed in 2+ years
- Associate of Science (A.S): for majors in STEM-related fields and designed to be completed in 2+ years
- Bachelor of Arts (B.A): designed to be completed in 4+ years
- Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.): for majors in art, music and dance which usually contain a conservatory component and are designed to be completed in 4+ years
- Bachelor of Science (B.S): for majors in STEM-related fields and are designed to be completed in 4+ years

College Search: There are many resources available for students during the college search. These resources are also very helpful for counselors to use while working with students. Some of these resources are:

- www.collegeboard.com
- The Public Library www.usa.gov/libraries
- www.nacacnet.org (National Association for College Admission Counseling)
- www.nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator (National Center for Education Statistics)
- *The Fiske Guide to Colleges* by Edward B. Fiske

- *The College Finder* by Steven R. Antonoff PhD
- Princeton Review's *K & W Guide to College for Students with Learning Differences*

Common App: The Common App (formerly The Common Application) is updated each year for use by applicants to over 1100 member colleges in the United States and more than 15 other countries. Students are able to complete a single application and electronically submit copies to participating colleges and universities. Many of the institutions will, however, require that supplemental items be submitted before the Common App is considered to be complete. Common App resources are available in English and Spanish and more information is available at www.commonapp.org

For the 2026-2027 cycle, students filing through the Common App are asked to provide a response (up to 650 words) to one of the following writing prompts:

- Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you and what did you learn from the experience?
- Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?
- Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
- Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that has sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
- Describe a topic, idea or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
- Share an essay on the topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

Community Based Organizations (CBOs) provide, among other services, college and career counseling. Counselors at CBOs offer important support for students who need more guidance than they can receive from within their high schools. Some examples of community based organizations would be:

- Churches, Synagogues and Mosques
- Boys' and Girls' Clubs
- Community Centers
- Breakthrough Collaborative

- The Opportunity Network
- uAspire

Community College/Two-Year College: Two-year or Community colleges are often part of state or city systems and offer Associate's Degrees (A.A.s/A.S.s), which are designed to be earned in 2+ years, rather than the 4+ years generally needed to earn a Bachelor's Degree (B.A./B.S.). Students at two-year colleges often transfer to another institution after receiving their Associate's degree in order to earn a Bachelor's degree. Two-year colleges offer both full-time and part-time programs and many have Honors Programs as part of their offerings.

Students who enroll in a two-year college with plans to complete a four-year degree should meet with the transfer office on campus to make sure that they are taking courses that will allow them to successfully transfer their credits.

Cost of Attendance: This is the actual cost of a student's enrollment, and may include transportation to and from campus (as a resident or a commuter), books, meals, lab fees and clothing in addition to tuition and housing.

CSS Profile: The College Scholarship Search Profile is a common financial aid form used by many private and public colleges and universities in addition to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (**FAFSA)** form. The form can be found online at www.collegeboard.com/profile. The CSS profile is generally available by October of the senior year. Colleges and universities may also require their own financial aid forms.

Decision Plans determine how and when students submit applications and when they will receive college admission decisions. The plans offered by each college will be detailed on the admissions page of its website.

- **Early Action (EA):** This plan encourages students to submit their applications a month or two before the regular deadline — and to receive their decisions early, too. Students are able to continue to apply to other colleges and can usually apply EA to multiple colleges. Even though students will receive their EA decisions between October and February, they do not have to make a commitment until May 1.
- **Early Decision (ED):** Under this plan, a student applies to a single college or university and makes a commitment to attend if admitted. In this case, students apply by an early deadline (usually November 1) and are notified of the decision by mid-December. If admitted, the student must enroll in that college or university and cancel all other pending applications. Because early decision is a binding

agreement (contract), the early decision application requires that both the college counselor and a parent/guardian sign the application acknowledging their understanding of the early decision rules.

Under most early decision plans, students can be admitted, denied or deferred. An applicant who is deferred will be placed in the regular admission pool of applicants and notified by mid-April. A deferred early decision application is no longer binding.

Colleges and universities prepare a financial aid package for each aid-seeking student who is admitted under early decision. The package is the same as what the student would be offered in the regular pool, so students are not penalized financially for applying early. They do, however, lose the opportunity to compare financial aid offers. If the offer of financial aid from the institution where the student is insufficient, the student can be released from the early decision commitment, but also forfeits admission to the university.

Some colleges and universities also offer **Early Decision II**, where applications are submitted in early January and decisions are released by mid-April. Early decision II is binding (like ED I) and can be a good option for students who are not ready to apply by the ED I deadline or who have been denied or deferred from the school where they applied ED I.

- **Open Admission**: This policy for admission requires only that a student have graduated from high school or received an equivalency diploma by passing the General Education Development exam (**GED**).
- **Regular Admission:** Under this plan, students usually apply between January 1 and March 15 of the senior year. Once a student's application has been reviewed, the college or university issues a decision. Most students will be either admitted or denied, meaning they are either offered a place in the first year class or not. Students will generally receive their decision letters by April 15. Students who are not admitted, but who meet the college or university's criteria for admission, may be offered a place on the **wait list**. Students on the **wait list** may be offered admission if places in the class remain available once the May 1 **universal reply date** has passed.
- **Restricted Early Action/Single Choice Early Action:** This plan is a hybrid of Early Decision and Early Action. While the decision from the college is non-binding, students who apply to college under a Restricted Early Action (REA) or Single Choice Early Action (SCEA) are limited in terms of other applications that they may file simultaneously. These policies vary greatly, so it is important to read them carefully.

- **Rolling Admission:** Under this plan, the admission office notifies applicants as their applications are processed rather than waiting for a general spring mailing.

Demonstrated Interest: Because colleges and universities are concerned about their applicant **yield**, many pay close attention to how interested a student appears to be in the particular college or university. In addition to campus visits**,** students can use the following to express their interest: attendance at college fairs, participation in in-school visits and local events, participation in online programs and e-mail contact with college representatives.

Deposits: The money required by a college or university to hold a student's place in the entering class. There are several types of deposits:

- Non-refundable: Can be required only on May 1 or later.
- Refundable: Can be required at any time
- Housing: Can be required at any time, but must be refundable until May 1.

Digital SAT (See SAT)

Direct Admissions: More than 200 college members of the Common App offer what is known as direct admissions. Through this program, the colleges get access to certain data points (zip code, GPA, etc.) after students create their Common App accounts and are able to offer admission to students even if those students have not yet applied to the college. Availability of direct admissions will vary by institution.

Diversity on Campus: This is the mix that results when students come from varying ethnic, religious, geographic, and economic backgrounds. Diversity also includes sexual orientation, age, gender, cultural experience, political philosophy and national origin. Colleges and universities list existing student groups on campus in their publications and on their websites. In addition, the following list is a sampling of websites providing information about student groups on campuses across the country:

- Catholic Colleges www.catholiccollegesonline.org
- Christian Colleges www.cccu.org
- Fellowship of Catholic Students www.focusonline.org
- Fraternities and Sororities www.greekpages.com
- Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities www.hacu.net
- Jewish Student Organizations www.hillel.org
- LGBTQIA+ (The Campus Pride Index no longer exists — review college websites for now)

- Muslim Student Organizations https://www.internationalstudent.com/study_usa/religious-schools/us-islamic-schools

Dual Enrollment: Some high schools offer students the option of taking some of their senior (and sometimes junior year) courses at local two and four-year colleges. This option is especially popular in the South and Midwest, with California, Texas and Florida among the states with the highest percentage of students participating. It is worth noting that dual enrollment grades will be listed on the student's college transcript.

E-Mail: E-mail is the primary way that colleges communicate with students through the application process, so students should check their e-mail on a regular basis — at least once per week. Students can ask questions or make comments by sending e-mail to the office of admission.

E-Mail Addresses: Students should understand that colleges will usually communicate with them via e-mail rather than phone calls or text messages. It's a good idea for students to create a separate e-mail address for the college process.

E-Mail Etiquette: Students should write their e-mails using their best spelling, grammar and punctuation.

ESL/ELL: English as a Second Language/English Language Learning

Expected Family Contribution (EFC): See **"Student Aid Index (SAI)"**

English Language Proficiency Tests: While there may be exceptions for students pursuing the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma or for those attending schools where instruction is in English, colleges will generally require international students to demonstrate their level of English language skills by taking an accepted test of English language proficiency. The tests generally measure Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking ability. Colleges may use these scores to complement the SAT Reading and Writing score and colleges usually list their minimum accepted scores in the international admissions section of their websites. The accepted tests will vary by institution, with details on each college's international student page, but will generally include one or more of the following exams:

> TOEFL: The Test of English as a Foreign Language is administered by the Education Testing Service (ETS). Registration information can be found at www.toefl.org.

IELTS: The International English Language Testing System. Information and registration at www.iELTS.org
DUOLINGO: The Duolingo English Test. Information and registration at www.englishtest.duolingo.com/readiness

Essay: See Personal Statement/Essay

FAFSA: Every student who applies for financial aid must complete the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** during their senior year of high school. The form becomes available online at www.studentaid.ed.gov and www.fafsa.ed.gov every October. Once the FAFSA is available, students and families should file as soon as possible. Students and families use prior prior year (PPY) income tax information when filing the FAFSA. For students graduating from high school in 2027, FAFSA forms can be submitted in 2026 using information from tax year 2025 (filed April 2026).

Students can get their FSA ID by visiting https://www.fsaid.ed.gov and parents/ guardians will receive an invitation to participate based on the contact information provided by the student.

The FAFSA form allows students to include up to 20 colleges and universities in their initial filing and if needed, students can add others using the FAFSA correction form. Colleges do not see other institutions listed on the student's FAFSA form.

Students and families can get estimated financial aid information from the **Net Price Calculators** that appear on each college website and the federal government's Aid Estimator at https://studentaid.gov/aid-estimator.

Federal Pell Grants: The maximum grant for the 2026-2027 award year remains $7395. Maximums in subsequent years will depend on budgetary approval. Students' eligibility is determined through their **FAFSA** filings.

Federal Student Aid: The Federal Student Financial Aid homepage offers extensive information about the types of financial aid that are available for students. The information is available in both English and Spanish.

- www.studentaid.gov
- www.fafsa.ed.gov

Financial Aid Package: After receiving reports from **FAFSA** and **CSS** (if applicable), each college will prepare a financial aid offer, or package, for the student. The package will likely include a combination of need-based aid such as loans, grants and work study.

The ratio of loans to grants within financial aid packages can vary greatly from institution to institution, and students should review the offers they receive carefully with an eye towards their actual cost of attendance. Financial aid packages will not necessarily cover the total cost for a student enrolling in the institution. The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) provides a variety of resources on its https://www.nasfaa.org/students_parents

Colleges and universities are either "need aware" or not, indicating whether or not a student's ability to pay will be considered in admissions decision.

In addition to need-based aid, some colleges also offer merit aid, which is awarded based on a student's accomplishments, including grade point average, activities or background. Information about all available financial aid is available on each college's website.

First Generation/First Generation College-Bound: These are students whose parents were born outside the United States and students whose parents did not complete a college degree. Many colleges offer fee waivers and/or special programs for these applicants.

Fly-In Programs/Visit Programs: Colleges offer fly-in and visit programs to enable prospective students to experience campus life. Some of these programs are designed specifically for low income students and/or students from marginalized groups, including BIPOC students. Several websites, including www.appily.com, provide information about programs throughout the US.

GED: Students who have not graduated from high school but who want to attend college can earn a General Educational Development diploma (GED). Information about how to earn a GED — including online options — can be found at www.ged.com. Many community colleges offer GED programs.

GPA: A student's grade point average (GPA) is determined at the end of the junior year by averaging the grades received in all of the student's academic courses for the three previous years. Colleges may choose to recalculate GPAs based on their own formulas.

Grading Scale: High schools, colleges and universities use a point system to measure student grades. In many cases, the scale goes from 0.0 (F) to 4.0 (A).

The grading system used by a high school should be explained in the high school profile. In some cases, a weighted average is used, meaning that students receive a GPA adjustment for the work they do in honors or AP courses. For example, if the high school uses a one-step adjustment, a student who gets an A- in AP English would have the grade computed in the GPA as a 4.0 rather than as a 3.7, even though the A- appears on the transcript.

Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs): See “Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs)” and www.hacu.net.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs): See “Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs)” and www.thehundred-seven.org.

Holistic Review: See Application Review

Honors Courses: Some high schools offer honors courses with advanced content as a complement or alternative to **AP** courses. Honors courses should be specified as such on the transcript.

International Baccalaureate/IB: International Baccalaureate (IB) programs have been offered in schools around the world for more than 50 years and have become increasing popular in the United States. Information can be found at **www.ibo.org**

International Students:

> **Visas**: International students who wish to study in the US must have a valid F-1 student visa. The visas are issued by the Department of Homeland Security based on the school or college’s submission of information through the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) system. Many high schools, colleges and universities are authorized to use SEVIS to issue F-1 visas. These visas have a termination date at the conclusion of a student’s course of study, but become invalid if the student fails to meet the requirements determined by the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security. When the student graduates from high school, the F-1 visa should be transferred to the college where the students will enroll. Detailed information can be found at www.studyinthestates.dhs.gov.
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> **Tuition and Fees**: Most colleges and universities will require that international students produce bank statements proving the ability to pay tuition and fees.

Students should request several copies of their bank statements, because colleges and universities often require original paperwork.

Financial Aid: Some colleges and universities will offer institutional aid to international students. Information about this can be found in the international student sections of the individual college and university websites or in publications such as The College Board's *International Student Handbook.*

Out-of-State Status: Students who are in the United States on F-1 visas will pay out-of-state tuition at all state and city universities because their visa status does not allow them to establish local residency.

Resources for International Students:

- www.studyinthestates.dhs.gov
- The College Board's *International Student Handbook*
- www.internationalstudent.com

Learning Differences: Learning differences (sometimes called learning disabilities) include a broad set of conditions that complicate a student's ability to learn in a traditional setting. Accommodations, such as extended-time testing, verbal instructions, and other support services can be made available in school based on the results of an evaluation. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires colleges and universities to make reasonable accommodations for students with documented learning differences. More information can be found at www.ada.gov and in the academic support/academic services section of each college's websites

Letters of Recommendation/Support: Colleges and universities may require up to three letters of support for each applicant. Many colleges and universities provide checklists as part of the application as well as including space for written comments. Usually, if three letters are requested, two will be from teachers and one will be from a counselor. Teacher and counselor recommendations are best if they are confidential, and students should be encouraged to waive their right to see the letters in the FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) section of the application and/or on the secondary school report (SSR). A universally accepted secondary school report can be found at https://www.nacacnet.org/secondary-school-report-form/

Students who are involved in activities outside of school may want an additional letter written on their behalf by their coach, supervisor, instructor or clergy member. To be most useful, these letters should be sent by the writer to either the college counselor or directly to the admissions office so that confidentiality can be maintained. Outside letters can also be uploaded directly to the Common App and Coalition Application.

Liberal Arts Colleges: While it may seem otherwise, students should think of liberal arts as a mindset rather than a major. A liberal arts education is not about studying art; it's about the "art" of studying broadly before focusing on a specific discipline or major. Liberal Arts colleges (LACs) are excellent places to study everything from anthropology to chemistry to finance to zoology.

Minority Serving institutions (MSIs)

Asian American and Native Pacific Islander Serving Institutions: Colleges and universities where the undergraduate population is at least 10% Asian American and Native Pacific Islanders. There are several hundred AAPI-serving institutions in the US.

Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs): A group of about 470 United States colleges and universities where the overall enrollment is at least 25% Hispanic. Information can be found at www.hacu.net, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities' website.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs): A group of colleges and universities that were founded to expand college attendance for Black students before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided access to all institutions. The 104 HBCUs in the United States admit students regardless of race, but enrollment remains comprised largely of Black students.

- www.hbculifestyle.com
- www.hbcuconnect.com
- www.thehundred-seven.org

Tribal Colleges: A group of 37 colleges with a mission of supporting Indigenous students and communities. Information can be found at www.aihec.org

Net Price Calculator: The federal government mandates that all college and university websites include a net price calculator, a tool which allows prospective students to obtain an **estimate** of the real cost of attending a particular institution. Net price calculators (and the information required to use them) will vary by institution, so students should complete the process at each college or university.

Opportunity Programs: There are many opportunity programs that have been designed to encourage educationally and economically underserved students to attend college. The programs also provide support services for students after they enroll. Information can be found on individual college websites. Programs at public colleges vary by state and information can generally be found on each state's education department website.

Personal Statement/Essay: Many colleges and universities, including most members of the Common App and Coalition Application, require a personal statement as part of their applications. Students should take particular care with the essay, as it is an opportunity to tell their story and also showcase their writing ability. If a question is provided, students should make sure that their essay answers the question completely. If no question or prompt is provided, students can use a brief biographical essay, or may use the essay questions on the Common Application or Coalition Application as a guide. Students may also have the opportunity to supplement their essays by including a graded paper from an English or History/Social Sciences class.

In addition to a personal statement, many colleges will also require supplements, which are shorter and more specific pieces of writing. One example of a supplement that is frequently used by colleges is the "Why Us?" question which generally requires students to explain their possible course of study and also detail why the student and their plans fit well with the particular college. While the description of the student can be used for various applications, research is required to make the "why us?" part of the answer specific to each college.

Pre-Professional Advising: Students who are considering graduate school, especially for business, dentistry, law or health professions, should research the advising offices on campus to see what support is available. Once enrolled, these students should meet with an advisor for help selecting courses, finding internships and research opportunities and preparing for entrance exams like the LSAT, MCAT and GRE.

Profile - College: Colleges usually provide information about the most recent class as part of a first year class profile that is published in printed materials and on their websites. A typical college profile might include the number of applicants, representation by geography race, ethnicity and gender, as well as middle 50% standardized test scores.

Profile - High School: The high school profile is prepared by the high school counselor and should accompany each student's transcript when it is sent to a college or university. The profile should describe both the school as a whole and the particular graduating class. The profile may also include a grade grid, or other reporting tool, with information about the current graduating class's performance over the first six semesters of high school. High School profiles are often included in the College Counseling section of the school's website. and examples can be found at www.nacacnet.org/school-profiles-member-examples/

Pronouns: Colleges will now ask students to share their preferred pronouns (she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/their, etc.). Using a person's preferred pronouns is important and respectful.

PSAT/Digital PSAT: The PSAT is traditionally offered to students in October of the junior year. Many schools also offer the test to sophomores and freshmen. The test is similar to the SAT, but scores are for preparation and guidance only and should never be reported to colleges. The PSAT models the **SAT**, but has certain differences in terms of structure and scoring. For example, the maximum score on the SAT is 1600 while to maximum PSAT score is 1520.

When students receive their scores, they also receive access to a detailed score report showing their answers and, if missed, the correct answers. Students can also access on-line assistance at www.collegeboard.com/quickstart and KhanAcademy.org. Students should use these tools in preparing for the SAT.

The full name of the PSAT is PSAT/NMSQT, which stands for National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. PSAT scores from the junior year are reported to the National Merit Scholarship Corporation for use in determining eligibility for National Merit recognition and scholarships. Of the nearly 1.5 million students taking the test, those with the top 50,000 scores are selected for further review, including a review of their SAT scores. Students can be named "commended scholars," "semi-finalists," "finalists" and "winners." Information about the program can be found at www.nationalmerit.org. Note that students must take the SAT in order to receive NMSQT recognition and awards.

High schools can offer the PSAT to sophomores in either the fall or the spring. In addition, the PSAT 8/9 and PSAT 10 are offered in some schools.

Public and Private Institutions:

> **Private colleges and universities** are run primarily through the use of tuition, donations, and endowments.
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> **Public universities** are run primarily through the use of state and federal funds that are supplemented by tuition, fees, donations and endowments. In general,

public institutions are less expensive than private institutions, but tuition is paid at different levels for state residents and out-of-state students:

- **State Residents** (students who can prove that they live in a particular state) pay a lower tuition because it is assumed that their families' taxes support the institution.
- **Out-of-State students** (who reside in other states or internationally) pay a higher tuition. International students studying on F-1 visas are generally considered to be out-of-state students.
- **Undocumented Students:** Students in California, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah and Washington can qualify to pay in-state tuition, provided that they meet state-specified criteria**.**

Reading List: While not college guides in the traditional sense, the following books provide insight into the college application process.

- *The Black Family's Guide to College Admissions* by Timothy L. Fields and Shereem Herndon-Brown
- *The College Conversation* by Eric J. Furda and Jacques Steinberg
- *Colleges That Change Lives* by Loren Pope
- *Dream School* by Jeff Selingo
- *The Gatekeepers* by Jacques Steinberg
- *The Privileged Poor* by Anthony Jack
- *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be* by Frank Bruni

Regional Events: Students can attend the information sessions and receptions that many colleges and universities hold in different regions to learn about the college and meet representatives from the admissions office. Many colleges now also offer virtual events.

Regions of the U.S.: The United States is divided into regions. States may appear in more than one region.

- Metropolitan Tri-State: New York, New Jersey and Connecticut
- Mid-Atlantic Region: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and Washington, DC
- Mid-Western Region: Ohio, Michigan, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Oklahoma and Wisconsin

- Mountain States: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming.
- New England: Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut
- Northwestern States: Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Washington and Wyoming
- Pacific Northwest: Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington
- Southern Region: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia and Texas
- Western States: Hawaii, California, Oregon and Washington
- US Territories: Guam, Puerto Rico, Northern Mariana Islands, and US Virgin Islands

SAT: The SAT is usually administered in the United States 7 times per academic year. Most students take the SAT for the first time in the spring of the junior year, but the test may also be taken in the senior year. The SAT may be taken multiple times and a calendar of test dates and registration deadlines is available at https://satsuite.collegeboard.org/sat/dates-deadlines

The SAT is now fully digital. Information about the test is available at CollegeBoard.com, www.deliveringopportunity.org, CompassPrep.com/digital_sat, https://youtu.be/ufcr4WNQCKA and other sites. Students can also download the College Board's free BlueBook app (for either Apple or Android) and take practice tests.

The transition to a digital SAT brought significant changes to every component of the test. The test still consists of sections on Reading & Writing and Math — each of which is scored on a scale of 200-800 — but the length of the test is now 2.25 hours rather than 3 hours. The test is also now "stage adaptive," meaning that a student's performance on the first math section will determine which math section they will get next — the easier one or the more challenging one. The same is true for the reading and writing sections. If a student is directed to the easier second section, the maximum attainable score is 600. Students who are directed to the more challenging second section have a maximum possible score of 800.

SAT Score Choice: Students are able to select which scores are sent to colleges by test date (i.e., October 2024 but not March 2025). Colleges do, however, have the option of requiring applicants to submit all of their SAT scores and students must follow the instructions of the colleges to which they apply.

Scholarships: Legitimate scholarships are grants that do not need to be repaid, and can be awarded by the college or university or by an outside company or organization. Students should take care to seek scholarships through trusted sources such as:

- www.appily.com (formerly Cappex)
- www.bigfuture.com (College Board)
- www.fastweb.com
- www.hsf.net (Hispanic Scholarship Fund)
- www.wiredscholar.com

Scholarship Scams: Scholarship organizations are in the business of giving money to students, not taking money from students. There should not be any cost associated with applying for legitimate scholarships and students should be suspicious of any scholarship application with a fee.

School Code: See CEEB Code

Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) allows for special administrations of the ACT, SAT and Advanced Placement (AP) tests, with accommodations ranging from large-block answer sheets to extended-time testing. In order for a student to use SSD, the school must confirm that the student has a valid Individual Educational Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan on file and that the student receives comparable accommodations in school.

Single-Sex Colleges: The majority of colleges and universities in the United States are coeducational, but there are institutions where men and women study separately. In most cases, the institutions have relationships with other colleges and universities in their area that provide for both academic and social exchange.

In recent years, many women's colleges have updated their policies to welcome transgender women as applicants. There are currently four all-male colleges in the United States and all will enroll transgender men. Specific guidelines can be found on the individual college websites.

Social Media: Students should be mindful of their social media footprints in high school and during the college process. The junior year is a good time for students to review their posts on Facebook, SnapChat, TikTok, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter) and other social media platforms to be sure they are presenting themselves appropriately and in the best light.

Students should also take advantage of the social media presence of colleges and universities. Students can participate digital groups, follow colleges on Facebook and Instagram, and be part of online chats about individual institutions and the college process in general.

Special Admissions Categories: Colleges and universities will sometimes admit students using special criteria to fill specific needs on campus. Some colleges are reexamining their use of special categories with an eye towards being more equitable. These special categories include, but are not limited to:

- Legacy: children, grandchildren or siblings of alumni or current students. Some states and individual colleges have restricted the use of legacy status in admissions decisions
- Athletics: students who will participate in varsity athletics
- Talent: students who have a talent (i.e., music, theatre, etc.)

State Aid Programs: Many states have programs that provide financial support for resident students attending in-state institutions. For example, New York offers the NYS Tuition Assistance Plan (TAP) which offers New York state residents who will attend a college or university in the state to qualify for additional assistance. Applying for TAP is part of the FAFSA form and no additional paperwork is required. The 2026-2027 maximum award is $5665.

State Scholarship Programs: Many states also offer scholarship programs for their residents attending public, in-state institutions. These include Florida's Bright Futures Scholarship, Georgia's HOPE Scholarship and New York's Excelsior Scholarship.

Student Aid Index (SAI): The **Student Aid Index** is the amount the government believes a student and their family can pay for a student's college costs. The SAI is the same regardless of the actual cost of the institution the student attends. The SAI replaced the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) when the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) was updated at the end of 2023.

Subject Tests: These hour-long tests (previously offered in 20 subjects) were discontinued in 2021.

Super Scores: Some colleges and universities create what have come to be known as "super scores," where a composite of the highest test score in each section, regardless of date, is created. Students will be able to super score a combination of paper and digital SAT scores. Many colleges also create super scores for the ACT.

Supplements: See Personal Statement/Essay

Test Optional/Test Flexible/Test Free: While many colleges already offered students the ability to apply without submitting standardized test scores, Covid19 accelerated that process. Most colleges are now test-optional through Fall 2026, but it's important to confirm each college's requirements. Colleges provide details of their individual policies in the testing section of their websites and an updated list test optional, test flexible and test free institutions is available at www.fairtest.org.

Some colleges — most notably the U of California system — have become permanently test free, meaning that standardized test scores are not part the application and are not considered.

Thank You Notes: Students who visit a college campus should take the time to write or e-mail a few words of thanks to the admission counselor with whom they met. Other candidates for thank you notes include recommenders and admissions visitors to the high school.

Transcript: The student's high school transcript is the official record of a student's coursework and grades from the four years of high school. The transcript is the document colleges use to evaluate an applicant's academic preparation and ability.

Universal Reply Date: While it is no longer a requirement, most colleges and universities that are members of the **National Association for College Admissions Counseling** (NACAC**)** continue to use May 1 as their reply deadline for accepting offers of admission and requests to stay on the wait list.

Wait List: See **Regular Decision**

Yield: The percentage of students offered admission by a specific college or university that ultimately enrolls there. Colleges will offer admission to students on the wait list when their yield is lower than expected.