



to figure out
what I want to
do with my life

It opens doors
to endless
opportunities

WHY Do you
WANT To Go
To COLLEGE?

get a
d job

To be
successful!

to have
new life
experiences

to make enough
money to do the
things I want
to do in life

it's super fun
and a brand
new experience!

Opportunities

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TIPS FOR USING THIS BOOK

Work from front to back.

In this book, the college prep process is organized into four sections—chronologically, so start at the beginning of the book and work your way to the end, page by page.

Have a pencil/pen handy.

It's OK to write in this book. Look for the YOUR TURN symbol—it indicates that the page includes either a checklist or a worksheet for you to complete.



Use the checklists.

The checklists in this book begin with the summer before your junior year in high school. However, you may have been working on some of the checklist items as early as middle school. If so, that's great—just continue to work on these checklist items. If you have just begun to think about college, that's OK too. It's not too late!

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.

AVAILABILITY IN SPANISH

To order Spanish copies and/or download a PDF, visit www.ecmc.org.

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FOR ADMINISTRATORS AND COUNSELORS

This book is a resource for you to share with students. For free copies of this book, send a request to opportunities@ecmc.org. Include the desired quantity of books in English and/or Spanish, your complete mailing address, your name, and your phone number.

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 about ECMC, visit www.ecmc.org.

ECMC wishes all students success in the pursuit of their education goals.

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

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.

Why go to college?

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. You could look them up, but we'll summarize them for you instead.

GET A JOB

Statistics show that unemployment rates drop in direct relationship to how much education you receive. For example, unemployment rates are lower for community college graduates than for high school graduates—but the rate is even lower for college graduates with bachelor's degrees. This has been true as long as employment statistics have been kept, but becomes even more important when the economy is struggling.

College is becoming even more important to having a job than it used to be. Of the fastest growing job categories, 90 percent require some education after high school. Even 40 percent of manufacturing jobs now require some education after high school.

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

BE HAPPY

There are plenty of statistics that indicate college attendance is important to living a happier life. People who attend college:

- Report that 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, if you talk with people who have gone to college, most will probably tell you this—it was fun!

Here's the bottom line—**college is important.**

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 that 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 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.

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 for you

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.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Program of study

Does the college offer programs that will help you achieve your career goals?

School size

Would you prefer a large or small school?

Class size

How large do you like your classes to be?

Support programs

Does the college offer programs to help you stay in school and graduate?

City and neighborhood

Do you prefer a city or a small town?

Campus culture

When visiting each college, get a feel for its "personality." Does it match yours?

Distance from home

How close do you want to live to your family?

Extracurricular activities

Do you have activities in your life that you can't live without?

Religious affiliation

Do you want to attend a college affiliated with your religious beliefs?

Cost of attendance

While one college may appear to be less expensive, what will your final cost be after receiving financial aid and scholarships? (You'll learn more about this in The Financial Aid Process chapter.)

Financial aid options

Does the college have special financial aid options to help you pay for college? 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.

Outside learning options

Does the college offer internships, externships, study abroad or service learning opportunities?

Checklist: Junior year

SUMMER

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/oco) 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's counseling 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.

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

AUGUST

- ❑ **Ensure that you will graduate.** Look at your high school's graduation requirements and compare your credits. Make sure you will graduate on time.

OCTOBER

- ❑ **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.

JANUARY — AUGUST

- ❑ **Visit colleges.** Planning 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 and/or ACT.** If these tests are required for your list of colleges, register and take them.
- ❑ **Take SAT Subject Tests.** Take these in May or June if the colleges that you are considering require them. At this point, the material is fresh in your mind.

- ❑ **Start preparing portfolios, audition tapes, 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 CD/DVD.

- ❑ **Request high school transcripts.** You will need a 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 tapes, 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 revised, complete 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.

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 that 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.

The PLAN Test

PLAN is a comprehensive program for 10th graders 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 have learned in your high school English, math, and science courses.

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.

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.

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.

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 over 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.

Testing dates, fees, and registration

PSAT

2011 Test dates	Tests administered	Regular registration deadlines	Late registration deadlines	Notes	Fees	Registration
October 12, 2011 or October 15, 2011	PSAT/NMSQT	Check with your school counselor	Check with your school counselor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test is administered by high schools, not through test centers. • Please note that each high school chooses only ONE October test date. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$14 • Note: Schools may charge an additional fee to cover administrative costs. • 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online registration is not available. • You must sign up for the PSAT/NMSQT at your high school or at another high school in your community.

PLAN

2011 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"> • Test administered in school-supervised setting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally no cost to the student. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register with your school counselor or administrator.

SAT

2011-2012 Test dates	Tests administered	Regular registration deadlines	Late registration deadlines	Notes	Fees	Registration
October 1, 2011	SAT and Subject Tests	September 9, 2011	September 21, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sunday administrations usually occur the day after each Saturday test date for students who cannot test on Saturday for religious reasons. • The Language Tests with Listening are offered in November only. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAT Reasoning Test: \$49 • SAT Subject Tests basic registration fee: \$22 • Language Tests with Listening: \$22 + basic fee • All other Subject Tests: \$11 + basic fee • Late registration fee: \$26 • Fee waivers are available for certain low-income students. See your counselor for details. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.collegeboard.org
November 5, 2011	SAT and Subject Tests	October 7, 2011	October 21, 2011			
December 3, 2011	SAT and Subject Tests	November 8, 2011	November 20, 2011			
January 28, 2012	SAT and Subject Tests	December 30, 2011	January 13, 2012			
March 10, 2012	SAT only	February 10, 2012	February 24, 2012			
May 5, 2012	SAT and Subject Tests	April 6, 2012	April 20, 2012			
June 2, 2012	SAT and Subject Tests	May 8, 2012	May 22, 2012			

ACT

2011-2012 Test dates	Tests administered	Regular registration deadlines	Late registration deadlines	Notes	Fees	Registration
September 10, 2011	ACT	August 12, 2011	August 26, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The February 2012 test is not scheduled in New York. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACT (no Writing Test): \$34 • ACT with Writing Test: \$49.50 • Late registration fee: \$21 • Fee waivers are available for certain low-income students. See your counselor for details. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.actstudent.org
October 22, 2011	ACT	September 16, 2011	September 30, 2011			
December 10, 2011	ACT	November 4, 2011	November 18, 2011			
February 11, 2012*	ACT	January 13, 2012	January 20, 2012			
April 14, 2012	ACT	March 9, 2012	March 23, 2012			
June 9, 2012	ACT	May 4, 2012	May 18, 2012			

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. Use a photocopier to make one copy for each college, and keep them 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 through this process.

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. Regardless of which way you apply, it is a good idea to set up a separate email account for communicating with the college admissions offices.

APPLICATION COSTS

Many colleges charge an application fee, and the fees 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 arrival date, make sure to build in 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, 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 his or her 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 tapes, 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:

Postmark date 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 _____

_____ College CEEB code* _____

City, state, zip _____ High school CEEB code* _____

Website _____

*CEEB codes can be found at www.collegeboard.org.
Click on: Students > College Board Tests > Code Search

RECOMMENDATIONS	Recommendations required? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>			OTHER	Essays required? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		Complete	Other components required? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		Complete
	Requested	Received	Thank you sent		First topic	Second topic		Third topic	Complete	
Reference 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Reference 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Reference 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	

INTERVIEW	Interview required? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		Will you be visiting campus? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		Date(s) of visit _____	
	Thank you sent? Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Name of interviewer _____	Name of person you are meeting or event _____	Date and time _____	Location _____	
	Title _____					
	Email _____					
	Phone _____					

CONTACTS

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

The financial aid process

Navigating the financial aid process from start to finish can seem overwhelming. Not sure how or when to begin? The tools, checklists, and timelines in this chapter will help you understand the FAFSA completion process, what types of financial aid are available, and how to stay on course to receiving your financial aid.

- Ask about scholarships when attending college fairs.**
Talk to college admissions representatives about scholarship programs for which you may qualify.

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.
- 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, your high school, or your post office.

OCTOBER

- Register for a Personal Identification Number (PIN).**

Go to www.pin.ed.gov to register for a PIN. Your PIN serves as your e-Signature for the online Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). If you are a dependent student, a parent should also register for a PIN at this time.

- Plan to attend financial aid meetings 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 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.federalstudentaid.ed.gov 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, 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 scholarships that might be available to you.**
- Send your midyear grades to the colleges of your choice.**

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.**
You should receive it within two to four weeks after filing the online FAFSA, or four to six weeks after filing the paper FAFSA. Each college that 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. If you filed electronically, make corrections online. Contact your college for more directions if necessary.

- Look for admissions responses.**
These will start coming in the mail from your colleges.

- 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.**

Checklist: Junior year

AUGUST — DECEMBER

- Research private 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 FAFSA₄caster.**
(See page 13 for details.)

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 rental or 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 or private 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 food and housing. 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 generally assumed to have somewhat 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 generally 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 private 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.

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.

FAFSA4CASTER

Reduce the amount of time it takes to complete the FAFSA by first completing the FAFSA4caster at www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov. FAFSA4caster is an online financial aid estimator that provides students and families an early estimate of the student's federal student aid eligibility. FAFSA4caster 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, FAFSA4caster 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

By October 2011, each college that participates in the federal financial aid programs must 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.

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.

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 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.

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.

About the FAFSA

COMPLETING THE FAFSA IS IMPORTANT

Students are required to complete the FAFSA to determine their eligibility for all federal student aid. Studies have shown that 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.

Here's 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/fotw1112/pdf/fafsaws12c.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.

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 that your family is expected to pay. Rather, you should think of the EFC as an index that 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 24-25 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
- PDF FAFSA that you download, complete, and mail—go to www.federalstudentaid.ed.gov and click on “FAFSA Filing Options”
- Paper FAFSA that you complete and mail—to get a paper FAFSA, call 1.800.4.FED.AID

Online filing is up to seven to 14 days 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. 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. Applicants who have questions while filling out their FAFSA can click on the “Live Help” link to get online assistance from a knowledgeable customer service representative. In addition, application entries are thoroughly edited, reducing the number of errors made by students and their families.

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:

- Will be 24 by December 31 of the award year
- Are married on the date you file the FAFSA
- Are a graduate or professional student
- Are currently serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces for purposes other than training
- Are a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces
- Have children who will receive more than half their support from you between July 1, 2011, and June 30, 2012
- Have legal dependents (other than your children or spouse) who live with you and who receive more than half their support from you now and through June 30, 2012
- When you were age 13 or older, both your parents were deceased and you were in foster care, a dependent, or ward of the court
- As of the day you apply for aid, you are an emancipated minor as determined by a court in your state of legal residence
- As of the day you apply for aid, you are in legal guardianship as determined by a court in your state of legal residence

- At any time on or after July 1, 2008, your high school or school district homeless liaison determined that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless
- At any time on or after July 1, 2008, the director of an emergency shelter program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development determined that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless
- At any time on or after July 1, 2008, the director of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program determined that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or was self-supporting and 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 fafsa.ed.gov/FOTWebApp/fotw1011/WorksheetServlet?wstype=WSDEP 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 offices at your colleges for more information.

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.

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.
- If using the PDF FAFSA, go to www.federalstudentaid.ed.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.

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. A PIN allows you to electronically sign the application. Your parents should also obtain a PIN. Visit 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 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 use Wite-Out® or any other correction fluid.

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.

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 (2011 for the 2012-2013 award year) is more accurate than projected (2012) information when estimating how much the family will be able to contribute during the coming school year.

You will file a tax return this year but probably won't get around to it until April. How should you answer the financial questions? 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 them from www.irs.gov.

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?

Your stepparent's financial information is required on the FAFSA if the parent you received financial support from was a single parent who is now married. It is also required if the parent you received financial support from was divorced or widowed but has remarried. This doesn't mean your stepparent is required to support you financially. However, reporting the stepparent's financial information on the FAFSA provides a more accurate picture of your family's total financial strength.

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 would 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.

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

While filling out your FAFSA online, click on the "Live Help" link for assistance

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

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.

Federal financial aid: Grants

FEDERAL PELL GRANT

To qualify, you must:

- Be a U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen
- Demonstrate financial need
- Be an undergraduate student enrolled at a qualifying college

To apply:

Complete the FAFSA as soon after January 1 as possible

Award amount:

- Depends on program funding
- Depends on cost of attendance
- Depends on Expected Family Contribution
- Depends on whether you are enrolled full-time or part-time
- The maximum Pell Grant for the 2011-2012 award year is \$5,500

Getting the money:

The college will do one of the following:

- Credit your account
- Pay the funds directly to you
- Allocate the funds using a combination of these two methods

Repayment:

Not required

FEDERAL SUPPLEMENTAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY GRANT (FSEOG)

To qualify, you must:

- Be a U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen
- Demonstrate exceptional financial need
- Be an undergraduate student enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying college
- Be a recipient of a Federal Pell Grant

To apply:

Complete the FAFSA as soon after January 1 as possible

Award amount:

- Depends on the amount of funds the college has to award, with those meeting the college's financial aid priority filing date receiving preference
- Depends on whether you are enrolled full-time or half-time
- Depends on college funding level
- The award is usually between \$100 and \$4,000

Getting the money:

The college will do one of the following:

- Credit your account
- Pay the funds directly to you
- Allocate the funds using a combination of these two methods

Repayment:

Not required

TEACH GRANTS

These grants are designed to encourage highly qualified teachers to serve in low-income schools and in high-need fields. Grants can be as much as \$4,000 annually. Students receiving these grants must agree to perform at least four years of qualified teaching service. Failure to complete the service obligation will cause the grant to be converted to a Direct unsubsidized Stafford loan. Not all colleges participate in this program. Check with your colleges' financial aid offices for more information.

Federal financial aid: Work-study

Federal Work-Study (FWS) provides part-time jobs for undergraduate and graduate students with financial need, allowing them to earn money to help pay education expenses. When assigning work hours, your employer or financial aid administrator will consider your award amount, your class schedule, and your academic progress. If you work on campus, you'll usually work for your college. If you work off campus, your employer will usually be a private, nonprofit organization or a public agency, and the work performed must be in the public interest. Your college may also offer its own work-study program.

To qualify, you must:

- Be a U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen
- Demonstrate sufficient financial need
- Be an undergraduate or graduate student enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying college

To apply:

Complete the FAFSA as soon after January 1 as possible

Award amount:

- Depends on financial need
- Depends on the amount of funds the college has to award
- Funds are limited—early filers get priority

Getting the money:

You work for an employer at an hourly rate earning at least the minimum wage

Repayment:

Not required

Federal financial aid: Loan programs

Many students and families have to borrow money to pay for college. While there are several federal student loan programs, the primary loans used to pay for college are Federal Perkins loans, Federal Stafford loans, and Federal PLUS loans.

Federal Perkins loans are made through participating colleges to undergraduate students, graduate students, and professional students who demonstrate the greatest financial need. The loans come from government funds with a part contributed by the college, and are repaid to the college.

Federal Stafford and Federal PLUS loans are available through your college's financial aid office. If you qualify for these loan programs, your college will let you know the steps you must take in order to receive a loan.

FEDERAL PERKINS LOAN**To qualify, you must:**

- Be a U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen
- Be an undergraduate or graduate student enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying college
- Demonstrate sufficient financial need

To apply:

- Complete the FAFSA as soon after January 1 as possible
- A Master Promissory Note (MPN) is required; contact the college you will be attending for information about signing the MPN

Award amounts:

- Undergraduate students: \$5,500 per year, up to a maximum of \$27,500
- Graduate/professional students: \$8,000 per year, up to a maximum of \$60,000, including undergraduate loans

Getting the money:

- After you sign a promissory note, the Perkins loan is credited to your college account
- Funds in excess of college charges are delivered directly to you

Repayment:

- Repayment begins six to nine months after you graduate, withdraw from school, or drop below half-time enrollment
- Maximum repayment term is 10 years
- The interest rate is a fixed rate of 5.0 percent

FEDERAL STAFFORD LOAN

There are two types of Federal Stafford loans: subsidized and unsubsidized.

Subsidized Stafford loan

These loans are awarded on the basis of financial need. The borrower is not charged interest during periods of enrollment, the grace period, or during authorized deferments. Instead, the federal government “subsidizes” the interest during these periods. Your college will calculate your need for the subsidized Stafford loan.

Unsubsidized Stafford loan

These loans are not awarded on the basis of financial need. They are awarded to students who do not qualify for a subsidized Stafford loan or who need additional assistance. 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. If your interest is capitalized, it will increase the amount you have to repay. Your college will determine your eligibility for an unsubsidized Stafford loan, including the loan amount for which you are eligible.

To qualify, you must:

- Be a U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen
- Be an undergraduate or graduate student enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying college
- To receive a subsidized loan, demonstrate sufficient financial need

To apply:

- Complete the FAFSA as soon after January 1 as possible
- A Master Promissory Note (MPN) is required; contact the college you will be attending for information about signing the MPN

Award amounts:**Dependent students, up to:**

- \$5,500—Freshman
- \$6,500—Sophomore
- \$7,500—Each remaining year of undergraduate study
- Students may qualify for all subsidized, all unsubsidized, or a combination depending upon demonstration of need
- Aggregate undergraduate borrowing limit is \$31,000 with a maximum of \$23,000 in subsidized loans

Independent students, up to:

- \$9,500—Freshman
- \$10,500—Sophomore
- \$12,500—Each remaining year of undergraduate study
- Students may qualify for all unsubsidized—or a combination of subsidized and unsubsidized—loans depending upon demonstration of need
- Aggregate undergraduate borrowing limit is \$57,500 with a maximum of \$23,000 in subsidized loans

Graduate/professional students, up to:

- \$20,500 per academic year
- Students may qualify for all unsubsidized—or a combination of subsidized and unsubsidized—loans depending upon demonstration of need

Getting the money:

Loan proceeds are typically credited to your student account at the college. Generally, the proceeds are credited in two or more disbursements—one near the beginning and one near the midpoint of the loan period, or one disbursement near the start of each academic term.

Repayment:

- Repayment begins six months after you graduate, withdraw from school, or drop below half-time enrollment
- Maximum repayment term depends upon total principal balance but might extend from 10-25 years
- The interest rate for the 2011-2012 award year for undergraduate students is a fixed rate of 3.4 percent for subsidized loans and 6.8 percent for unsubsidized loans. The 2011-2012 interest rate for graduate/professional students is 6.8 percent regardless of whether the loan is subsidized or unsubsidized. For the 2012-2013 award year, all Stafford loans (subsidized and unsubsidized) for both undergraduate and graduate/professional students will be made at a 6.8 percent fixed rate.

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.

If you 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.

FEDERAL PLUS LOAN

PLUS loans are made to parents (natural or adoptive) of a dependent undergraduate student enrolled in college at least half-time, to graduate students, and to professional students. 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. The yearly limit on a PLUS loan is equal to the cost of attendance minus any other financial aid received. A PLUS loan is an unsubsidized loan; therefore, the borrower is responsible for all interest that accrues on the loan.

To qualify, you must:

- Be a natural or adoptive parent of a dependent undergraduate student who is enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying college, be a graduate student, or be a professional student
- Not have an adverse credit history

To apply:

- Complete the FAFSA as soon after January 1 as possible
- A Master Promissory Note (MPN) is required; contact the college you will be attending for information about signing the MPN

Award amounts:

- Up to the cost of attendance, minus any financial aid you are eligible to receive

Getting the money:

Loan proceeds are typically credited to your student account at the college. Generally, the proceeds are credited in two or more disbursements—one near the beginning and one near the midpoint of the loan period, or one disbursement near the start of each academic term.

Repayment:

- The repayment period 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
- The interest rate for the 2011-2012 award year is a fixed 7.9 percent

Scholarships

Scholarships are a form of gift aid—money given to students that does not have to be repaid. Scholarships are sometimes also referred to as grants. 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, and you should first look for no-fee or low-fee sites. While we are not endorsing these sites, three of the major scholarship search sites that have proven over the years to be legitimate are:

- Fastweb:
www.fastweb.com
- College Board:
www.collegeboard.org
- Scholarships.com:
www.scholarships.com

A good scholarship search extends beyond just searching the Web. 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.

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. Legitimate services offering federal or state financial aid information should be free of charge.

WARNING SIGNS

“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.

“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.

“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.

“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.

“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. Most scholarship sponsors only will 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.

“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.

Avoiding student loan scams

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 provides information on how and where to file a complaint. This guide is available on the Web at www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/credit/cre43.pdf.

TIPS TO REMEMBER

In addition to the FTC's six signs, the following are some other points to keep in mind when considering 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 might 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 earlier 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.

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 26, 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.**
Prepare a budget for your freshman year in college.
- 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.

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 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. See if there is a national association affiliated with your major that might offer a scholarship. Review your college catalog, contact the head of the department of your major, talk to your school counselor, or take another look at the free college scholarship search services available online.
- Consider any potential benefits from your parents' places of employment. Look beyond just tuition and scholarships. Programs might exist 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.

WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE ON AN AWARD LETTER

The award letter provides a summary of the financial aid the college is offering to you. The most common sources of aid include the following (the numbers correspond to the numbers in the sample award letter):

Scholarships (do not have to be repaid) (1)

Any scholarships you informed the college about as well as those the college has to offer will be included on the award letter.

Grant aid (does not have to be repaid) (2)

- Federal Pell Grant
- Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant
- College grants
- State-sponsored grants

Work-study (3)

On-campus or college-affiliated employment. (This does not guarantee a position. It makes you eligible.)

Loans (must be repaid) (4)

- Federal subsidized Stafford loan
- Federal unsubsidized Stafford loan
- Federal PLUS loan
- Federal Perkins loan
- State loan programs
- Private loan programs

SAMPLE UNIVERSITY**Office of Financial Aid****Notification of Financial Aid Award**

Jason D. Sample
123 Main Street
Collegetown, USA 23232-1111

Dear Jason,

After careful consideration and review of your financial aid application, the Office of Financial Aid of Sample University has authorized this offer of financial assistance for the 2011-2012 award period.

To accept this award, you must complete, sign and return the white copy of this form within four (4) weeks of receipt. This award is subject to cancellation if you do not respond by the specified date.

If you choose to decline any part of the package, please place a check mark in the "Declined" box for the corresponding part of the package.

Be sure to review the terms and conditions of the award as described in the Sample University Financial Aid Guide Book. Contact the Office of Financial Aid at 1.800.555.6789 for additional assistance.

Academic Year:
2011-2012
Budget Assumptions:
Resident Dependent Single
Identification Number:
000-11-2222
Award Date:
April 15, 2011

DECLINED	AWARD	FALL 2011	SPRING 2012
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sample School Merit Scholarship 1	\$5,400.00	\$5,400.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	Federal PELL Grant 2	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	Federal SEOG 2	\$530.00	\$530.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	State Award 2	\$900.00	\$900.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	Federal Work-Study 3	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	Federal Subsidized Stafford Loan 4	\$1,750.00	\$1,750.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	Urban League Scholarship 1	\$500.00	\$500.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	TOTAL	\$11,080.00	\$11,080.00

FAMILY RESOURCES

Parent's Contribution	\$1,840.00
Student's Contribution	\$1,000.00
Other Resources	\$0.00
Total Family Contribution	\$2,840.00

SUMMARY

Total Estimated Budget	\$25,000.00
Less Family Contribution	\$2,840.00
Financial Need	\$22,160.00
Total Financial Aid	\$22,160.00

Elizabeth Doe, Director

This is a sample award letter, for illustration purposes only.

Worksheet: Make your decision

After receiving your admissions and financial aid responses, use this chart to compare colleges and decide which one to attend.

COSTS	College			
	Pros			
	Cons			
	Tuition and fees			
	Room and board			
	Books and supplies			
	Transportation			
	Other expenses			
	Total costs			
FINANCIAL AID	Grants and scholarships			
	Work-study			
	Loans			
	Total financial aid			
	Family contribution			
	Unmet need*			
LOAN REPAYMENT		If you will be taking loans, determine how much your monthly payments will be to repay them. There are several student loan repayment calculators available online to help you estimate your monthly payment amount, including www.finaid.org .		
	Loan repayment period			
	Estimated monthly payment			

*Costs minus financial aid and family contribution

Glossary

Learn the lingo—familiarize yourself with the college and financial aid terms in this section to better equip yourself for the admissions and financial aid processes.

Ability-to-benefit test

A test some colleges use to allow students who are not high school graduates and do not have a GED to qualify to receive federal financial aid.

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

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; or 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

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, that 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, that 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.

many jobs
require education
after high school

to
good

My parents say
I have to go!