

ECMC

# Opportunities

2013-2014 | Preparing for college guide and workbook

How going to  
college can  
change your life

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Estimating  
your college  
costs

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completing  
the FAFSA

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Whether you are considering a private career college, a community college, or a four-year college, ECMC prepared this workbook to guide you through the college selection, application, and financial aid process.

#### TIPS FOR USING THIS BOOK

- Work from front to back
- Have a pencil/pen handy
- Use the checklists

#### UPDATES TO THIS BOOK

While every effort is made to keep this book up-to-date, program requirements are subject to change. For complete information regarding specific programs, contact the organization responsible for administering that individual program.

The U.S. Congress frequently considers legislation that could change some of the provisions of the federal student financial aid programs. If changes are made, a description of these changes will be posted on [www.ecmc.org](http://www.ecmc.org).

#### AVAILABILITY IN SPANISH

To order Spanish copies and/or download a PDF, visit [www.ecmc.org](http://www.ecmc.org). Para ordenar copias Español y/o descargar un PDF, visite [www.ecmc.org](http://www.ecmc.org).

#### FOR ADMINISTRATORS AND COUNSELORS

This book is a resource for you to share with students. For free copies of this book, go to [www.ecmc.org/opportunities](http://www.ecmc.org/opportunities) to order.

#### ABOUT ECMC

Educational Credit Management Corporation (ECMC) is a nonprofit company providing services in support of higher education finance. We work to support college access and success, and we provide students with tools and resources for planning and paying for college.

For more information, visit us online at [www.ecmc.org](http://www.ecmc.org).

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*To reduce confusion, in this book we refer to all types of higher education institutions as “colleges.”*

# How going to college can change your life

You may know or be able to think of individuals who are successful but have never gone to college. However, your odds of success are much higher if you attend college. There are many statistics available that prove this.

## BE HAPPY

People who attend college:

- Report they have more job satisfaction than those who did not attend
- Typically live healthier lifestyles, and are more likely to have access to employer-provided health insurance
- Are more involved in their communities through higher levels of volunteering and voting

Finally, talk with people who have gone to college, most will tell you it was fun!

## EDUCATION PAYS

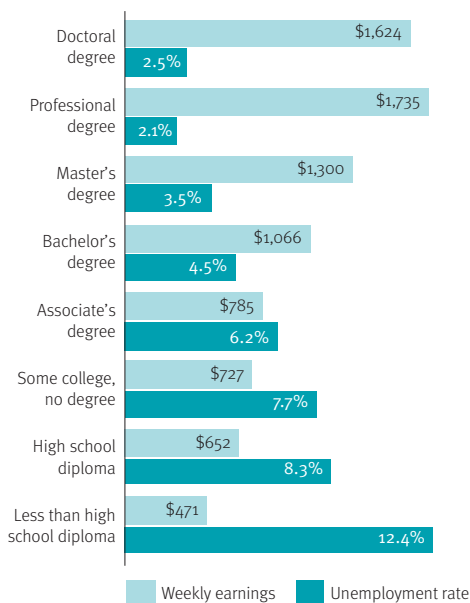
Statistics show that unemployment rates drop in direct relationship to how much education you receive. In addition, the more education you get, the more money you are likely to make. The chart below illustrates both.

## MAKE MONEY

Going to college costs you money, but not going can cost you even more. Statistics show that the more education you get, the more money you are likely to make. A 2010 study by the U.S. Census Bureau reported that over an adult's working life, average total earnings are as follows:

- High school graduate = \$1.2 million
- Bachelor's degree = \$2.1 million
- Master's degree = \$2.5 million

Weekly earnings and unemployment rates based on education level



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012 Current Population Survey

Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.

## Paths to higher education

The term “higher education” refers to all the educational opportunities available to you after high school. By knowing all available opportunities, you will have a better idea of what type of college may be a good match for you. These options include:

### FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Four-year colleges and universities focus on offering educational programs that lead to bachelor's, master's, or professional degrees. Students typically choose a course of study to major in, and this prepares them for occupations that require a college or professional degree. Many students start college studies at a community college and later transfer to a four-year college or university. This allows students to complete courses at a less expensive community college and later use the credits to meet the graduation requirements at a four-year college.

### COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Community colleges are designed to meet the vocational and educational needs of the community. Individual colleges vary widely and can offer programs ranging from classes in continuing education and certificate programs to vocational programs and associate degrees.

### PRIVATE CAREER COLLEGES

Private career colleges are designed to provide a student-centered learning environment, which combines academic subject matter with interactive, hands-on labs and learning of skills. Individual colleges can vary widely and can offer programs ranging from bachelor's and associate degrees to diplomas, certificates, and certifications.

### TRADE AND VOCATIONAL COLLEGES

Trade and vocational colleges focus on developing practical career skills. These colleges offer programs that concentrate on developing a specific skill, often leading to a certificate, and are designed to get students into the workforce quickly.

### ONLINE COLLEGES

Many colleges offer some or all of their classes online, and can be either instructor-led or self-paced. Some programs may be completed entirely online, while other programs may require a mixture of classes—some taken in a classroom environment and others online.



## Preparing for college

Colleges care about the courses you take in high school. The more you challenge yourself when choosing high school courses, the more college options you will have.

### HONORS CLASSES

Honors classes cover the same academic material as regular classes, but are more challenging. They are typically faster paced and cover topics in greater depth. Generally, they are not the equivalent of college-level work and do not earn you college credit. However, they may be weighted higher when computing your grade point average than regular classes. They also show colleges that you are willing to challenge yourself academically.

### ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) CLASSES

These courses prepare you to take rigorous exams that can lead to college credit. About 90 percent of U.S. colleges award early college credits to students who take AP classes.

More than 30 AP classes are offered in subject areas, including art, English, foreign languages, math, science, and history. Your high school may not offer classes in all AP subjects, but most AP classes are also available online (a fee may be involved).

After coursework is completed, students take nationally administered AP exams in their chosen subject areas. If the resulting scores are acceptable to the college, it might award college credit for the course.

### DUAL-ENROLLMENT PROGRAMS

High school students might be able to start their college education before graduation with dual-enrollment programs. In these programs, students take college-level classes for college credit while continuing to participate in regular high school activities. These classes are often offered at high schools or nearby community colleges.

Not every high school participates in a dual-enrollment program. Contact your high school counselor for more information.

### INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE ORGANIZATION'S DIPLOMA PROGRAMME

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IB) is a two-year curriculum offered by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) that combines requirements of a mixture of different national education systems. Programs are offered in English, French, and Spanish, and allow students moving around the country or from one country to another to transfer among IB schools.

IB Diploma students are typically between ages 16 and 19, and are highly motivated to learn. Exam grades are based on one standard across all IB schools. Colleges from around the world accept students who participate in IB.

Not every high school offers the program. A list of participating schools from around the world is available on the IBO website. For more information, visit [www.ibo.org](http://www.ibo.org).

### TECHNICAL PREPARATION (TECH PREP) PROGRAMS

Tech Prep—also known as the Career Technical Program—is a multiyear program (two or more years in high school and two in an occupational/technical program at a community or technical college) designed to prepare students for technical occupations. These programs can expand education and employment opportunities by preparing you for careers in health care, business, industry, labor, government, and the community. There is a strong emphasis on math, science, and English. A complete Tech Prep program includes the following:

- A comprehensive career development plan
- Courses designed for a specific career that integrate academic and occupational preparation
- A learning environment that emphasizes math, communications, science, and technology
- A smooth transition from high school to college or employment

Regardless of the college preparatory program you participate in—or even if you don't participate in one—each college has specific admissions requirements you must meet.

# Choosing the right college

Your college selection is an important decision, but where do you start? Use the tools and resources in this chapter to help you choose where to apply.

## FINDING THE RIGHT COLLEGE

Every person is different. Your background, interests, and personality are just a few things that make you original and unique.

When considering your future career and choice of a college, it's easy to fall prey to the influence of others. Don't think of certain colleges as good or bad. Think of which ones are best for you. Use the checklist and tools in this chapter to do some self-discovery.

Depending on many factors, you may find preparing for college a simple or very time-consuming process. Let your personal interests, goals, and situation influence your decisions throughout the process.

## DEADLINES

Deadlines are just that, so plan carefully and pay attention to the various deadlines throughout the process. You'll find guidance throughout this book on the timing of events and when you need to complete tasks.

## Checklist: Junior year

- Investigate careers of interest.**  
Consider subjects you do well in and enjoy. Talk to your parents, school counselor, and other adults about the careers that interest you. The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook ([www.bls.gov/ooh](http://www.bls.gov/ooh)) can also help you identify careers of interest. It's OK if you are undecided about a career. College is a great place to explore career options.
- Approach professionals and tradespeople with questions.**  
Find some family friends, friends of friends, friends of teachers, and leaders in the community who work in the careers that interest you. Ask them about their work. You will learn a lot about the careers that would best suit you.
- Make a list of important factors.**  
Using the worksheet on page 5, think about what factors are the most important to you when considering your future college.
- Research colleges.**  
Based on what you've learned about careers and your own interests, look for colleges with programs that can help you achieve your goals. Search for your program interests using online resources. Take note of which colleges offer the kinds of programs you want. Also, your high school counselor's office, teachers, library, and the public library will have materials to help you.
- Make a list of prospective colleges.**  
Use the worksheet on page 5 to help identify prospective colleges.
- Request materials.**  
Go online or call the colleges to request catalogs and financial aid materials.
- Attend college and/or career fairs.**  
Seek out the colleges that interest you and ask about the programs you've identified to determine if the college will help you achieve your goals.
- Narrow your list.**  
Based on what you've learned, narrow your list of schools using the worksheet on page 5. If possible, rank your colleges in order of preference.

## Worksheet: Choosing the right college

### STEP 1

In the top row, make a preliminary list of colleges that interest you.



### STEP 2

Think about important factors you want your college to have. Then, prioritize each factor in the level of importance column.



### STEP 3

Cross off colleges that appear to not have what you're looking for. Rank the remaining colleges in order of preference.

Level of importance	Factors to consider	College (fill in names of colleges that interest you)			
	<b>Program of study:</b> Which programs does the college offer to help you achieve your career goals?				
	<b>School size:</b> Would you prefer a large or small school? What is the student population?				
	<b>Class size:</b> How large do you like your classes to be? What is the student-to-teacher ratio?				
	<b>Support programs:</b> Which programs does the college offer to help you stay in school and graduate?				
	<b>City and neighborhood:</b> Do you prefer a city or a small town? What is the population of the city or town?				
	<b>Campus culture:</b> When visiting each college, get a feel for its "personality." How or why does it match yours?				
	<b>Distance from home:</b> How close do you want to live to your family?				
	<b>Extracurricular activities:</b> Do you have activities in your life that you can't live without?				
	<b>Religious affiliation:</b> Do you want to attend a college affiliated with your religious beliefs?				
	<b>Cost of attendance:</b> While one college may appear to be less expensive, what will your final cost be after receiving financial aid and scholarships?				
	<b>Financial aid options:</b> Does the college have special financial aid options? These could include things such as a tuition payment plan to spread out your payments or a guaranteed cost of attendance as long as you are enrolled.				
	<b>Outside learning options:</b> Does the college offer internships, externships, study abroad or service learning opportunities?				
	<b>Housing options near campus:</b> How close or far is housing? Will you need a car, or are where you live, shop and work within walking or biking distance?				
	<b>Add it all up:</b> Prioritize your preferences in the left column, then rank each school's ability to meet your preferences.				

# The college application process

Depending on your interests and goals, the college application process could be as simple as filling out one page for a community college, or as complicated as writing dozens of essays, taking multiple standardized tests, and preparing portfolios. This chapter will help you organize the process and stay on track. Keep in mind—this checklist shows general timelines. Each college will have more specific deadlines you need to meet.

## Checklist: Junior year

- Ensure that you will graduate.**  
Look at your high school's graduation requirements and compare your credits. Make sure you will graduate on time.
- Take the PSAT/NMSQT or PLAN Test.**  
Take these tests to practice taking college admissions tests. The PSAT/NMSQT also establishes your eligibility for the National Merit Scholarship Program, the National Hispanic Recognition Program, and additional scholarship programs.
- Make a list of entrance requirements.**  
Look up the minimum acceptance requirements for entering freshmen at your top colleges, such as grade point average, high school subject credits, and standardized test scores.
- Meet with your school counselor.**  
After your PSAT/NMSQT or PLAN scores come in, schedule a meeting. Bring your list of entrance requirements. Determine with the counselor if your list of colleges is reasonable or needs to be adjusted, and if your current and future high school classes are appropriate.
- Visit colleges.**  
Planning to travel during spring break or summer vacation? Many families visit college campuses on their vacation trips. Call the

admissions office in advance to learn what times they conduct regular tours. Then, use these visits to compare campuses and help narrow your selection.

- As you learn more, narrow your list.**  
Continue to attend college fairs and, if possible, schedule individual sessions with representatives from your top colleges to learn more about their programs.
- Take the SAT, SAT subject tests, and/or ACT.**  
If these tests are required for your list of colleges, register and take them.
- Start preparing portfolios, audition materials, writing samples, or other evidence of talent and look for volunteer service opportunities.**  
If these are required for admission to your programs or scholarships, begin working on these now.
- Request information.**  
Contact the colleges that interest you and request admissions procedures and financial aid information.

## Checklist: Senior year

### SEPTEMBER — DECEMBER

- Review your plans with your school counselor.**  
Discuss your grades and test results from junior year.
- Start drafts of your college essays.**  
Identify a teacher or counselor who can provide you with feedback on your essays.
- Register to retake the SAT and/or ACT, if necessary.**  
You can take these tests as many times as you want through the April national testing date in the year you will graduate from high school. You should take these exams at least six weeks before your earliest college admissions or financial aid deadline.
- Make a final list of the colleges that interest you.**  
Request complete admissions, housing, and financial aid information from each of these colleges.
- Visit colleges that most interest you.**  
Many colleges offer open houses and campus tours, and provide the opportunity to sit in on classes. At some colleges, you can arrange, in advance, a personal interview

with an admissions counselor. If possible, stay overnight and talk to current students. If you cannot visit the campus, the college's website may contain an online tour or a link to request an informational DVD.

- Request high school transcripts.**  
You will need an official high school transcript for each application you plan to submit.
- Identify references.**  
Ask if they will provide letters of recommendation for you.
- Finalize portfolios, audition materials, or writing samples.**  
Complete these if they are required for admissions or scholarships.
- Follow up with your references.**  
Make sure they remembered to send in the forms if they are sent separately from your application.
- Complete revisions of all applications and essays.**  
Review them with a parent, teacher, or school counselor.
- Submit all admissions and college academic scholarship applications before holiday break.**  
Keep copies for your file. If you submit your applications online, verify that they were received.

### JANUARY

- Send your midyear grades to the colleges of your choice.**

### MARCH — APRIL

- Tie up loose ends.**  
If required, send any additional information to the colleges such as grades and new test scores. Be sure to adhere to each college's application deadlines.
- Congratulations! Your acceptance letters will start arriving.**  
These will start coming in the mail from your colleges.

### MAY

- Take Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) exams.**  
Take AP exams if your college of choice requires them or will accept the results for college credit.



## College entrance exams

### PRACTICE EXAMS

There are two tests that help you “rehearse” for taking college entrance exams—the PSAT/NMSQT and PLAN. Taking one of these tests will help you identify strengths and weaknesses in skills necessary for successful college study. You can then focus your preparation on those areas where you could most benefit from additional study or practice. Your specific test results are not reported to colleges. However, you will receive pamphlets, catalogs, and brochures from colleges interested in students testing within your range.

#### The PSAT/NMSQT

PSAT/NMSQT stands for Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test and the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. It is a standardized test that helps you practice for taking the SAT Reasoning Test. The PSAT/NMSQT measures the following skills:

- Critical reading
- Math problem solving
- Writing

The PSAT/NMSQT is usually taken during your junior year because the National Merit Scholarship Corporation uses these scores to determine eligibility for their scholarship programs. If you take the test earlier in your high school career, do not be discouraged by a low score because the PSAT/NMSQT is a junior-level test. For more information on the PSAT/NMSQT, visit the College Board website at [www.collegeboard.org/testing](http://www.collegeboard.org/testing).

#### The PLAN Test

PLAN is a comprehensive program for sophomores designed to provide a midpoint assessment of educational progress given your college and career goals. PLAN is a 145-question, multiple-choice test that measures academic achievement in English, math, reading, and science. PLAN is not an aptitude or an IQ test. Instead, the questions are directly related to what you learned in your high school classes.

PLAN also collects information about your interests, needs, and plans in order to help you select your remaining high school courses and plan for your life after high school. PLAN is linked to the ACT in terms of content and is scored along the same score scale. For more information on PLAN, visit [www.actstudent.org/plan](http://www.actstudent.org/plan).

### ENTRANCE EXAMS

Many colleges require you to take a college entrance exam as part of the admissions process. There are two primary tests, the SAT Reasoning Test and the ACT, and either test is generally accepted by colleges for admissions purposes.

#### The SAT Reasoning Test

The SAT includes three sections: math, critical reading, and writing. The questions are geared toward measuring conceptual thinking, rather than memorizing facts.

The writing section includes multiple-choice questions about grammar, usage, and word choice. Each student will write a short, timed essay that requires him or her to take a position on an issue and use examples to support the position.

The critical reading section includes short and long reading passages. The math section includes questions on exponential growth, absolute value, functional notation, linear functions, manipulations with exponents, and properties of tangent lines.

Students taking the SAT will receive three scores: one each for writing, math, and critical reading, each on a scale of 200-800.

Students can prepare for the SAT by reviewing practice questions and taking an official SAT practice test for free at [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org).

For a fee, the College Board also offers an online course and study guide.

#### The ACT

The ACT is a 215-question, multiple-choice test that measures academic achievement in English, math, reading, and science. It measures what you have learned in high school and your ability to perform tasks that are frequently required in college coursework. In addition to the test areas, the ACT includes an interest inventory to help you choose a college major and identify jobs you might wish to explore.

The ACT is not an aptitude or an IQ test. Instead, the questions are directly related to what you have learned in your high school English, math, and science courses.

The ACT test score is based on the number of correct answers, has no penalty for guessing, and is measured as an average of the four test areas in a composite score ranging from 1-36.

An optional Writing Test is available. Check with the college you plan to attend to determine if this is one of its testing requirements. This test measures your writing skills emphasized in high school English classes and in entry-level college composition courses. It is a 30-minute essay asking you to state your position on an issue from a writing prompt that is provided. For more information and practice tests, visit the ACT website at [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org).

For a fee, ACT also offers an online test preparation program.

### THE SAT SUBJECT TESTS

The SAT Subject Tests are one-hour subject tests with mostly multiple-choice questions. These tests measure how much you know about a particular academic subject and how well you can apply that knowledge. Many colleges require or recommend one or more of the SAT Subject Tests for admission or placement. These tests provide a dependable measure of your academic achievement and are a good predictor of future performance. There are more than 20 subject tests that fall into the following five general subject areas:

- English
- Math
- History
- Science
- Languages (includes English Language Proficiency Test)

For more information, visit [www.collegeboard.org/testing](http://www.collegeboard.org/testing).

## Testing dates, fees, and registration

### PSAT

2013 Test dates	Tests administered	Regular registration deadlines	Late registration deadlines	Notes	Fees	Registration
October 16, 2013 or October 19, 2013	PSAT/NMSQT	Check with your school counselor	Check with your school counselor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Test is administered by high schools, not through test centers.</li> <li>Please note that each high school chooses only ONE October test date.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$14</li> <li>Note: Schools may charge an additional fee to cover administrative costs.</li> <li>The College Board makes fee waivers available to schools for students in 11th grade from low-income families that cannot afford the test fee. See your school counselor for more information about fee waivers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online registration is not available.</li> <li>You must sign up for the PSAT/NMSQT at your high school or at another high school in your community.</li> </ul>

### PLAN

2013 Test dates	Tests administered	Regular registration deadlines	Late registration deadlines	Notes	Fees	Registration
September – June each year at your school's discretion	PLAN (subject areas: English, math, reading, science)	Check with your school counselor or administrator	Check with your school counselor or administrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Test administered in school-supervised setting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generally no cost to the student.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Register with your school counselor or administrator.</li> </ul>

### SAT

2013-2014 Test dates	Tests administered	Regular registration deadlines	Late registration deadlines	Notes	Fees	Registration
October 5, 2013	SAT and Subject Tests	September 6, 2013	September 20, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sunday administrations usually occur the day after each Saturday test date for students who cannot test on Saturday for religious reasons.</li> <li>The Language Tests with Listening are offered in November only.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SAT Reasoning Test: \$51</li> <li>SAT Subject Tests basic registration fee: \$24.50</li> <li>Language Tests with Listening: \$24 + basic fee</li> <li>All other Subject Tests: \$13 + basic fee</li> <li>Late registration fee: \$27.50</li> <li>Fee waivers are available for certain low-income students.</li> <li>See your counselor for details.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.collegeboard.org">www.collegeboard.org</a></li> </ul>
November 2, 2013	SAT and Subject Tests	October 3, 2013	October 18, 2013			
December 7, 2013	SAT and Subject Tests	November 8, 2013	November 22, 2013			
January 25, 2014	SAT and Subject Tests	December 27, 2013	January 10, 2014			
March 8, 2014	SAT only	February 7, 2014	February 21, 2014			
May 3, 2014	SAT and Subject Tests	April 4, 2014	April 18, 2014			
June 7, 2014	SAT and Subject Tests	May 9, 2014	May 23, 2014			

### ACT

2013-2014 Test dates	Tests administered	Regular registration deadlines	Late fee required	Notes	Fees	Registration
September 21, 2013	ACT	August 23, 2013	August 24 – September 6, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The February 2014 test is not scheduled in New York.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ACT (no Writing Test): \$36.50</li> <li>ACT with Writing Test: \$52.50</li> <li>Late registration fee: \$22</li> <li>Fee waivers are available for certain low-income students.</li> <li>See your counselor for details.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.actstudent.org">www.actstudent.org</a></li> </ul>
October 26, 2013	ACT	September 27, 2013	September 28 – October 11, 2013			
December 14, 2013	ACT	November 8, 2013	November 9 – 22, 2013			
February 8, 2014 *	ACT	January 10, 2014	January 11 – 24, 2014			
April 12, 2014	ACT	March 7, 2014	March 8 – 21, 2014			
June 14, 2014	ACT	May 9, 2014	May 10 – 23, 2014			

## Submitting your college applications

Every college has a different application process with different directions to follow. Read them carefully and use the worksheet on page 10 to organize the information for the colleges you are considering. Make one copy for each college to keep with your application materials.

Applying to college can seem to be a daunting task. However, you are not in this by yourself. If you need help, ask for it. There are many resources—parents, teachers, school counselors, volunteer organizations—you can call on to help guide you.

### WAYS TO APPLY

Most colleges allow you to apply either by submitting a paper application or completing the application online. To determine the best way to apply, go to the admissions page on each college's website and look for more information.

### APPLICATION COSTS

Many colleges charge an application fee which may vary among colleges. Do not let these fees keep you from applying to college. Many colleges will waive the application fee, especially for applicants who received fee waivers for taking college entrance exams. Check with the college admissions office to determine the circumstances under which the college will waive the application fee.

### DEADLINES

Each college has its own deadline for applications to be submitted. In fact, some colleges allow you to start at several different times during the year and may have a different deadline for each starting class. Pay attention to and meet these deadlines. If applying with a paper application, be careful to note whether the deadline is based on the arrival or postmark date. If the deadline is the arrival date, make sure to include several days for postal delivery.

### EARLY DECISION AND EARLY ACTION

Many colleges allow you to apply under an “early decision” or “early action” program. Typically, you have to apply earlier than most applicants, but you also find out earlier whether you have been accepted. These programs are not for everyone. Generally, only those who have a clear-cut, first-choice college should apply under these programs. If you believe early decision or early action is right for you, check with the college admissions office to determine how to apply.

### TRANSCRIPTS

Request an official copy of your high school transcript (and college transcript if you have already earned some college credits) for each college where you plan to apply. You or your school counselor will need to submit this as part of the admissions process.

Because many students apply to colleges while still attending high school, acceptances from colleges are often contingent upon your final high school grades. You will need to send a final transcript to the college you will attend.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

If your colleges require recommendations, letters or forms, you will need to ask your teachers and/or other adults to be references. Some colleges even ask for peer recommendations. When identifying whom you should ask, consider your relationship with the person and how well you've done in your activities with him or her. Don't ask someone to write you a recommendation if you don't think they will have anything good to say.

Many colleges have specific forms they want references to complete. Make sure you get these forms in plenty of time to meet the application deadlines. Follow the checklist at the beginning of this chapter to stay on schedule.

Writing recommendations can be time-consuming for the people writing them. They might also be writing them for other students. Give your references plenty of time with the forms and make sure they are aware of recommendation deadlines. Two to four weeks with the forms should be sufficient, but inquire as to your reference's schedule when asking.

A recommendation is a favor. No one is required to recommend you to a college. Here are some commonly accepted rules of etiquette to follow:

- When giving your references the forms, include a pre-addressed envelope to the appropriate address with the correct amount of postage on the envelope if they are meant to mail it directly to the college.
- Write thank you notes to your references.

### ESSAYS

If your colleges require essays, they will usually give you specific questions or topics for your essays. If this is the case, don't stray from the question. Focus on the issue being presented. Here are some tips to follow:

- Check for spelling and grammar mistakes. Most software programs offer this feature, but don't rely entirely on the computer.
- Have someone proofread and provide constructive feedback on your essay.
- Don't exceed the word limit, if any is given.
- Be yourself. Don't second-guess what the college would like you to think or say in your essay.

Everyone goes about the writing process differently. Here are two methods that might help you:

#### Brainstorming

Brainstorm your thoughts on the topic. Write quickly without worrying how coherent or organized your thoughts are. When you're finished, look at your thoughts and begin organizing them.

#### Outlining

Make an outline to organize the essay. Then write in portions, section by section, according to your outline topics.

Depending on your area of interest, your colleges might ask for a portfolio, audition materials, or other evidence of your talents. Contact the specific program for more information on what to include.



## Worksheet: Organize your application information

Make copies of this page, and complete the information for each college you are seriously considering.

Application deadline:		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Postmark date	<input type="checkbox"/> Arrive-by date
	Requested	Received
Catalog	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Application	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
High school transcript	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

COLLEGE INFORMATION	College name _____	Admissions office phone _____
	Mailing address for application _____	Fax _____
	City, state, zip _____	College CEEB code* _____
	Website _____	High school CEEB code* _____
		*CEEB codes can be found at <a href="http://www.collegeboard.org">www.collegeboard.org</a> . Click on: Students > College Board Tests > Code Search

ESSAYS	Essays required? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	INTERVIEW	Interview required? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	OTHER REQUIREMENTS	Other requirements? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	First topic _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Complete		Thank you sent? Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		Name of interviewer _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Complete
	Second topic _____ <input type="checkbox"/>		Name of interviewer _____ <input type="checkbox"/>		Title _____ <input type="checkbox"/>
	Third topic _____ <input type="checkbox"/>		Email _____ <input type="checkbox"/>		Email _____ <input type="checkbox"/>
	Phone _____ <input type="checkbox"/>	Phone _____ <input type="checkbox"/>			

RECOMMENDATIONS	Recommendations required? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		
	Reference 1 _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Requested	<input type="checkbox"/> Thank you sent
	Reference 2 _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Received	
	Reference 3 _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	

VISIT	Will you be visiting campus? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Date(s) of visit _____
	Name of person you are meeting or event _____	Date and time _____
	_____	Location _____

CONTACTS	Name _____	Phone _____	Email _____	Notes _____
	_____	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____	_____

# Navigating financial aid

Not sure where to begin? The tools, checklists, and timelines in this chapter will help you understand the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion process, what types of financial aid are available, and how to stay on course to receive your financial aid.

## Your college costs

### COLLEGE COSTS

The cost to attend college, which is often referred to as the total student budget or “Cost of Attendance,” includes direct and indirect expenses. The direct expenses are those fixed costs that are billed by the college, such as tuition, fees, and room and board. The indirect costs do not show up on the college bill but are taken into consideration when looking at the overall cost to attend college. They include books and supplies, travel expenses, and personal expenses, such as laundry, telephone, and even pizza. If you live off campus, room and board costs will become indirect costs.

Cost of Attendance (COA) is used in the calculation to determine your eligibility for financial aid. The most common components of COA are:

- Tuition and fees
- Room and board
- Books and supplies
- Personal expenses
- Transportation

Colleges can also consider the following allowable costs when determining the total Cost of Attendance:

- Allowance for dependent care
- Loan fees
- Costs related to a disability
- Allowance for purchase of a personal computer
- Reasonable cost for eligible study abroad programs

### Tuition and fees

The cost of tuition and fees charged by a college depends on many factors, but the most significant factor is what kind of college it is.

Tuition and fees at **public** colleges are generally the lowest because they receive funds from state taxes. Most four-year and two-year public colleges charge higher tuition for nonresidents than for legal residents of the state in which the college is located. This out-of-state tuition can often make the cost of attending a public college as high as the cost of attending many private colleges.

Tuition at **private** colleges is usually higher than at public colleges. Private colleges do not receive public funding for their operations and need to charge more of the real costs to students. However, private colleges often have more financial aid resources that can help you make up the difference between costs and financial aid. The greater your overall expenses, the greater the possibility you will demonstrate need for financial aid.

Private career or for-profit colleges (such as trade and technical colleges) usually set tuition at levels that ensure they recover all of their operating costs and make a profit.

Whether you are looking at public, private or career colleges, fees might be charged for services, such as the library, student activities, and the health center.

### Room and board

Room and board means basic living expenses for housing and food. Regardless of the kind of college you choose, you will have to consider these expenses.

Colleges with their own housing typically charge you on a nine-month basis for your room and most meals, excluding holiday and vacation periods. The room and board charge is built into your student expense budget. Colleges also expect that students living in privately owned, off-campus housing have a similar level of expense.

If you plan to live at home, you are likely to have lower expenses than on-campus students because you do not have to pay for housing. However, you or your parents will still need to factor in the cost of your food and other normal living expenses. These are usually built into commuter student expense budgets for financial aid purposes. Take these costs into consideration in your planning.

### Books and supplies

As a college student you will spend money on textbooks, notebooks, paper, computer supplies, and the like. The amount you spend for books and supplies will vary only slightly by the type of college, but is related to the curriculum or courses you select. In some academic fields, such as nursing and other medical fields, you will spend more on books than in other fields, such as business or communications. Some fields will require specific uniforms and equipment that must be purchased, such as art supplies, a stethoscope, or lab supplies.

### Personal expenses

Regardless of the type of college you choose to attend, you will have some personal expenses, such as clothing, laundry, toiletries, recreation, medical insurance and medical costs, and perhaps incidental room furnishings.

### Transportation

All students spend some money for travel. If you live in a different city than where your college is located, you have to travel to get there at the start of the academic year and travel to return home at the end of the year. Most students also go home at least once during the year. For financial aid purposes, colleges often budget students for two round-trips home per year by the least expensive means of travel possible.

Commuter students will also have travel expenses, whether you use public transportation or a car to get to and from college several days a week. These costs are built into student expense budgets by colleges for financial aid purposes.

### DETERMINING YOUR OWN COSTS

To determine your own cost estimates, remember to consider any additional costs that might result from medical bills or extraordinary personal expenses.



## Ways to reduce your college costs

**Earn college credits in high school.** You can earn college credits by taking AP or IB exams or through dual enrollment. See page 3 for details.

**Earn college credits for what you already know.** College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests can get you through college quicker or help you graduate on time. For details, visit [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org).

**Two plus two.** Start at a community college, and then transfer to a four-year college to complete your bachelor's degree.

**Tax credits.** Investigate what college will cost after taking into account tax credits that may be available. See IRS Publication 970 at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) for information on potential tax benefits.

**Tuition reimbursement.** If you or your parents are employed, check to see if the employer offers to reimburse you for the cost of attending college.

**Take an extra class over the normal, full-time load.** Usually taking an extra class does not add to the tuition cost for the term.

## Estimating your college costs

Before you file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), there are ways to get an estimate of how much it may cost you to attend college.

### FAFSA<sub>4</sub>CASTER

Reduce the amount of time it takes to complete the FAFSA by first completing the FAFSA<sub>4</sub>caster at [www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov). FAFSA<sub>4</sub>caster is an online financial aid estimator that provides students and families an early estimate of the student's federal student aid eligibility. FAFSA<sub>4</sub>caster provides an estimated Expected Family Contribution (EFC)—the index colleges use to determine what types of financial aid a student may be eligible to receive.

Using this estimated EFC, FAFSA<sub>4</sub>caster determines what types of federal grants, loans, and work-study a student may qualify for along with estimated award amounts. Students and families may use this tool during the student's junior year in high school—or earlier—to help in college planning.

### NET PRICE CALCULATORS

Each college that participates in the federal financial aid programs is required to have a “net price calculator” on its website. These calculators can give you a rough estimate of how much it may cost you to attend each specific college, taking into account aid you may receive from both the college and federal financial aid.

The questions you will be asked when using a net price calculator can vary from college to college. Some net price calculators may ask for much more specific information than others in the hope of providing a more accurate estimate of your net college costs. Because of this, the estimates provided by different net price calculators should not be used to absolutely rule in or rule out a particular college. Because the calculators may be different, the results may not provide an “apples-to-apples” comparison of your net college costs.

### When using one of these estimating tools, keep in mind:

- These are only estimates. Your final cost to attend a specific college may vary significantly from the estimates.
- The only sure way to know what your final net cost will be is to file the FAFSA and complete the financial aid process at the colleges you are considering attending.
- The award letter you receive from each college will tell you your net cost to attend that college. It may vary significantly from the estimate you received when completing the net price calculator.

## About the FAFSA

### COMPLETING THE FAFSA IS IMPORTANT

Students are required to complete the FAFSA to determine their eligibility for all federal student aid. Many people do not complete the FAFSA because they assume they will not be eligible for federal aid, or they feel the process is too confusing or complicated.

Here's what's wrong with that thinking:

- You may assume that you don't qualify for any aid, but you may be wrong. Virtually every student is eligible for at least one type of federal student aid. It's very simple—if you do not apply for federal student aid by filing the FAFSA, you will not receive any federal student aid.
- Most states have financial aid programs, and many of these programs use the data from the FAFSA to determine if you are eligible for state aid.
- Many colleges use the data from the FAFSA to determine if you are eligible for any financial aid programs the college may offer—typically known as institutional aid. Colleges might require additional forms as part of the application process. Contact each college's financial aid office to find out which forms it requires.
- Many private scholarship programs use FAFSA data to determine who qualifies for their scholarships.

### You will need to file the FAFSA each year you will be in college to be considered for aid.

Regardless of whether you qualify for federal student aid, if you fail to file the FAFSA you will miss out on being considered for state and institutional aid. Assuming you are not eligible can be costly.

### ONE MORE THING TO KEEP IN MIND

Filing the FAFSA is free. There are companies that will charge you a fee to help you complete the FAFSA, but you should be able to complete the FAFSA without this assistance. Remember—the first word in FAFSA is “Free.”

### WHAT THE FAFSA DOES

Your eligibility for federal financial aid is calculated using the Federal Methodology Needs Analysis, a formula mandated by Congress. The formula takes into account your (and your parents' if you are a dependent student) financial condition. When you complete the FAFSA, you are answering a series of questions to provide this information.

If you plan to file the FAFSA online, you will probably find it helpful to first complete the FAFSA on the Web Worksheet available at [www.fafsa.ed.gov/fotw1314/pdf/fafsaws13c.pdf](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/fotw1314/pdf/fafsaws13c.pdf). This worksheet provides a preview of the questions that you may be asked while completing the FAFSA online. The questions on the FAFSA on the Web Worksheet are ordered as they appear on the online FAFSA, although some may be skipped online based on your answers to earlier questions.

To complete the FAFSA, you (and your parents if you are considered dependent) must provide certain information regarding your financial assets, liabilities, and income for the year directly preceding the year you apply for aid. You might need to refer to the following documents:

- Income tax returns (student, parent, and spouse)—although in some circumstances, you may be able to transfer income tax data from the IRS directly into the FAFSA
- W-2 forms and other income records
- Current bank statements
- Mortgage information
- Records of benefits from federal and state agencies

It is essential that you provide correct information and follow all instructions for filing the FAFSA. Mistakes and incomplete information can lead to delays in receiving aid.

The single most important part of the financial aid process is completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Here's what you need to know about the FAFSA.

After you file a FAFSA, you will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) from Federal Student Aid (FSA). The SAR contains information provided on your FAFSA and your Expected Family Contribution (EFC). Your EFC is not the amount of money your family is expected to pay. Rather, you should think of the EFC as an index colleges use to calculate the amount of financial aid you may qualify to receive. Your family is expected to contribute toward your cost of education. However, the amount of this contribution will be determined by the financial aid office at your college.

When you complete the FAFSA, you select the colleges you are interested in attending. These colleges receive the information you provided on the FAFSA. Based on this information, each college will determine the amount and types of aid for which you are eligible.

A financial aid award letter will be sent to you from each college that accepts you for admission. The letter outlines the total financial aid package (grants, scholarships, work-study, and loans) for which you are eligible. Financial aid officers at the colleges can answer questions regarding the SAR and award letters. See pages 23-24 for more information about award letters.

### THREE WAYS TO FILE, BUT ONE IS BEST

There are three ways to complete and file a FAFSA:

- Online at FSA's website—[www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov)
- PDF FAFSA that you download, complete and mail—go to [www.fafsa.ed.gov/options.htm](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/options.htm) and click on “FAFSA Filing Options”
- Paper FAFSA that you request, complete and mail—to get a paper FAFSA, call 1.800.4.FED.AID

Online filing is much faster than filing a PDF or paper FAFSA if you electronically sign your application with your Federal Student Aid PIN. PINs are issued by FSA at [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov). You, and at least one parent if you are a dependent student, will need to have a PIN to electronically sign the FAFSA.

Filing the FAFSA online eliminates delays that can occur from mailing. Also, your application is edited for errors as you complete it to ensure your information is as accurate as possible.

When FAFSA information is transmitted over the Internet, it is completely secure. FAFSA on the Web is easy to navigate and offers extensive online help. While filling out the FAFSA online, the following resources are available:

- “Need Help” and “Help and Hints” sections provide more information
- “Contact Us” section for live chat, email and phone options

In addition, application entries are thoroughly edited, reducing the number of errors made by students and their families.

#### IRS Data Retrieval Tool makes filing easier

To make filing a FAFSA easier, the U.S. Department of Education offers the IRS Data Retrieval Tool to automatically transfer tax information from the IRS directly into the FAFSA. This tool is available only for those who have already completed their prior-year taxes at the time of FAFSA filing. Go to [fafsa.gov](http://fafsa.gov) to learn more about using the tool.

In recent years, more than 98 percent of FAFSA filers have applied online. It's the fastest, the easiest, and simply the best way to file your FAFSA.

### SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Special considerations that might affect your eligibility for aid include your dependency status and state of domicile.

#### Independent vs. dependent status

In determining financial need, one of the most important factors is whether you are classified as a dependent or independent student. Dependent students must include parental information on the FAFSA. Independent students should include information only on themselves and their spouse (when applicable). You are automatically classified as independent if you can check ANY of the following boxes::

- I was born before January 1, 1990
- I am married
- I will be working on a master's or doctorate program (e.g. MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, EdD, graduate certificate)
- I am serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces
- I am a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces
- I have children and I provide more than half their support
- Since I turned age 13, both of my parents were deceased
- I was in foster care since turning age 13
- I have dependents (other than my children or my spouse) who live with me and I provide more than half of their support
- I was a dependent or ward of the court since turning age 13
- I am currently or I was an emancipated minor
- I am currently or I was in legal guardianship
- I am homeless or I am at risk of being homeless

If none of these criteria apply to you, you are a dependent student.

You may complete a Dependency Status Worksheet at [www.fafsa.ed.gov/help/ffto2k.htm](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/help/ffto2k.htm) to determine your dependency status before completing the FAFSA.

In addition, the financial aid office at your college can determine that you should be considered independent if exceptional circumstances exist, but this occurs only in rare circumstances.

#### Domicile

On the FAFSA, domicile is referred to as your “State of Legal Residence.” A person's domicile is their present, fixed home to which they return following temporary absences and at which they intend to stay indefinitely. To be eligible for in-state tuition benefits and most state-supported financial aid, you must have established domicile for at least one year prior to the first day of class. Minors are presumed to have the domicile of their parent or legal guardian.

Domiciliary intent is determined using many factors. These could include paying state income tax as a resident, registering to vote in the state, owning property, permanent employment, sources of financial support, and economic ties with the state. The burden is on the applicant to provide sufficient information to establish domiciliary intent.

Contact the domicile office at your college for more information.

## Checklist: FAFSA

### PREPARING FOR THE FAFSA

Check as you prepare to file the FAFSA:

- If filing the FAFSA online, you, and at least one parent if you are a dependent student, must sign the application. Both of you will need a Federal Student Aid PIN. You may each apply for a PIN at [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov).
- If using the PDF FAFSA, go to [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov). If using the paper FAFSA, request one by calling 1.800.4.FED.AID.
- Find the federal school codes for your colleges at [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov).

### FILING THE FAFSA

Check as you complete the FAFSA:

- You and the appropriate family members have signed the forms.
- You have listed all the schools to which you are applying for admission.
- You have printed a copy or made a copy of your completed FAFSA for your records.

**Note:** Do not send information about special circumstances to the schools listed on the FAFSA until you contact the financial aid offices about your application information. The financial aid offices will tell you what is needed.

## Tips for completing the FAFSA

### Meet all financial aid deadlines.

Each college has a different “priority filing date.” File your FAFSA in time to meet the deadlines set by your colleges. Contact the financial aid offices to determine individual priority filing deadlines as well as what other financial aid applications or forms you might be required to submit.

### Sign the FAFSA appropriately.

If the appropriate family member(s) fail to sign the FAFSA, it cannot be processed, and you might lose out on financial assistance you are otherwise qualified to receive. If you complete your FAFSA online, you might still need to supplement your electronic form with an actual copy of your signature if you and at least one parent have not secured a Federal Student Aid PIN from [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov). A PIN allows you to electronically sign the application. Your parents should also obtain a PIN. Visit [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov) for more information.

### List all the colleges to which you are applying for admission.

If you want to be considered for financial aid from a specific college, you must list that college on the FAFSA. The paper application allows you to list up to four colleges while the online FAFSA allows you to list up to 10 colleges. Information from the FAFSA will only be sent to those colleges listed on your application. You must include each college’s six-digit federal school code as well as the name and address of each of your colleges.

Visit [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov) to search for federal school codes.

### Send information about special financial circumstances to your colleges’ financial aid offices.

The FAFSA does not include space for you to explain special financial circumstances unique to you and your family. If you need to communicate special circumstances (unusual medical bills, an impending divorce, expected unemployment), write a letter to each of the colleges to which you are applying. Do not mail this letter or any other correspondence with your FAFSA because this could slow down the processing of your financial aid application.

### If completing the PDF FAFSA or paper FAFSA, use a black ink pen or No. 2 pencil.

Do not mark the FAFSA with a colored pencil or felt tip pen. Make any necessary corrections with a pencil eraser.

### Do not delay completing the FAFSA because you or your family have not filed your federal income tax forms.

You will find the FAFSA easier to complete if you have completed your federal income tax forms. However, it is more important that you submit your financial aid application on time using estimated tax information rather than miss a financial aid deadline. Your colleges will verify the final income information later when your tax returns are completed.

### Do not delay completing the FAFSA because you are waiting to hear if you have been accepted to a college.

You should file your FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1 of the year you plan to enroll regardless of whether or not you have been accepted to a college. Waiting until you have been accepted could result in missing important financial aid deadlines, making you ineligible for financial aid you might otherwise have been able to receive.

### Retain a copy of your completed FAFSA.

Keep copies of your completed FAFSA and any other materials required by your colleges.

## Questions about the FAFSA?

Call the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1.800.4.FED.AID (1.800.433.3243)

Go to [www.studentaid.ed.gov](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov)

While filling out the FAFSA online, the following resources are available:

- “Need Help” and “Help and Hints” sections provide more information
- “Contact Us” section for live chat, email and phone options

Contact your colleges’ financial aid offices

Find out if there is an event in your area to help individuals complete the FAFSA—the financial aid office at a local college will be able to direct you to such an event

On average, it takes just 23 minutes to complete the FAFSA online.

## FAQs about completing the FAFSA

### Why does Federal Student Aid ask for income information from the year before you go to college?

Studies have consistently shown that verifiable income tax information from the base year (2012 for the 2013-2014 award year) is more accurate than projected (2013) information when estimating how much the family will be able to contribute during the coming school year.

### How should you answer the financial questions if your tax return hasn’t been filed yet? Should you wait to fill out this form until after you’ve filed your tax return?

Ideally, you should complete the FAFSA after you have done your tax return, but don’t wait until April. Many colleges award aid on a first-come, first-served basis. Also, you might not be eligible for state aid if you wait until April to submit your FAFSA. If you have not submitted your tax return, you should calculate your Adjusted Gross Income and taxes paid using the instructions for an IRS Form such as the 1040, 1040A, or 1040EZ. You can get the instructions and the form at a public library or download from [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov). After you file your taxes, you will need to log back into the FAFSA and correct any estimated information that was wrong.

### What if you are a dependent student, but your parents are divorced or separated? Whose financial information should be used on the FAFSA?

You should report information about the parent you lived with the majority of the time during the year before the date you file your FAFSA. If you didn’t live with either parent, or if you lived with each parent an equal amount of time, report information about the parent who provided the greatest amount of financial support during the year before the date you file your FAFSA. If you didn’t receive any parental financial support during that time, you must report information about the parent who most recently provided the greater amount of parental support.

### Do you report stepparent information?

Information about both of your legal parents (biological or adoptive), as long as they are living together, is required on the FAFSA, regardless of their marital status or gender. This change, effective for the 2014-2015 FAFSA filing year, provides a more accurate picture of your family’s overall financial condition and recognizes the diversity of today’s families.

### You are considered a dependent student but have no contact with your parents. What should you do?

Submit your FAFSA without any parent data. The college financial aid administrator can use professional judgment to determine that a student should be treated as an independent student. You will need to provide the financial aid office documentation of your circumstances. The financial aid administrator will not automatically change your dependency status just because you request it. The decision is based on the financial aid administrator’s judgment based on the facts of your specific situation, and is final.

### If your biological parents are deceased, whose income should you report on the FAFSA?

If both biological parents are deceased, you will be considered an independent student, and only your financial information is required.

### What should you do if your family has special circumstances that are not mentioned in the application?

Talk to the college’s financial aid administrator. If your family’s circumstances have changed from the previous tax year due to loss of employment, loss of benefits, death, or divorce, the financial aid administrator might decide to adjust data elements used to calculate the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The adjustment might increase your eligibility for financial aid.



## Checklist: Junior year

### AUGUST — DECEMBER

- Research scholarship and grant opportunities.**  
This information is available at your high school counseling office, local public library, and civic and professional organizations. Also, look online for scholarships that might apply to your career goals, skills, or demographics.
- Talk with your parents about your college plans and finances.**  
Become more specific about how you can finance your plans.

### JANUARY — JUNE

- Complete the FAFSA<sup>4</sup>caster.**  
(See page 12 for details.)
- Ask about scholarships when attending college fairs.**  
Talk to college admissions representatives about scholarship programs for which you may qualify.
- Look for summer jobs to help with college costs.**

### JULY — AUGUST

- Talk to coaches.**  
If you are interested in an athletic scholarship, contact the appropriate coaches at your colleges and send a resume of your accomplishments. Let your high school coach know about your interests.
- Request private scholarship applications.**  
Request application information from any private scholarship sources you have identified.

## Checklist: Senior year

### SEPTEMBER

- Investigate financial aid.**  
Start investigating federal, state, college, and local financial aid opportunities, including scholarship and grant opportunities.
- Males—register with the U.S. Selective Service.**  
If you are a male age 18-25, register with the U.S. Selective Service so you will be eligible for federal student aid. You can register at: [www.sss.gov](http://www.sss.gov), your high school, or your post office.

### OCTOBER

- Register for a Personal Identification Number (PIN).**  
Go to [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov) to register for a PIN. Your PIN serves as your e-Signature for the online FAFSA. If you are a dependent student, a parent should also register for a PIN at this time.
- Plan to attend financial aid and college nights in your community.**  
There are meetings in many communities to help you understand the financial aid process and provide assistance with filing the FAFSA. Find out when these events are held by checking with your counselor or a local college.

### NOVEMBER

- Begin to prepare for the FAFSA.**  
Download the FAFSA on the Web<sup>SM</sup> Worksheet to preview the questions you may be asked on the online FAFSA. If you do not plan to file the FAFSA online, download the PDF FAFSA at [www.fafsa.ed.gov/options.htm](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/options.htm) or call 1.800.4.FED.AID to obtain a paper FAFSA. You cannot submit your FAFSA until after January 1 of your senior year in high school.
- Apply for private scholarship and grant programs.**

### JANUARY

- File your FAFSA online at [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov), or complete and mail your PDF FAFSA or paper FAFSA.**  
Do this as soon as possible after January 1. Submit the FAFSA in time to meet each college's financial aid deadline. (These can vary and can be different than admissions deadlines.) Contact the financial aid offices at your colleges for more information.
- Continue researching and applying for scholarships that might be available to you.**
- Attend free financial aid workshops held at local high schools and colleges.** Many provide free hands-on FAFSA assistance.

### FEBRUARY

- Confirm receipt of your information.**  
Check with your colleges to be sure they have received the information from your FAFSA and any revised SAT and/or ACT test scores.

### MARCH

- Look for your Student Aid Report (SAR) in the mail or via email, if address provided.**  
You should receive it within three to ten days after filing the online FAFSA, or two to three weeks after filing the paper FAFSA. Each college you included on your FAFSA will receive a copy of your SAR.

- Review the SAR.**  
Make any necessary changes and return the corrected form to Federal Student Aid as indicated on the SAR. If you filed electronically, make corrections online. Contact your college for more directions if necessary.
- Tie up loose ends.**  
If required, send any additional information to the colleges to complete the admissions and/or financial aid process.

### APRIL

- Look for summer jobs to help with college costs.**

## Federal financial aid

Federal financial aid takes three basic forms—grants, work-study and loans. Keep in mind that other aid may be available from the state, the college, or other organizations.

### GRANTS (DO NOT HAVE TO BE REPAID)

Program	Eligibility requirements	Annual award	Application deadline	Forms required	More information
Federal Pell Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undergraduates</li> <li>U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen</li> <li>Demonstrate financial need</li> <li>Enrolled at least half-time</li> </ul>	Maximum award for 2013-14 is \$5,645	Contact your financial aid office	FAFSA <a href="http://www.fafsa.gov">www.fafsa.gov</a>	Award amount depends on program funding, COA, EFC, full- or part-time enrollment and Lifetime Eligibility Used (LEU). Lifetime eligibility is limited to the equivalent of six years of funding or 600 percent.
Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undergraduates</li> <li>U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen</li> <li>Demonstrate exceptional financial need</li> <li>Enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying college</li> <li>Recipient of a Federal Pell grant</li> </ul>	Between \$100 and \$4,000	Contact your financial aid office	FAFSA <a href="http://www.fafsa.gov">www.fafsa.gov</a>	Award amount depends on amount of funds the college has to award and full- or part-time enrollment.
Federal Teach Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undergraduates/graduate/post-baccalaureate students at qualifying colleges pursuing a career in teaching</li> </ul>	Up to \$3,760 annually	Contact your financial aid office	FAFSA <a href="http://www.fafsa.gov">www.fafsa.gov</a>	Must agree to teach in a high-need field serving low-income students for four years.
Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undergraduates whose parent or guardian was a member of the U.S. armed forces and died as a result of performing military service in Iraq or Afghanistan after the events of 9/11</li> <li>U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen</li> <li>Ineligible for a Federal Pell Grant due only to having less financial need than is required to receive Pell funds</li> <li>Less than 24 years old or enrolled at least part-time at an institution of higher education at the time of the parent's or guardian's death</li> </ul>	\$5,080.50 annually	Contact your financial aid office	FAFSA <a href="http://www.fafsa.gov">www.fafsa.gov</a>	Payment adjusted for less than full-time study.  Total amount may not exceed the equivalent of six years of Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant funding.

### WORK-STUDY (MONEY EARNED WHILE ATTENDING SCHOOL; DOES NOT HAVE TO BE REPAID)

Program	Eligibility requirements	Annual award	How to apply	Forms required	More information
Federal Work-Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undergraduate or graduate students</li> <li>U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen</li> <li>Demonstrate sufficient financial need</li> <li>Enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying college</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depends on financial need and amount college has to award</li> <li>Contact the financial aid office</li> </ul>	Complete the FAFSA and contact the financial aid office	FAFSA <a href="http://www.fafsa.gov">www.fafsa.gov</a>	Depends on the amount of funds your college has to award. Funds are limited—early filers receive priority. You work for an employer at an hourly rate earning at least the minimum wage. Your college may also offer its own work-study program.

### LOAN PROGRAMS (BORROWED MONEY THAT MUST BE PAID BACK WITH INTEREST)

Program	Eligibility requirements	Annual award	Application deadline	Forms required	Repayment information	More information
Federal Perkins Loan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen</li> <li>Undergraduate or graduate students enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying college</li> <li>Demonstrate sufficient financial need</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undergraduate students: \$5,500 per year, up to a maximum of \$27,500</li> <li>Graduate/professional students: \$8,000 per year, up to a maximum of \$60,000, including undergraduate loans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete the FAFSA</li> <li>A Master Promissory Note (MPN) is required</li> <li>Contact the college you will be attending for information about signing the MPN</li> </ul>	FAFSA and MPN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repayment begins nine months after you graduate, withdraw from school, or drop below half-time enrollment</li> <li>Maximum repayment term is 10 years</li> <li>The interest rate is a fixed rate of 5.0 percent</li> </ul>	

LOAN PROGRAMS (BORROWED MONEY THAT MUST BE PAID BACK WITH INTEREST) (continued)

Program	Eligibility requirements	Annual award	Application deadline	Forms required	Repayment information	More information
<b>Federal Direct PLUS Loan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Natural or adoptive parent of a dependent undergraduate student who is enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying college</li> <li>Graduate or professional students enrolled at least half-time</li> <li>Not have an adverse credit history</li> </ul>	Up to the cost of attendance, minus any financial aid you are eligible to receive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete the FAFSA</li> <li>A Master Promissory Note (MPN) is required.</li> <li>Contact the college you will be attending for information about signing the MPN</li> </ul>	FAFSA and MPN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repayment begins after the final PLUS loan disbursement; however the borrower may qualify for a deferment of the first payment until six months after the student is no longer enrolled at least half-time</li> <li>Maximum repayment term depends upon total principal balance but might extend from 10-25 years</li> <li>For PLUS loans first disbursed 7/1/13-6/30/14, interest rate is a fixed 6.41 percent</li> </ul>	Applicants must pass a credit check to be eligible for a PLUS loan. If they don't pass, they might still be able to receive a loan if they can demonstrate that extenuating circumstances exist or if they secure a creditworthy endorser. A PLUS loan is an unsubsidized loan and the borrower is responsible for paying all interest that accrues on the loan.
<b>Federal Direct Subsidized Stafford Loan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen</li> <li>Undergraduate students enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying college</li> <li>Demonstrate sufficient financial need</li> </ul>	See <i>Federal Direct Stafford Loan award amounts</i> chart on the following page for amounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete the FAFSA</li> <li>A Master Promissory Note (MPN) is required</li> <li>Contact the college you will be attending for information about signing the MPN</li> </ul>	FAFSA and MPN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repayment begins six months after you graduate, withdraw from school, or drop below half-time enrollment</li> <li>Maximum repayment term depends upon total principal balance but might extend from 10-25 years</li> <li>For undergraduate subsidized and unsubsidized loans first disbursed 7/1/13-6/30/14, interest rate is a fixed 3.86 percent</li> <li>For graduate Unsubsidized loans first disbursed 7/1/13-6/30/14, interest rate is fixed at 5.41 percent</li> </ul>	<p>These loans are awarded based on financial need. The borrower is not charged interest during periods of enrollment and during authorized deferments. The federal government pays (subsidizes) the interest during these periods. Your college will calculate your need for the Subsidized Stafford Loan.</p> <p>Note: Beginning on July 1, 2012, and ending on July 1, 2014, interest will now be charged on the Subsidized Stafford Loan during the six month grace period.</p>
<b>Federal Direct Unsubsidized Stafford Loan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen</li> <li>Undergraduate or graduate students enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying college</li> <li>Demonstrate sufficient financial need</li> </ul>	See <i>Federal Direct Stafford Loan award amounts</i> chart on the following page for amounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete the FAFSA</li> <li>A Master Promissory Note (MPN) is required</li> <li>Contact the college you will be attending for information about signing the MPN</li> </ul>	FAFSA and MPN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unsubsidized loans first disbursed 7/1/13-6/30/14, interest rate is fixed at 5.41 percent</li> </ul>	These loans are not awarded on the basis of financial need for students not qualifying for a Subsidized Stafford Loan or who need more funding. You are responsible for the interest charged from the time the loan is disbursed until it is paid in full. You can pay the interest as it accrues or allow the interest to be "capitalized," which means the interest will be added to the principal amount of the loan. Capitalized interest increases the amount you repay. Your college will determine your eligibility for an Unsubsidized Stafford Loan, including the loan amount for which you are eligible.

Federal Direct Stafford Loan limit amounts:

Year	Dependent undergraduates <sup>1</sup>	Independent undergraduates	Graduate and professional students
First year	\$5,500	\$9,500	\$20,500 (unsubsidized only)
	No more than \$3,500 may be in subsidized loans		
Second year	\$6,500	\$10,500	
	No more than \$4,500 may be in subsidized loans		
Third year and beyond (each year)	\$7,500	\$12,500	
	No more than \$5,500 may be in subsidized loans		
Teacher certification	\$5,500	\$12,500—no more than \$5,500 may be in subsidized loans	
Total amount you can borrow	\$31,000	\$57,500	\$138,500 <sup>2</sup> —no more than \$65,500 may be in subsidized loans <sup>3</sup> (includes any Stafford Loans you received for undergraduate study)
	No more than \$23,000 may be in subsidized loans		

<sup>1</sup> If you're a dependent student whose parents are unable to obtain a federal PLUS loan, you may be eligible to borrow the same amount in unsubsidized loans as an independent student.

<sup>2</sup> Graduate and professional students enrolled in certain approved health professions programs may borrow up to \$224,000.

<sup>3</sup> No new Subsidized Stafford Loans have been made to graduate/professional students for periods of study on or after July 1, 2012. Annual and aggregate limits for these students did not change.

### If you have to borrow money to attend college:

**Don't borrow money you don't need.** Just because you are eligible to borrow a certain amount, don't automatically do so. If you can manage with less, borrow less.

**Think about how much you'll make versus how much you borrow.** Loans add up over your college career. Think about whether your job after graduation will pay enough to make the payments on the amount you borrow. Visit [bls.gov/ooh](http://bls.gov/ooh) to estimate your starting salary.

**If you have other income and borrow unsubsidized loans, try to make interest payments while you are still in college.** This will significantly decrease the amount of money you will have to repay after you graduate.

### Scholarships

Scholarships are a form of gift aid—money given to students that does not have to be repaid. Not every student will receive a scholarship, but it is important that you make an effort to identify and apply for scholarships.

#### TYPES OF SCHOLARSHIPS

Unfortunately, many students do not conduct a scholarship search. They assume that all scholarships go to the most academically or athletically gifted. While these are the scholarships that you hear about the most, there are many other scholarships that are awarded based on other criteria. These can include scholarships based upon:

- The high school you attended
- The community in which you grew up
- Community service you performed
- The program of study you intend to pursue
- How much financial need you demonstrate

Simply put, there are thousands of scholarships awarded every year that have nothing to do with your academic or athletic performance. However, the scholarship sponsor is probably not going to come looking for you. You have to make an effort to find this free money.

#### SCHOLARSHIP SPONSORS

Colleges award most scholarships each year. Be sure to investigate the scholarship opportunities offered by the colleges that interest you. The college's financial aid office or website should have a list of scholarships that are available at the college.

Be sure you don't overlook other scholarship sponsors. These can include religious and civic groups, community organizations, employers, and other corporations, foundations, and even some individuals.

#### SCHOLARSHIP SEARCHES

To maximize your chances of receiving scholarship funds, you should develop a plan to search and apply for scholarships. A good place to start your scholarship search is the Internet.

There are several scholarship search sites on the web. You will have to provide some personal information in order for the scholarship search engine to be effective, but be careful! Not all scholarship search sites are legitimate. Four of the major scholarship search sites that have proven over the years to be legitimate are:

- Fastweb: [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)
- College Board: [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)
- Scholarships.com: [www.scholarships.com](http://www.scholarships.com)
- U.S. Department of Labor: [www.careerinfonet.org/scholarshipsearch](http://www.careerinfonet.org/scholarshipsearch)

A good scholarship search extends beyond searching the Internet. You should also talk with your family, friends, and school counselor. Your local public library may contain books or lists of scholarships. Investigate local employers (including your own if you have had a job) and civic organizations to see if they offer scholarships. Finally, make sure to research the scholarship opportunities available at the colleges you are interested in attending.

## APPLYING FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

Successful scholarship applicants generally don't apply for just one scholarship. They apply for several and so should you. Many scholarships require you to complete a formal scholarship application. They may also request additional information such as:

- An essay or personal statement
- Letters of recommendation
- Examples of work in a specific study area
- SAT/ACT scores
- Transcripts
- Telephone or in-person interview

When completing scholarship applications, follow all the specific application directions. Meet all deadlines and make sure you submit applications that are complete and error-free.

If you are awarded one or more scholarships, you will likely receive a letter of congratulations. You may also have to provide some additional information at this time, so be sure to follow up on any instructions contained in the letter. And there's one last thing—make sure to thank the scholarship sponsor, those who wrote letters of recommendation, and anyone else who helped you in your scholarship search.

## RECEIVING A SCHOLARSHIP

If you receive a scholarship, the scholarship sponsor may send the scholarship funds to you. However, most scholarships are paid directly to the college on your behalf.

Keep in mind that most colleges have an outside scholarship policy to address how a scholarship might affect the financial aid package offered. It is possible that receipt of a scholarship could cause the college to reduce the other aid you are scheduled to receive. Be sure to report outside scholarships to the college.

Finally, most scholarships that pay for tuition and fees are not taxable. However, it is possible that some or all of the scholarship funds could count as income and could be taxable. Make sure you seek advice to determine if any scholarship funds should be claimed on your tax forms.

## Scholarship scams

Securing money to pay for a college education can cause a great deal of stress in a family. Some unscrupulous companies prey upon the stress the financial aid search can cause. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) warns students and their parents to watch for these six warning signs of a scholarship scam.

## WARNING SIGNS

1. **“The scholarship is guaranteed or your money back.”**  
No service can guarantee that it will get you a grant or scholarship. Refund guarantees often have impossible conditions attached. Review a service's refund policies in writing before you pay a fee. Typically, fraudulent scholarship search services require that applicants show rejection letters from each of the sponsors on the lists they provide to request a refund of any fees paid. If a sponsor no longer exists, if it really does not provide scholarships, or if it has a rolling application deadline, letters of rejection are almost impossible to obtain.
2. **“The scholarship service will do all the work.”**  
Unfortunately, nobody else can fill out the personal information forms, write the essays, and supply the references that many scholarships require.
3. **“The scholarship will cost some money.”**  
Be wary of any charges related to scholarship information services or individual scholarship applications, especially in significant amounts. Some legitimate scholarship sponsors charge fees to defray their processing expenses. Before you send money to apply for a scholarship, investigate the sponsor. “Free” money shouldn't cost you a thing.
4. **“You can't get this information anywhere else.”**  
Scholarship directories are available in any large bookstore, public library, or high school counseling office. Additional information on private scholarship programs, including scams, can be found at [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org).
5. **“You are a ‘finalist’ in a contest you never entered, or you have been selected by a ‘national foundation’ to receive a scholarship.”**  
Most legitimate scholarship programs never seek particular applicants and will most likely only contact you in response to an inquiry. If you think there is a real possibility that you might have been selected to receive a scholarship, investigate before you send money to be sure the sponsor or program is legitimate.

6. **“The scholarship service needs your credit card or checking account number in advance.”**

Never provide your credit card or checking account number on the telephone to the representative of an organization that you do not know. A legitimate need-based scholarship will not ask for your checking account number. Get information in writing first. An unscrupulous operation does not need your signature on a check. It schemes to set up situations that allow it to drain a victim's account with unauthorized withdrawals.

## Other points to consider in a scholarship program:

**Fraudulent scholarship operations often use official-sounding names containing words, such as federal, national, administration, division, federation, and foundation.** Their names are often a slight variant of the name of a legitimate government or private organization. Do not be fooled by a name that seems reputable or official, an official-looking seal, or a Washington, D.C. address.

**If you win a scholarship, you will receive written official notification by mail, not by telephone.** If the sponsor calls to inform you, they will follow up with a letter in the mail. If a request for money is made by phone, the operation is probably fraudulent.

**Beware of telephone numbers with a 900 area code.** These will charge you a fee of several dollars a minute for a call that could be a long recording and provides only a list of addresses or names.

**A dishonest operation might put pressure on an applicant by saying that awards are on a first-come, first-served basis.** Some scholarship programs give preference to the earliest qualified applications. However, if you are told (especially on the telephone) that you must respond quickly but you will not hear about the results for several months, there might be a problem.

**Be wary of endorsements.** Fraudulent operations claim endorsements by groups with names similar to well-known private or government organizations. The Better Business Bureau and government agencies do not endorse businesses.



## Avoiding financial aid scams

Legitimate services offering federal or state financial aid information should be free of charge. It is also important to recognize and avoid deceptive and questionable practices involving student loans. To help, the Federal Trade Commission and the U.S. Department of Education have produced “Student Loans: Avoiding Deceptive Offers.” This guide provides tips on recognizing deceptive lending practices and information on how and where to file a complaint. This guide is available on the web at [www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/pdf-0048-student-loans.pdf](http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/pdf-0048-student-loans.pdf).

### Be careful of “free” seminars offered by financial aid “consultants.”

Sometimes these consultants offer good tips on preparing for college, but often they are trying to get you to sign up for a long-term contract for services you don't need. Often these “consultants” are trying to sell you other financial products, such as annuities, life insurance, or other financial services that have little to do with college financial aid.

## Your rights and responsibilities

### YOUR RIGHTS

You have a right to receive the following information from your college:

- What financial aid is available, including information about federal, state, and college programs
- Deadlines for applying for each kind of aid
- The cost of attendance and the refund policies if you withdraw
- Criteria used to select aid recipients
- How your financial need is determined, including how student expenses are calculated in your budget
- What resources are considered in determining your need, such as parent contribution, other financial aid and benefits, assets, and so on
- How much of your financial need has been met
- What aid resources make up your financial aid package
- What part of the aid is a loan and must be repaid and what part is grant aid
- The interest rate on your student loan, the total amount that must be repaid, the procedures for paying back the loan, how long you have to repay, and when repayment begins
- Procedures for appealing a financial aid decision if you think you have been treated unfairly or if your aid package is inadequate
- How the college determines whether or not you are making Satisfactory Academic Progress and what happens if you are not

### YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

You have a responsibility to:

- Review and consider all information about a college's program before you enroll
- Complete your application for student financial aid accurately and submit it to the right place on time (errors can delay your getting aid and intentional misreporting of information is a violation of law subject to penalties under the U.S. Criminal Code)
- Return all additional documentation, verification, corrections, and/or new information requested either by the financial aid administrator or the agency to which you submitted your application
- Read and understand all forms that you are asked to sign, keep copies of them, and accept responsibility for all agreements you sign
- Notify the lender/servicer of your loans about any changes in your name, address, or school status
- Satisfactorily perform the work associated with aid in the form of student employment
- Know and comply with the deadlines for applying and reapplying for aid
- Know and comply with your college's refund policies and procedures

# The final decision

Your financial aid award letters have arrived. Now is the time to carefully consider your options and select the types of aid and school that are the best fit for you. This section will help you choose the right school, guide you through the final steps in receiving your financial aid, and help you financially prepare yourself for college.

## Checklist: Senior year

### APRIL

- Review your award letters.**  
You should receive financial aid award letters from the colleges that have accepted you for admission. Review them with your parents or a trusted advisor. Be sure you understand the terms and conditions for each type of aid.
- Weigh your options and make your decision.**  
Using the worksheet on page 25, compare and weigh your options.
- Notify the colleges of your final decision.**  
Each college that accepted you for enrollment needs to know whether you plan to accept or decline its offer. Follow the colleges' instructions to let them know your final decision.

### MAY

- Send a deposit to your college of choice.**  
Many colleges require that you send a deposit to reserve your place and formalize your college acceptance. You may submit a deposit to only one college. The exception to this is if you are put on a wait list by a college and are later admitted to that college.
- Send in your financial aid forms.**  
Sign your financial aid award letter and any other items requiring your signature and return them. If you have questions, schedule an appointment with a financial aid officer. If you have decided to accept a loan, understand all your rights and responsibilities before you and/or your parents sign.

- Update the college on your financial aid situation.**  
Notify the financial aid office of any outside scholarships, grants, or other kinds of student aid from private sources that you have received since you submitted your aid application.
- Send letters of decline to financial aid offices.**  
If you have received financial aid award letters from colleges whose offers you have decided to decline, notify the financial aid office in writing because other students will need the aid you declined.
- Arrange for housing and meals at the college you will attend.**  
If necessary, arrange for housing and a meal plan for the fall.

### JUNE

- Send your final transcript.**  
Your college will need confirmation of your graduation.

### SUMMER

- Work and save.**  
Make a plan for saving a portion of your summer earnings.
- Make a budget.**  
Find a Budget Worksheet online at [www.ecmc.org/FinancialLiteracy](http://www.ecmc.org/FinancialLiteracy).
- Attend orientation at your new college.**  
Make plans to attend required summer orientation sessions at the college.

## Understanding your award letter

Once you have been accepted for enrollment at any college and have applied for financial aid by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and any other financial aid forms required by the college, you and your family will receive a financial aid award letter. This letter will detail the amount of financial support the college is able to provide for the upcoming year. You might receive the award letter along with your notice of acceptance. Some colleges make the award letters available online. Check with your colleges to see how they distribute the award letters.

### READ THE FINE PRINT

- Read your award letter carefully to ensure you understand all terms and conditions so you can decide if you want to accept any, or all, of the aid offered.

- Look for instructions for your next steps. You might need to complete additional paperwork (e.g., loan applications).
- Determine if grants or scholarships are available for more than one year. If so, what are the applicable conditions?
- When comparing financial aid awards, consider your final out-of-pocket cost. An award containing loans may have a higher ultimate out-of-pocket cost than an equivalent award that contains mostly grants.

### KEEP YOUR COLLEGE AWARE OF CHANGING SITUATIONS

Has your family situation changed since you filed the FAFSA? Has a parent become unemployed or ill? Have you been awarded additional private scholarships? You must report any changes to the college. Even name and address changes must be reported. Any of these changes can affect your award.

### WHAT IF IT'S NOT ENOUGH?

If after reading the award letter you believe that the award and your family savings are not enough to cover all of your expenses, don't panic! There are other options for getting the money you need to attend the college of your choice.

- Research other sources for private scholarships. It might not be too late to apply.
- Consider any potential benefits from your parents' places of employment. Look beyond just tuition and scholarships such as programs to lower the cost of computers, insurance, or travel.
- See if your college offers a payment plan that allows tuition expenses to be spread out over the year.
- Make sure your college is aware of any special situations or circumstances that might affect the college's award decision. Is another sibling in college? Has a baby been born or adopted? Is a parent facing possible layoff? Do any of your family members have a chronic medical condition resulting in unusually high medical expenses? Make sure your financial aid office is aware of any unique situations.

### MEET DEADLINES

The clock is ticking! Once you've chosen your college, you might need to inform the college, in writing, about how much of the award you plan to accept. If you don't respond by the date indicated, your award could be in jeopardy.

### WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE ON AN AWARD LETTER

The award letter provides a summary of the estimated cost of attendance along with financial aid the college is offering you. Here's an example of an award letter:

## Sample University award letter

### Costs in the 2014-15 year

<b>Estimated cost of attendance for full-time enrollment</b>	<b>\$25,000 / year</b>
Tuition and fees	\$14,000
Housing and meals (On-campus resident)	\$8,000
Books and supplies	\$1,000
Transportation	\$600
Other educational costs	\$1,400

### Grants and scholarships to pay for college

<b>Total Grants and Scholarships</b> (“Gift” aid; no repayment needed)	<b>\$13,130 / year</b>
Grants from your school	\$8,000
Federal Pell Grant	\$3,200
Grants from your state	\$900
Other scholarships you can use	\$1,030

### What you will pay for the 2014-15 year

<b>Net costs</b> (Cost of attendance minus total grants and scholarships)	<b>\$11,870 / year</b>
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### Options to pay net costs

#### Work options

Work-study (Federal, state, or institutional)	\$1,000 / year
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#### Loan options\*

Federal Perkins Loans	\$700 / year
Federal Direct Subsidized Loan	\$5,500 / year
Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan	\$0 / year

\*Recommended amounts shown here. You may be eligible for a different amount. Contact your financial aid office.

#### Other options

<b>Family contribution</b> (As calculated by the institution using information reported on the FAFSA or to your institution.)	<b>\$2,323 / year</b>
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- Payment plan offered by the institution
- Parent PLUS Loan
- Military and/or National Service benefits
- Non-Federal private education loan

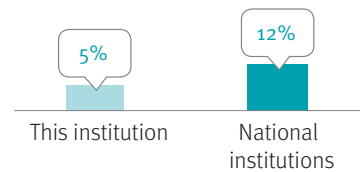
#### GRADUATION RATE

Percentage of full-time students who graduate within 6 years



#### LOAN DEFAULT RATE

Percentage of borrowers entering repayment and defaulting on their loan



#### MEDIAN BORROWING

Students at Sample University typically borrow \$20,000 in Federal loans over 4 years. The Federal loan payment over 10 years for this amount is approximately \$196.84 per month. Your borrowing amount may be different.

#### REPAYING YOUR LOANS

To learn about loan repayment choices and work out your Federal Loan monthly payment, go to: <http://studentaid.ed.gov/repay-loans/understand/plans>

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION AND NEXT STEPS:

Sample University (SU)  
Financial Aid Office  
123 Main Street  
Anytown, ST 12345  
Telephone: (123) 456-7890  
E-mail: [financialaid@SampleUniv.edu](mailto:financialaid@SampleUniv.edu)

## Worksheet: Make your decision

A quick way to compare offers and determine your net costs is to subtract all your grant, scholarship and other free aid from your cost of attendance. Keep in mind that colleges have different ways of awarding financial aid as well as different costs of attendance.<sup>1</sup> If you have more than two schools to compare, make copies of this page before starting.

		College (fill-in)					
		Sample college					
EVALUATE	Pros	Top rated program, low cost of living					
	Cons	May need a car, limited housing options					
COST OF ATTENDANCE	Tuition and fees	\$654					
	Room and board <sup>2</sup>	\$10,872					
	Books and supplies	\$1,638					
	Computer allowance	-					
	Other fees	\$3,096					
	Other costs	\$1,170					
	<b>Total college costs (A)</b>	<b>\$17,430</b>					
GRANT/SCHOLARSHIP AID	Federal Pell Grant	\$2,770					
	Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)	\$765					
	TEACH Grant	\$2,000					
	State Grant	\$4,000					
	Other grants	-					
	Scholarships	-					
	Institution-based aid	-					
	<b>Total grant/scholarship aid (B)</b>	<b>\$9,535</b>					
<b>Your net costs (A – B)</b>	<b>\$7,895</b>						
LOANS		Offered	Accept/Declined	\$	Offered	Accept/Declined	\$
	Federal Perkins loan	\$4,000	Accept	\$4,000			
	Federal subsidized Stafford Loan	\$3,500	Accept	\$3,500			
	Federal unsubsidized Stafford Loan	\$2,000	Accept	\$398			
	Federal PLUS loan	\$2,500	Declined	-			
	Private loan	-		-			
	<b>Total loan aid (C)</b>	<b>\$7,895</b>					
SUMMARY	<b>Total financial aid (B + C = D)</b>	<b>\$17,430</b>					
	<b>Your out-of-pocket costs (A – D)</b>	<b>\$0</b>					
	<b>Work-study or student employment (E)</b>	<b>-</b>					

<sup>1</sup> Not all colleges participate in all of the financial aid programs listed above.

<sup>2</sup> If room and board aren't part of your housing contract, check with the college's housing office or check the local paper or online for rental costs.

# Glossary

Familiarize yourself with the college and financial aid terms in this section to better equip yourself for the admissions and financial aid processes.

## Academic year

A period of time schools use to measure a quantity of study. An academic year typically consists of two semesters, three quarters, or a defined number of hours of study.

## Advanced Placement (AP)

A college-equivalent course taken in high school that allows the student, upon passing a test, to earn college credit.

## Assets

Items of value such as stocks, bonds, savings and real estate. You are required to report the value of some types of assets when completing the FAFSA.

## Associate degree

A degree granted by a college after the satisfactory completion of a two-year, full-time program of study or its part-time equivalent.

## Bachelor's or baccalaureate degree

A degree granted by a college after the satisfactory completion of a four- or five-year, full-time program of study, or its part-time equivalent.

## Books/supplies

One of the typical components of Cost of Attendance (COA). Each college includes an average estimated cost you may incur for purchasing textbooks and other academic supplies.

## Budget

The total "sticker price" of attending college; also known as Cost of Attendance (COA).

## Capitalization

For unsubsidized loans, the amount of interest that accrues while you are in school, a grace period, or in deferment or forbearance that is added to the principal balance of your loan.

## Consolidation loan

A loan that combines several student loans into one new loan from a single lender.

## Cost of Attendance (COA)

The calculated cost of attending the college, which includes transportation, room and board, tuition and fees, and the estimated cost of books, supplies, and other expenses. COA is used to determine eligibility for financial aid.

## CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE®

A form some colleges may require you to complete in addition to the FAFSA to qualify for financial aid.

## Default

Occurs when the borrower fails to make scheduled loan payments for a period of 270 days or longer.

## Deferment

When the borrower is allowed to postpone repayment of a loan for as long as the borrower meets specific eligibility conditions specified in the law. For subsidized federal loans, interest that accrues during periods of deferment is paid by the federal government.

## Dependent student

For federal student aid purposes, any student who is not an independent student is considered to be dependent. See the definition of "independent student" for a list of qualifying conditions.

## Early action

A college admissions process that is similar to early decision, but is not a binding commitment to attend the college.

## Early decision

Students who apply under early decision commit to enroll at the college if admitted and offered a satisfactory financial aid package. Application deadlines usually are in November or December with a mid- to late-December notification date.

## Expected Family Contribution (EFC)

The index used to determine how much a family is expected to contribute toward the Cost of Attendance. Your EFC is calculated based upon the information you provided when filing the FAFSA.

## Federal Methodology Need Analysis Formula

A formula used to calculate your family's expected financial contribution for college. This formula, established by Congress, is used nationwide for all students. The most important factors in the formula are: parent income, assets, and net worth; student income and assets; and family size.

## Financial aid package

The total amount of financial aid a student is eligible to receive. It might include grants, work-study, and loan funds from a variety of sources, and is assembled by the college's financial aid office.

## Financial need

The amount by which your family contribution falls short of covering the cost of attendance.

## Forbearance

The temporary postponement or reduction of loan payments that is typically granted at the discretion of the lender/servicer. The borrower is responsible for paying all interest that accrues during periods of forbearance.

## Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

A free application that must be completed by all students and parents who apply for federal student aid.

## Full-time student

An undergraduate student who is enrolled for at least 12 credit hours per semester or equivalent. For a graduate student, the enrollment requirements can vary among colleges. Does not include audited courses.

## Graduate student

A student who is enrolled in a master's or doctoral program at a college.

## Grant

A type of financial aid usually based on financial need, which the student does not have to repay.

## Independent student

A student is considered independent for federal student aid if the student meets one of the following criteria:

- Is age 24 or older
- Is working toward a master's or doctoral degree
- Is married
- Has legal dependents other than a spouse
- Is an orphan or ward of the court or in foster care at any time after age 12
- Is on active duty or is a veteran of the U.S. Armed forces
- Is an emancipated minor or in legal guardianship
- Is an unaccompanied homeless youth
- Is an unaccompanied self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness



**Interest**

The periodic fee charged to borrow money. Interest charges are repaid in addition to the principal of the loan.

**Loan**

A type of financial aid that must be repaid, with interest.

**Master Promissory Note (MPN)**

To borrow under the federal loan programs, a student or parent must sign this common form. The MPN allows borrowers to receive loans for a single academic year, or for multiple academic years without having to sign a new note.

**Merit-based aid**

Financial aid awarded on the basis of grades, test scores, athletic ability or other talent regardless of a family's income or assets.

**Need-based aid**

Financial aid awarded based on the family's ability to pay for college. The FAFSA is typically used to determine a family's eligibility for need-based aid.

**Part-time student**

An undergraduate student who is enrolled for fewer than 12 credit hours per semester or equivalent. A graduate student who is enrolled for fewer hours than the college's standard to be considered a full-time student. Does not include audited courses.

**Personal expenses**

One of the typical components of Cost of Attendance (COA). Each college includes an average estimated cost you may incur for purchasing personal items such as laundry detergent, toothpaste, etc.

**PIN (Personal Identification Number)**

A four-digit number that is used in combination with a student's Social Security number, name, and date of birth to identify someone who has the right to access the student's personal information on Federal Student Aid websites, such as FAFSA on the Web. Parents of dependent students will also electronically sign a FAFSA and need their own PIN.

**Principal**

The dollar amount borrowed on which interest is calculated.

**Priority filing date**

The date established by the college by which students are encouraged to submit their FAFSA and have the results forwarded to the college to increase their chances of being awarded certain campus-based financial aid. Financial aid funds are limited for students who fail to meet their college's priority filing date.

**Private grant aid**

Non-college grant aid, such as scholarships from community groups and organizations, which does not require repayment.

**Private loans**

Education loan programs provided by private lenders to supplement the student and parent education loan programs available from the federal government.

**Promissory note**

The legal document signed by the borrower prior to receiving a loan. States a promise to repay the loan, and lists the conditions of the loan and terms for repayment. The Master Promissory Note (MPN) is one type of promissory note.

**Room/board**

One of the typical components of Cost of Attendance (COA). Each college includes the actual cost it charges if you live on campus, or an estimated cost you may incur for living off campus.

**Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)**

The academic standard you must meet in college to continue to receive federal financial aid. Each college establishes its own SAP policy to comply with federal requirements.

**State grant aid**

State financial aid, such as grants and scholarships, which does not have to be repaid.

**Student Aid Report (SAR)**

The SAR summarizes the information you included on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The SAR provides the Expected Family Contribution (EFC), which is used to determine whether a student is eligible for a Federal Pell Grant and other federal aid.

**Title IV school code**

The Title IV school code is a six-character college identifier used for federal student aid programs. This code may have a two-digit suffix that identifies a particular division, campus or branch of the college.

**Transportation**

One of the typical components of Cost of Attendance (COA). Each college includes an average estimated cost you may incur for transportation to and from school. This can vary depending upon whether your permanent residence is in another city/state or if you are a commuting student.

**Tuition/fees**

One of the typical components of Cost of Attendance (COA). This is the actual cost the college charges students for providing instructional and other services. Tuition may be charged per term, per course or per credit hour.

**Undergraduate student**

A student who is enrolled in an undergraduate course of study that usually does not exceed four years and that typically leads to a degree or certificate.

**Unmet need**

The amount of need remaining after Expected Family Contribution (EFC), grant aid, and self-help are subtracted from Cost of Attendance.

**Verification**

The process colleges use to ensure the accuracy of the information reported on the FAFSA. You may be required to provide the college with a copy of your tax return or other additional documentation.





