

# OPPORTUNITIES

PREPARING FOR COLLEGE  
GUIDE & WORKBOOK  
NATIONAL 2020-2021

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WE WANT *your*  
FEEDBACK!



SCAN ME  
TO TAKE A  
SURVEY

OR VISIT  
THIS  
WEBPAGE

## Updates to this book

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

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

## Availability in Spanish

To order copies in Spanish and/or download a PDF, visit [www.ecmc.org/opportunities](http://www.ecmc.org/opportunities).

Para ordenar copias Español y/o descargar un PDF, visite [www.ecmc.org/opportunities](http://www.ecmc.org/opportunities).

## For administrators and counselors

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

## About ECMC

Educational Credit Management Corporation (ECMC) is a nonprofit company with a mission to help students succeed. We work to lower student loan default rates; sponsor college access and success initiatives, and financial literacy programs; and provide resources to support student loan borrowers to successfully repay their loans.

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

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ECMC



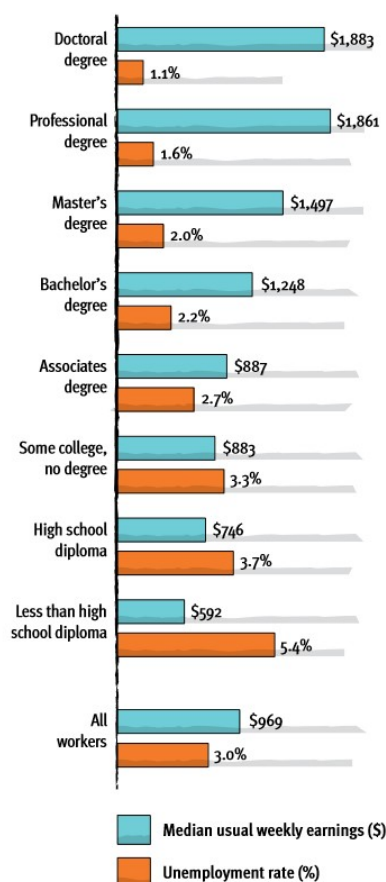
## GOING TO COLLEGE CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

# Going to college can change your life

Your odds of career success are much higher if you attend college. This chapter shares some statistics that prove this.

## EMPLOYMENT RATES & EARNINGS

### BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, 2019



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019 Current Population Survey

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

### Be happy

People who attend college:

- Report they have more job satisfaction than those who did not attend.
- Typically live healthier lifestyles, and are more likely to have access to employer-provided benefits including: medical insurance, retirement plans and paid time off.
- Are more involved in their communities through higher levels of volunteering and voting.

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

### Education pays

Statistics show that unemployment rates decrease in direct relationship to how much education you receive. The more education you receive, the more money you are likely to make. A study by the Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019 (Current Population Survey) supports this, shown in the chart to the left. Keep in mind, education is an investment in your future.

### Earn more

Going to college costs you money, but not going can cost you even more. The U.S. Census Bureau's 2011 American Community Survey reveals that over an adult's working life, average total earnings were as follows:

- High school graduate = \$1.3 million
- Some college = \$1.6 million
- Associates degree = \$1.8 million
- Bachelor's degree = \$2.4 million
- Master's degree = \$2.8 million

Source: [www.census.gov/library/publications/2011/acs/acs-14.html](http://www.census.gov/library/publications/2011/acs/acs-14.html)

### 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.

View college options on the next page

*ECMC prepared this workbook to guide you through the college selection, application and financial aid process. To reduce confusion, in this book we refer to all types of higher education institutions as "colleges."*



## GOING TO COLLEGE CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

## Most common college types

Type of institution	Description	Degrees offered	Admissions
<b>Career and technical education institutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can be nonprofit or for-profit, these schools focus on a highly specialized curriculum</li> <li>Geared for students who want to learn a specific skill and find employment within two years</li> <li>Examples include cosmetology, HVAC, culinary and automotive technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Certificates of completion</li> <li>Associate Applied Science (AAS)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed application for admission</li> <li>Proof of high school completion</li> </ul>
<b>Community college</b> <b>Junior college (2-year)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A college is one institution with multiple academic departments</li> <li>Offers traditional academic, continuing education and remedial programs</li> <li>Offers technical programs, such as cosmetology, HVAC, culinary and automotive technology</li> <li>Offers general education prerequisite courses required for most bachelor's degree programs at four-year colleges and universities</li> <li>Ideal for students looking to transfer to a four-year college and pursue a bachelor's degree, students looking to earn an associate degree or certificate, and students looking to further their education</li> <li>Some colleges offer a limited number of bachelor's degree programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Certificates of completion</li> <li>Associate of Arts (AA)</li> <li>Associate of Science (AS)</li> <li>Associate Applied Science (AAS)</li> <li>May offer limited: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bachelor of Arts (BA)</li> <li>Bachelor of Science (BS)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incoming freshmen and transfers</li> <li>Completed application for admission</li> <li>High school transcript showing proof of high school completion</li> <li>College transcript, if previously attended</li> <li>College placement testing may be required depending on the school</li> </ul>
<b>College (4-year)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A college is one institution with multiple academic departments</li> <li>Offers traditional academic programs; may offer technical, continuing education and remedial programs</li> <li>Offers general education prerequisite courses and upper-level, major-specific undergraduate and graduate courses</li> <li>Colleges can be specialized in a specific area or liberal arts based</li> <li>Liberal arts colleges offer primarily liberal arts majors, yet many offer degrees in STEM fields as well</li> <li>Colleges (especially liberal arts colleges) tend to be smaller and offer fewer majors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bachelor of Arts (BA)</li> <li>Bachelor of Science (BS)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incoming freshmen and transfers</li> <li>Completed application for admissions</li> <li>Transcript showing successful completion of high school (more selective colleges require a higher grade point average)</li> <li>SAT, ACT and/or SAT Subject Test scores may be required depending on the school</li> <li>Supplemental documents may include essay, personal statement and/or academic résumé</li> <li>College transcript, if previously attended</li> </ul>
<b>University (4-year)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offers traditional academic programs; may offer technical, continuing education and remedial programs</li> <li>Universities usually offer a greater number of majors and are typically larger than colleges</li> <li>Even though universities tend to focus more on technical and specialized majors, most universities have a college of arts and sciences that offers liberal arts programs</li> <li>The main difference between colleges and universities is size; universities also offer a more diverse curriculum and types of degrees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bachelor of Arts (BA)</li> <li>Bachelor of Science (BS)</li> <li>Master of Arts (MA)</li> <li>Master of Science (MS)</li> <li>Master of Business Administration (MBA)</li> <li>Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD)</li> </ul> <p>There are many other graduate and undergraduate degrees, but these are the most common</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incoming freshmen and transfers</li> <li>Completed application for admissions</li> <li>Transcript showing successful completion of high school (more selective universities require a higher grade point average)</li> <li>SAT, ACT, and/or SAT Subject Test scores may be required depending on the school</li> <li>Supplemental documents may include essay, personal statement and/or academic resume</li> <li>College transcript, if previously attended</li> </ul>

## A note about school accreditation and licensing

Accrediting and licensure agencies provide third-party oversight and ensure the college is providing the quality of education promised to the student. Due to colleges having different accreditation

agencies, credits earned at one college may not be transferrable to another college. Check with the Admissions department to determine which of your credits will transfer.

For more information about accreditation and state licensing, visit the Department of Education at [www2.ed.gov/students/prep/college/consumerinfo/choosing.html](http://www2.ed.gov/students/prep/college/consumerinfo/choosing.html).



## CHOOSING THE RIGHT COLLEGE

# Choosing the right college

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

## Finding the right college

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

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.

## Explore career fields

Identify careers that interest you and determine which majors will best prepare you for that career. Investigate the academic requirements necessary to enter into those majors.

## Consider your academic strengths

The best way to identify a career field or major course of study is to look at the academic subjects you already enjoy, especially those in which you perform well. Identify majors that concentrate in these subject areas to ensure selection of a major you'll likely enjoy and do well in. Once you've identified a major or majors, identify colleges that offer those majors.

Base your final decision on the type of student you are, your educational goals and what situation best fits your needs. Talk to friends, family, teachers and counselors for help with identifying your goals in going to college.

Use the worksheet on the following page to do some self-discovery.

To help get you started, visit the following resources and career assessment websites:

- [www.bls.gov/ooh](http://www.bls.gov/ooh)—Occupational Outlook Handbook with more than 1,500 jobs descriptions and their likely pay scale.
- [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)—The official website for the U.S. Small Business Administration, dedicated to providing support to small businesses across the nation.
- [www.careerbuilder.com](http://www.careerbuilder.com)—Associated with one of the larger job search websites, CareerBuilder®. It has numerous career exploration quizzes.
- [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)—Has many career exploration exercises and also provides a focus on what educational requirements are needed to achieve career goals.
- [www.onetonline.org](http://www.onetonline.org)—The U.S. Department of Labor's interactive database of occupational information.



# WORKSHEET: CHOOSING THE RIGHT COLLEGE



## STEP 1

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



## STEP 2

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



## STEP 3

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

Level of importance	Factors to consider	College (fill in names of colleges that interest you)			
		1.	2.	3.	4.
	<b>Program of study:</b> Which programs does the college offer to help you achieve your career goals?				
	<b>School size:</b> Do you prefer a large or small college? What is the student population?				
	<b>Class size:</b> How large do you like your classes to be? What is the student-to-teacher ratio?				
	<b>Support programs:</b> Which programs does the college offer to help you stay in college and graduate?				
	<b>City and neighborhood:</b> Do you prefer a city or a small town? What is the population of the city or town?				
	<b>Campus culture:</b> When visiting each college, get a feel for its "personality." How or why does it match yours?				
	<b>Distance from home:</b> How close do you want to live to your family?				
	<b>Extracurricular activities:</b> Do you have activities in your life that you can't live without?				
	<b>Religious affiliation:</b> Do you want to attend a college affiliated with your religious beliefs?				
	<b>Net Price:</b> While one college may appear to be less expensive, what will your final cost be after receiving grants and scholarships? Use <a href="https://collegecost.ed.gov/net-price">https://collegecost.ed.gov/net-price</a> to identify your likely estimated cost.				
	<b>Financial aid options:</b> Does the college have special financial aid options? These could include things such as a tuition payment plan to spread out your payments or a guaranteed cost of attendance as long as you are enrolled.				
	<b>Outside learning options:</b> Does the college offer internships, externships, study abroad or service learning opportunities?				
	<b>Housing options near campus:</b> How close or far is housing? Will you need a car, or are where you live, shop, and work within walking or biking distance?				

This worksheet can be downloaded here: [www.ecmc.org/ChoosingTheRightCollege](http://www.ecmc.org/ChoosingTheRightCollege)





# 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.

## 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 may have.

### HONORS CLASSES

- More challenging academically.
- Typically faster paced; cover topics in greater depth.
- Generally weighted higher for grade point average (GPA) but do not earn you college credit.

### ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) CLASSES

- More challenging academically; courses prepare you to take rigorous exams that can lead to college credit.
- More than 35 AP classes are offered in subject areas.
- 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, advanced placement, or both, for the course.

### DUAL-ENROLLMENT PROGRAMS

- Students take college-level classes for college credit while continuing to participate in regular high school activities.
- Classes are often offered at high schools or nearby community colleges.
- Not every high school participates; contact your high school counselor for more information.

### INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE ORGANIZATION'S DIPLOMA PROGRAMME

- Two-year curriculum offered by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) that combines requirements of a mixture of different national education systems.
- Offered in English, French, and Spanish, and allow students moving around the country or from one country to another to transfer among IB schools.
- A list of participating schools from around the world is available at [www.ibo.org](http://www.ibo.org).

### TECHNICAL PREPARATION (TECH PREP) PROGRAMS

- 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.
- Expands education and employment opportunities by preparing you for careers in health care, business, industry, labor and government.
- 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

## Practice entrance exams

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

### THE PRELIMINARY SCHOLASTIC APTITUDE TEST AND THE NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARSHIP QUALIFYING TEST (PSAT/NMSQT)

The PSAT/NMSQT are standardized tests, usually taken during your junior year that help you practice for taking the SAT. The newly redesigned tests are made up of:

- Evidence-based reading and writing
- Reading test
- Writing and language test
- Math

These tests measure the following skills:

- Critical reading
- Math problem-solving
- Writing

In addition, eighth, ninth, and tenth graders may benefit from taking the PSAT 8/9 and PSAT 10.

The National Merit Scholarship Corporation uses these scores to determine eligibility for their scholarship programs. For more information on the PSAT/NMSQT, visit the College Board website at <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org>.

### THE PreACT TEST

PreACT is a multiple-choice test for sophomores designed to help students prepare for the experience of taking the ACT test. It is patterned after the ACT and includes testing in English, math reading, and science. PreACT score reports offer a broad view of students' college and career readiness, and provides information regarding their future performance on the exam.

PreACT also offers insights to help students explore college major and career options to start planning for their future. The test is scored on the same 1-36 scale as the ACT but includes fewer questions. For more information on PreACT, visit [www.act.org](http://www.act.org).

## 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 and the ACT, and either test is generally accepted by colleges for admissions purposes.

### THE SAT SUBJECT TESTS

In addition to the SAT, some students choose to take SAT Subject Tests. The tests are one-hour subject tests with multiple-choice questions. These tests can complement or enhance your college admission credentials, and 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 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 <https://sat.collegeboard.org/home>.

### ENTRANCE EXAM COMPARISON

	ACT (American College Test)	SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test)
What is tested	ACT measures what you learn in high school to determine your academic readiness for college	SAT measures what you learn in high school and what you need to succeed in college
When to take the test	ACT examination is offered seven times a year in the months of February, April, June, July, September, October and December	SAT examination is offered seven times a year in the months of March, May, June, August, October, November and December
Registration deadline	About five to six weeks before the test date	About four weeks before the test date
Test duration	2 hours, 55 minutes + 40 minutes for optional essay	3 hours + 50 minutes for optional essay
Major sections	English, mathematics, reading, science and an optional writing section	Math, reading, writing, language and an optional essay
Scoring	1-36	400-1600
Test owned by	ACT, Inc.	College Board
Started in	1959	1926
Website	<a href="http://www.act.org">www.act.org</a>	<a href="http://www.collegeboard.org">www.collegeboard.org</a>

**DUE TO COVID-19, MANY COLLEGES ARE ELIMINATING THE REQUIREMENT FOR ACT/SAT TEST SCORES. CHECK WITH THE COLLEGE'S ADMISSIONS COUNSELOR TO DETERMINE IF THEY HAVE TESTING REQUIREMENTS IN PLACE FOR 2020-2021**



## THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

## Testing dates, fees and registration

## PSAT

2020-2021 Test dates	Regular registration deadlines	Late registration deadlines	Notes	Fees	Registration
September 21, 2020– March 26, 2021  April 13–30, 2021	Check with your school counselor	Check with your school counselor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Test is administered by high schools, not through test centers</li> <li>Note: Each high school chooses only ONE October test date</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$17</li> <li>Note: Schools may charge an additional fee to cover administrative costs</li> <li>The College Board makes fee waivers available to schools for students in 11th grade from low-income families that cannot afford the test fee</li> <li>See your school counselor for more information about fee waivers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online registration is not available</li> <li>You must sign up for the PSAT/NMSQT at your high school or at another high school in your community</li> </ul>

## PreACT

2020 Test dates	Regular registration deadlines	Late registration deadlines	Notes	Fees	Registration
September 1–June 1 each year at your school's discretion	Check with your school counselor or administrator	Check with your school counselor or administrator	Test administered in school-supervised setting	Generally no cost to the student	Register with your school counselor or administrator

## SAT

2020-2021 Test dates	Regular registration deadlines	Late registration deadlines (online)	Notes	Fees	Registration
October 3, 2020	September 4, 2020	September 22, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sunday administrations usually occur the day after each Saturday test date for students who cannot test on Saturday for religious reasons</li> <li>The Language Tests with Listening are offered in November 2020 and May 2021</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SAT: \$52</li> <li>SAT with essay: \$68</li> <li>Register by phone: \$15</li> <li>Change test center or date: \$30</li> <li>Waitlist: \$53</li> <li>Late registration fee: \$30</li> <li>Fee waivers are available for certain low-income students</li> <li>See your school counselor for details</li> <li>Additional fees apply for SAT Subject Tests</li> </ul>	www.collegeboard.org
November 7, 2020	October 7, 2020	October 27, 2020			
December 5, 2020	November 5, 2020	November 24, 2020			
March 13, 2021 <sup>1</sup>	February 12, 2021	March 2, 2021			
May 8, 2021	April 8, 2021	April 27, 2021			
June 5, 2021	May 6, 2021	May 26, 2021			

## ACT

2020-2021 Test dates	Regular registration deadlines	Late fee required	Notes	Fees	Registration
October 10, 2020 October 17, 2020 October 24, 2020 October 25, 2020	September 17, 2020	August 15–28, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You can proceed with your original test date or you can request to change it. However, you will need to pay the basic registration fee for the new test date plus the test date change fee. If you request a date change after the regular deadline for the new date, you must also pay the late registration fee. Your basic registration fee for the original test date will be refunded.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ACT (no Writing Test): \$55</li> <li>ACT with Writing Test: \$70</li> <li>Late registration fee: \$35</li> <li>Test date change: \$35</li> <li>Test center change: \$35</li> <li>Fee waivers are available for students who meet one or more indicators of economic need</li> <li>See your school counselor for details</li> </ul>	www.act.org
December 12, 2020	November 6, 2020	November 7–20, 2020			
February 6, 2021	January 8, 2021	January 9–15, 2021			
April 17, 2021	March 12, 2021	March 13–26, 2021			
June 12, 2021	May 7, 2021	May 8–21, 2021			
July 17, 2021 <sup>2</sup>	June 18, 2021	June 19–25, 2021			

<sup>1</sup> Subject Tests will not be offered on this date. SAT Subject Tests will be offered during all of the other dates. Visit <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat-subject-tests/register/test-dates-deadlines> to verify which Subject Tests will be offered on each test date.

<sup>2</sup> No test centers are scheduled in New York for this date.



## Submitting college applications

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

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

### WAYS TO APPLY

- Paper
- Electronic

To determine the best way to apply, go to the admissions page on each college's website and look for more information.

Consider visiting [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org). More than 700 colleges and universities participate in this one-stop for college admissions where you can apply, keep track of college-specific deadlines and more.

### APPLICATION COSTS

Application fees vary among colleges. 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

Deadlines are important. Be sure to pay attention to and meet each college's date for application. If applying with a paper application, be careful to note whether the deadline is based on the arrival or postmark date. If the deadline is the arrival date, make sure to include several days for postal delivery.

### EARLY DECISION AND EARLY ACTION

Many colleges allow you to apply under an "early decision" or "early action" program. Typically, you have to apply earlier than most applicants, but you also find out earlier whether you have been accepted. These programs are not for everyone.

Generally, only those who have a clear-cut, first-choice college should apply under these programs. If you believe early decision or early action is right for you, check with the college admissions office to determine how to apply.

### TRANSCRIPTS

As part of the admissions process, you or your school counselor will need to request and submit 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.

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

### RECOMMENDATIONS

If your colleges require recommendations, letters or specific forms, you will need to ask your teachers and/or other adults to be references. Some colleges even ask for peer recommendations. When identifying whom you should ask, consider your relationship with the person and how well you've done in your activities with him or her.

Follow the checklists starting on page 27 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 and make sure they are aware of recommendation deadlines. One month before your earliest deadline should be sufficient, but inquire as to your reference's schedule when asking.

## THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

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. 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.
- Don't stray from the question/topic.

Everyone goes about the writing process differently. Brainstorming and/or outlining are two methods that might help you.



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

## THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS



# WORKSHEET: ORGANIZE YOUR APPLICATION INFORMATION

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

<b>COLLEGE NAME</b>	
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<b>COLLEGE INFORMATION</b>	<b>APPLICATION DUE</b>
Address for application: _____ _____ City, state, zip: _____ Website: _____ Admissions office phone: _____ Fax: _____ CEEB code* (College): _____ (High School): _____ <small>*CEEB codes can be found at <a href="http://www.collegeboard.org">www.collegeboard.org</a>.</small>	_____ / _____ / _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Postmark date <input type="checkbox"/> Arrive-by date

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>ESSAYS</b>																								
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This worksheet can be downloaded here: [www.ecmc.org/OrganizeYourAppInfo](http://www.ecmc.org/OrganizeYourAppInfo)



# Navigating financial aid

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

## College costs

### COST OF ATTENDANCE

The cost to attend college is often referred to as Cost of Attendance (COA). COA is used in the calculation to determine eligibility for financial aid. The COA includes both direct and indirect costs.

Direct costs are fixed costs that are billed by the college.

- Tuition
- Fees
- Room and board (if living on campus)

Indirect costs are not included on a college bill; however, considered in the overall cost to attend college.

- Books and supplies
- Dependent care
- Loan fees
- Personal computer
- Personal expenses
- Study abroad program
- Transportation

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

Other allowable costs:

- Dependent care
- Loan fees
- Costs related to a disability
- Purchase of a personal computer
- Reasonable cost for eligible study abroad program

### Tuition

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.

**Public colleges:** Tuition and fees 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. However, some bordering state residents may be treated as legal residents of that state under a reciprocity agreement. Check with the college admissions office if you are eligible to receive in-state tuition rates.

**Private colleges:** Tuition 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 cost of attendance, the greater the possibility you will demonstrate need for financial aid.

### Fees

Many colleges charge fees for other services. Examples include:

- Athletic
- Enrollment
- Greek societies (charge membership dues)
- Health center
- Library
- Parking
- Student activities
- Technology fees

### Room and board

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

Colleges with their own housing typically charge you on a nine-month basis for your room and most meals, excluding holiday and vacation periods. The room and board charge is built into your COA. Colleges also expect that students living in privately owned, off-campus housing have a similar level of expense. Some colleges do not allow students to stay in on-campus housing during excluded periods.





## NAVIGATING FINANCIAL AID



## WAYS TO REDUCE 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 6 for details.
- ➡ Earn college credits for what you already know. College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests can get you through college quicker or help you graduate on time. For details, visit [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org).
- ➡ Two plus two. Start at a community college and then transfer to a four-year college to complete your bachelor's degree.
- ➡ Tuition reimbursement. If you or your parents are employed, check to see if the employer offers to reimburse you for the cost of attending college.
- ➡ Take an extra class over the normal, full-time load. Usually taking an extra class does not add to the tuition cost for the term.
- ➡ Shop around for textbooks. Rent or buy used books and sell them back to the bookstore or to other students after the end of the term. Look online for textbook deals and consider less expensive electronic versions.
- ➡ Graduate on time.



## NAVIGATING FINANCIAL AID

If you plan to live at home, you are likely to have lower expenses than on-campus students because you do not have to pay for housing. You will still need to factor in your cost of food and other living expenses. These costs are usually built into a commuter student budget for financial aid purposes.

#### Books and supplies

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

#### Personal expenses

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

#### Transportation

All students spend some money for travel. If you live in a different city than where your college is located, you have to travel

to get there at the start of the academic year and travel to return home at the end of the year. Most students also go home at least once during the year. For financial aid purposes, colleges often budget students for two round-trips home per year by the least expensive means of travel possible.

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

#### DETERMINING YOUR OWN COSTS

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

### Estimating 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.

You can visit College Board's BigFuture EFC Calculator (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/paying-your-share/expected-family-contribution-calculator>) in order to get an idea of the financial aid process. This website can also help you obtain early estimates of the type of aid your family might qualify to receive.

#### NET PRICE CALCULATORS

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

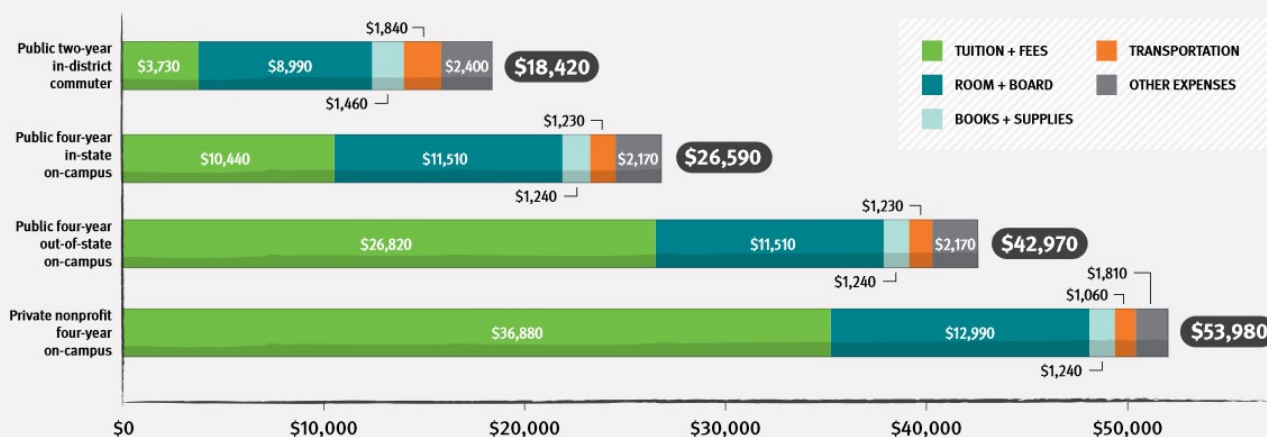
The estimates provided by different net price calculators should not be used to absolutely rule in or rule out a particular college. The calculator questions vary from college to college. Because of this, the results may not provide an "apples-to-apples" comparison of your net college costs.

#### COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

The U.S. Department of Education designed the College Affordability and Transparency Center to provide better information about college costs. It serves as a central point of access to several tools that allow users to compare college tuition and fees, net price and other characteristics including College Scorecard, College Navigator, links to college's net price calculators and state spending charts.

<https://collegecost.ed.gov>

## AVERAGE ESTIMATED FULL-TIME UNDERGRADUATE BUDGETS, 2019-20



Source: <https://research.collegeboard.org/trends/college-pricing/figures-tables/average-estimated-undergraduate-budgets-sector-2019-20>



## NAVIGATING FINANCIAL AID

## FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID

## FAFSA

*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.*

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

## About the FAFSA

### COMPLETE THE FAFSA—IT'S IMPORTANT!

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

Here's what's wrong with that thinking:

- **Don't assume you won't qualify for financial aid.** 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.
- Eligibility for many state aid programs is determined by your FAFSA data. If you don't complete the FAFSA, you simply won't be considered for state aid, in many cases.
- Many colleges use FAFSA data to determine eligibility for institutional aid (or aid the college offers.) Additional forms may be required as part of the application process; contact each college's financial aid office to find out.
- 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.

**Filing the FAFSA is free.** Remember—the first word in FAFSA is “Free.” There are companies that will charge you a fee to help you complete the FAFSA, but there shouldn't be a need to pay for this service. If you do not meet the citizenship requirements for filing the FAFSA, check with the financial aid office at your college to determine if an alternate application can be used.

### WHAT THE FAFSA DOES

Your eligibility for federal financial aid is calculated using the Federal Need Analysis Methodology, 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.

- You may find it helpful to first complete the FAFSA on the Web Worksheet available at <https://studentaid.gov/sites/default/files/2020-21-fafsa-worksheet.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. Refer to the following documents:

- Prior-prior year federal income tax returns (two years prior to the current year; for example, the the 2021 FAFSA will use 2019 federal income tax returns). **Many applicants may be able to transfer income tax data directly from the IRS into the FAFSA using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool.**
- W-2 forms and other income records
- Current bank statements
- 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.



## NAVIGATING FINANCIAL AID

**THE STUDENT AID REPORT (SAR)**

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

When you complete the FAFSA, you indicate the federal school codes for 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.

You will receive an award letter 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.

**FILE THE FAFSA ONLINE-IT'S FAST!**

- Go to [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov).
- This is the fastest and most accurate way to file and get results—your application is automatically edited for errors as you complete it to ensure your information is as accurate as possible.
- When your FAFSA information is transmitted over the Internet, it is completely secure.
- Easy to navigate with extensive online help including live chat, email and phone options available.

**COMPLETION OF  
THE FAFSA IS THE  
SINGLE MOST  
IMPORTANT PART OF  
THE FINANCIAL AID  
PROCESS.**

To sign your FAFSA online, you must apply for an FSA ID; which includes a username and password. Your FSA ID is issued by Federal Student Aid at <https://fsaid.ed.gov>. You, and at least one parent if you are a dependent student, will need to have an FSA ID to electronically sign the FAFSA.

Other ways to file include:

- PDF FAFSA that you download, complete and mail—go to [www.fafsa.ed.gov/options.htm](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/options.htm) and click on “Complete a PDF FAFSA.”
- Paper FAFSA that you request, complete and mail—to get a paper FAFSA, call 1.800.4.FED.AID (1.800.433.3243) If you are hearing impaired, contact the TTY line at 1.800.730.8913.

**DOMICILE (RESIDENCY)**

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 registrar’s office at your college for more information.

**INDEPENDENT VS. DEPENDENT STATUS**

In determining financial need, one of the most important factors is whether you are classified as a dependent or independent student. Dependent students must include parental information on the FAFSA. Independent students should include information only on themselves and

their spouse (when applicable). You are automatically classified as independent if you can check ANY of the following boxes:

- ☐ I was born before January 1, 1997
- ☐ I am married
- ☐ I will be working on a master’s or doctorate program (e.g., MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, EdD, graduate certificate)
- ☐ I am serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces
- ☐ I am a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces
- ☐ I have children and I provide more than half their support
- ☐ Since I turned age 13, both of my parents were deceased
- ☐ I was in foster care since turning age 13
- ☐ I have dependents (other than my children or my spouse) who live with me and I provide more than half of their support
- ☐ I was a dependent or ward of the court since turning age 13
- ☐ I am currently or I was an emancipated minor
- ☐ I am currently or I was in legal guardianship
- ☐ I am homeless or I am at risk of being homeless

**If none of these criteria apply to you, you are a dependent student. See <https://studentaid.gov/dependency> for more information.**

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



## NAVIGATING FINANCIAL AID

# 9 MYTHS ABOUT THE FSA ID

As of April 2017, 45 million FSA IDs have been created, and people have used their FSA ID more than 315 million times. With any new process, there are some myths floating around about creating and using an FSA ID. Visit [www.ed.gov/content/9-myths-about-fsa-id-o](http://www.ed.gov/content/9-myths-about-fsa-id-o).

## MYTH #1

It'll take a long time to create my FSA ID.

On average, it takes about seven minutes to create an FSA ID. Federal Student Aid has a variety of resources, such as this helpful video, that walk you through each step of creating an FSA ID. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdaGZASwjZU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdaGZASwjZU)

## MYTH #2

Only students need to create an FSA ID.

If you are a dependent student, then your parent will need his or her own FSA ID in order to sign the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form electronically. That's because you will need to provide your parent's information on your FAFSA form, and your parent will need to sign the FAFSA form as well. But here is something very important: Your parent must create his or her own, separate FSA ID. Your parent shouldn't use your FSA ID, and you shouldn't create an FSA ID for your parent.

If you're not sure if you're a dependent student, visit <https://studentaid.gov/dependency>.

## MYTH #3

It's okay to let someone else create or use my FSA ID.

Not okay. Each individual person needs to create his or her own FSA ID. If you're a parent, you should NOT create an FSA ID for your child. If you're a student, you should NOT create an FSA ID for your parent. Why? For example, if a parent tries to create both the parent's and child's FSA IDs, it's easy to mix up information such as Social Security numbers, dates of birth, and usernames and passwords. Because Federal Student Aid verifies your information with the Social Security Administration, it's crucial that this information be correct. Also, if someone else creates your FSA ID, how will you know the answers to your challenge questions if you need to retrieve a forgotten username or password?

Most importantly, FSA IDs are used to sign legally binding documents, so giving someone access to your FSA ID is like allowing them to forge your signature. Be sure to create your own FSA ID, and save yourself the trouble.

## MYTH #4

I need an email address or mobile phone number to create an FSA ID.

You do NOT need an email address or mobile phone number to create an FSA ID. If you don't have an email address or mobile phone number, you can leave those fields blank. However, adding this information is strongly recommended. Once your email address is verified, you can enter your email address instead of your username when you log in. You can also use your email address or mobile phone number to retrieve your forgotten username or password or to unlock your account. It's easy to update and verify your email address or mobile phone number by going to <https://fsaid.ed.gov> and clicking on the "Manage My FSA ID" tab.

## MYTH #5

As a parent, I can use the same email address or mobile phone number for both my FSA ID and my child's FSA ID.

An email address or mobile phone number cannot be used with more than one FSA ID. If you're a student and you choose to provide an email address and/or mobile phone number when creating your FSA ID, you'll need to include your own email address and/or mobile phone number. Your parent will need to include his or her own email address and/or mobile phone number when creating his or her FSA ID. If you don't have an email address or mobile phone number, you can leave those fields blank.

## MYTH #6

I need an FSA ID to fill out the FAFSA form.

The fastest way to sign and submit your FAFSA form is to use an FSA ID. That said, if you or your parent don't have an FSA ID, you can still submit the FAFSA form. If you fill out the FAFSA form online but don't have an FSA ID, you can choose the option to submit your FAFSA form without signatures, and then print and mail a signature page. If you can't fill out the FAFSA form online, you have other options.

Students without access to a computer can receive FAFSA assistance from a wide range of college access organizations, such as the National College Access Network. A student can also visit a local library, use a computer at school, or get help from a school counselor.



## MYTH #7

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has to verify my information before I can use my FSA ID.

If you're filling out a FAFSA form for the first time, you can use your newly created FSA ID to sign and submit your FAFSA form right away. But, if you need to submit a renewal FAFSA form or make corrections after you've submitted your FAFSA form, you first have to wait for the SSA to verify your identity before you can use your new FSA ID. The verification process takes one to three days.

When creating your FSA ID, make sure to enter your information exactly as it appears on your Social Security card to avoid delays. Once your information is verified, you can use your FSA ID to submit your renewal FAFSA form, make corrections, access your loan history and a host of other things.

If you're a parent, you never have to wait for the SSA match to sign your child's FAFSA form. However, if you sign the FAFSA form when your SSA match status is listed as "pending" and it later returns "no match," Federal Student Aid will remove your signature from your child's FAFSA form. If that happens, you will either need to resolve the conflict with the SSA and sign electronically again, or you'll need to print and mail a signature page.

## MYTH #8

Confirming my email address or mobile phone number can take up to 24 hours.

You should receive your mobile phone verification code and email confirmation within three minutes. If you don't, your email account's spam filter could be the culprit. It's a good idea to add the FSA ID email address—@ed.gov—to your address book to make sure you get your confirmation.

## MYTH #9

I forgot my password, and it's going to take 30 minutes to reset it.

The easiest way to reset your password is by using your verified email address or verified mobile phone number. If you reset your password using one of these options, you can use your FSA ID immediately. You have to wait 30 minutes only if you reset your password using your challenge questions.

There are lots of resources online to help you create and use your FSA ID; visit <https://studentaid.gov/fsaid> for more FSA ID information. In no time, you'll have your very own FSA ID, too!

**CREATE YOUR  
FSA ID TODAY**

<https://fsaid.ed.gov/npas>



## NAVIGATING FINANCIAL AID

## 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 an FSA ID. You may each apply for an FSA ID at <https://fsaid.ed.gov>.
- ☐ If using the PDF FAFSA, go to [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov). If using the paper FAFSA, request one by calling 1.800.4.FED.AID (1.800.433.3243).
- ☐ Find the federal school codes for your colleges at [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov)

## FILING THE FAFSA

Check as you complete the FAFSA:

- ☐ You and the appropriate family members have signed the forms
- ☐ You have listed all the colleges to which you are applying for admission
- ☐ You have printed a copy or made a copy of your completed FAFSA for your records
- ☐ If you do not have enough room for all your colleges, list your first 10 choices on the FAFSA. Once you have received your valid SAR, you can then edit the college list so that your FAFSA data is transmitted to the remaining colleges.

**Note:** Do not send information about special circumstances to the colleges 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.

THREE TYPES OF  
FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID—

**GRANTS,  
WORK-STUDY  
& LOANS.**

## Tips for completing the FAFSA

## Meet all financial aid deadlines.

- Check each college's deadline and/or "priority filing date" and file your FAFSA in time to meet those deadlines.
- Contact the financial aid office regarding other applications or forms you may be required to submit.

## Sign the FAFSA appropriately.

- You and your appropriate family member will need to acquire an FSA ID from <https://fsaid.ed.gov> to electronically sign your online FAFSA. Failure to do so may cause you to lose out on financial assistance you may be otherwise qualified to receive.

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

- Your FAFSA information will only be sent to the colleges you specify (you may list up to 10).
- Each college has a six-digit federal school code.
- Visit [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov) to search for federal school codes.

## Contact your college to report special circumstances.

- Since the FAFSA does not include space for you to explain special financial circumstances unique to you and your family, an explanation of the situation should be communicated directly to the college(s) to which you're applying.
- Special circumstances might include unusual medical bills, an impending divorce, expected unemployment or other situations.
- Do not mail this correspondence with your FAFSA because this could slow down the processing of your financial aid application.

## 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 on or after October 1 regardless of whether or not you have been accepted to 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.

## FAQs about completing the FAFSA

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

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

**What's the easiest/fastest way to complete the FAFSA?**

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

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

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

**Do you report stepparent information?**

Information about both of your parents (biological or adoptive), as long as they are living together, is required on the FAFSA, regardless of their marital status or gender.



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.

Why does Federal Student Aid (FSA) ask for prior-prior year income information from the year before you go to college?

Studies have consistently shown that verifiable income tax information from the prior-prior year (2019 for the 2021-2022 award year) is more accurate than projected information when estimating how much the family will be able to contribute during the coming school year.

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 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 (FSA) Information Center at 1.800.4.FED.AID (1.800.433.3343).

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

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

→ "Need Help" and "Help and Hints" sections provide more information

→ "Contact Us" section for live chat, email, and phone options

Contact your colleges' financial aid offices.

Find out if there is a FAFSA completion event in your area—check with the financial aid office at a local college to learn more.

## Federal financial aid

The U.S. Department of Education's website defines federal student aid as "financial aid from the federal government to help you pay for education expenses at an eligible college or career school. Grants, loans and work-study are types of federal student aid."

You must complete the FAFSA form to apply for this aid. Contact your financial aid office for specific deadlines.

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

Program	Eligibility requirements	Annual award	More information
Federal Pell Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undergraduates</li> <li>U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen</li> <li>Demonstrate financial need</li> <li>Enrolled at least half-time</li> </ul>	Maximum award for 2020-2021 is \$6,345	Award amount depends on program funding, COA, EFC, full- or part-time enrollment, and Lifetime Eligibility Used (LEU). Lifetime eligibility is limited to the equivalent of six years of full-time funding or 600 percent.
Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undergraduates</li> <li>U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen</li> <li>Demonstrate exceptional financial need</li> <li>Enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying college</li> <li>Recipient of a Federal Pell Grant</li> </ul>	Between \$100 and \$4,000	Award amount depends on amount of funds the college has to award, and full- or part-time enrollment.
Federal Teach Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undergraduates/graduate/post-baccalaureate students at qualifying colleges pursuing a career in teaching</li> </ul>	Maximum award for 2020-2021 is up to \$4,000	Must agree to teach in a high-need field serving low-income students for four years. If service obligation is not fulfilled, TEACH grant converts to a Direct Unsubsidized Loan, which must be repaid with interest retroactively.
Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undergraduates whose parent or guardian was a member of the U.S. Armed Forces and died as a result of performing military service in Iraq or Afghanistan after the events of 9/11</li> <li>U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen</li> <li>Ineligible for a Federal Pell Grant due only to having less financial need than is required to receive Pell funds</li> <li>Less than 24 years old or enrolled at least part-time at an institution of higher education at the time of the parent's or guardian's death</li> </ul>	Maximum award for 2020-2021 is up to \$6,345 but cannot exceed cost of attendance	<p>Payment adjusted for less than full-time study.</p> <p>Total amount may not exceed the equivalent of six years of Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant funding.</p>

## NAVIGATING FINANCIAL AID

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

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

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

To receive federal student loans, you must first complete the FAFSA. You will also be required to sign a Master Promissory Note (MPN), which explains the terms and conditions of your loan(s). Contact the college you will be attending for information about how to sign the MPN. Loan repayment begins 180 days after you leave college or drop below part-time enrollment.

Program	Eligibility requirements	Annual award	Repayment information	More information
Federal Direct PLUS Loan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biological or adoptive parent of a dependent undergraduate student who is enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying college</li> <li>Graduate or professional students enrolled at least half-time</li> <li>Not have an adverse credit history</li> </ul>	Up to the cost of attendance minus any financial aid you are eligible to receive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repayment begins after the final PLUS loan disbursement; however, the borrower may qualify for a deferment of the first payment until six months after the student is no longer enrolled at least half-time</li> <li>Maximum repayment term depends upon total principal balance but might extend from 10-25 years</li> <li>For PLUS loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2020, interest rate is a fixed 5.30 percent</li> </ul>	<p>Applicants must pass a credit check to be eligible for a PLUS loan. If they don't pass, they might still be able to receive a loan if they can demonstrate that extenuating circumstances exist or if they secure a creditworthy endorser. A PLUS loan is an Unsubsidized loan and the borrower is responsible for paying all interest that accrues on the loan.</p> <p>There is a loan fee of 4.228 percent for loans disbursed on or after October 1, 2020 and prior to October 1, 2021.</p>
Federal Direct Subsidized Loan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen</li> <li>Undergraduate students enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying college</li> <li>Demonstrate sufficient financial need</li> </ul>	See <i>Federal Direct Loan Limit Amounts</i> chart on the following page for amounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repayment begins six months after you graduate, withdraw from college or drop below half-time enrollment</li> <li>Maximum repayment term depends upon total principal balance but might extend from 10-25 years</li> <li>For Subsidized loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2020, interest rate is a fixed 2.75 percent</li> </ul>	<p>These loans are awarded based on financial need. The borrower is not charged interest during periods of enrollment and during authorized deferments. The federal government pays (subsidizes) the interest during these periods. Your college will calculate your need for the Direct Subsidized Loan.</p> <p>For first-time borrowers on or after July 1, 2013, the max period of time you can receive Direct Subsidized Loans is 150 percent of the published length of your program of study. Find length of study in your college's catalog.</p> <p>There is a loan fee of 1.057 percent for loans disbursed on or after October 1, 2020 and prior to October 1, 2021.</p>
Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen</li> <li>Undergraduate or graduate students enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying college</li> </ul>	See <i>Federal Direct Loan Limit Amounts</i> chart on the following page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repayment begins six months after you graduate, withdraw from college or drop below half-time enrollment</li> <li>Maximum repayment term depends upon total principal balance but might extend from 10-25 years</li> <li>For Unsubsidized loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2020, interest rate is a fixed 2.75 percent for undergraduates and 4.30 percent for graduate students</li> </ul>	<p>You are not required to show financial need to receive a Direct Unsubsidized Loan. You are responsible for the interest charged from the time the loan is disbursed until it is paid in full. You can pay the interest as it accrues or allow the interest to be "capitalized," which means the interest will be added to the principal amount of the loan. Capitalized interest increases the amount you repay. Your college will determine your eligibility for an Unsubsidized loan, including the loan amount for which you are eligible.</p> <p>There is a loan fee of 1.057 percent for loans disbursed on or after October 1, 2020 and prior to October 1, 2021.</p>



## FEDERAL DIRECT LOAN LIMIT AMOUNTS

Year	Dependent undergraduates (except students whose parents are unable to obtain PLUS Loans)	Independent undergraduates (and dependent undergraduate students whose parents are unable to obtain PLUS Loans)	Graduate or Professional Students
First year	\$5,500	\$9,500	\$20,500 (Unsubsidized only)
	No more than \$3,500 may be in subsidized loans		
Second year	\$6,500	\$10,500	
	No more than \$4,500 may be in subsidized loans		
Third year and beyond (each year)	\$7,500	\$12,500	
	No more than \$5,500 may be in subsidized loans		
Total amount you can borrow	\$31,000	\$57,500	
	No more than \$23,000 may be in subsidized loans		
			\$138,500 <sup>1</sup> for graduate or professional students—no more than \$65,500 may be in subsidized loans. The graduate aggregate limit includes all federal loans received for undergraduate study.

<sup>1</sup> Graduate and professional students enrolled in certain approved health professions programs may borrow additional Direct Unsubsidized Loans beyond this amount. Please check with the financial aid office at your college for more details.



## Scholarships

Scholarships are a form of gift aid—money that does not have to be repaid. You will want to invest your time into conducting your own scholarship search to locate this free money. There are many scholarships awarded each year, some are based on academics or athletics but thousands are based on a variety of other criteria, including:

- 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
- Hobbies, skills or special interests

Simply put, there are thousands of scholarships awarded every year that have nothing to do with your academic

or athletic performance. However, scholarship donors are not going to come looking for you. It's up to you to make every effort to find these opportunities.

### SCHOLARSHIP DONORS

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.

Look to other sources, including 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. A list of scholarship search sites known to be legitimate are:

- Fastweb: [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)
- College Board: [www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org](http://www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org)
- U.S. Department of Labor: [www.careerinfonet.org/scholarshipsearch](http://www.careerinfonet.org/scholarshipsearch)
- Golden Door Scholars: [www.goldendoorscholars.org](http://www.goldendoorscholars.org)
- Chegg Scholarships: [www.chegg.com/scholarships](http://www.chegg.com/scholarships)
- Peterson's: [www.petersons.com/scholarship-search.aspx](http://www.petersons.com/scholarship-search.aspx)
- Niche: [www.niche.com/colleges/scholarships](http://www.niche.com/colleges/scholarships)
- Cappex: [www.cappex.com/scholarships](http://www.cappex.com/scholarships)

## NAVIGATING FINANCIAL AID

## OTHER POINTS TO CONSIDER IN A SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

- ➡ Fraudulent scholarship operations often use official-sounding names containing words, such as federal, national, administration, division, federation and foundation. 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 generally receive official notification by mail or email, not by telephone. If the sponsor calls to inform you, they will generally send written documentation of the scholarship. If a request for money is made by phone, the operation is probably fraudulent.
- ➡ Beware of telephone numbers with a 900 area code. These will charge you a fee of several dollars a minute for a call that could be a long recording and provides only a list of addresses or names.
- ➡ A dishonest operation might put pressure on an applicant by saying that awards are on a first-come, first-served basis. Some scholarship programs give preference to the earliest qualified applications. However, if you are told (especially on the telephone) that you must respond quickly but, you will not hear about the results for several months, there might be a problem.
- ➡ Be wary of endorsements. Fraudulent operations claim endorsements by groups with names similar to well-known private or government organizations. The Better Business Bureau and government agencies do not endorse businesses.

### APPLYING FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

Successful scholarship applicants typically apply for more than 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

Follow all directions, meet all deadlines, submit complete error-free applications and provide all additional information requested. Finally, write thank you notes to all who helped in your search, especially the donor.

### RECEIVING A SCHOLARSHIP

Most scholarships are paid to the college on your behalf. Some may be made co-payable to you and the college. If this happens, you will be required to endorse the check. Alternately, some scholarship donors may send the scholarship funds directly to you. If you receive a scholarship check, advise the financial aid office at your college immediately upon receipt.

Outside scholarships are considered resources, meaning they reduce your financial aid package dollar for dollar. Federal regulations require the college to reduce the financial aid package when the total aid from all sources exceeds the college's cost of education by more than \$300. (Certain types of grants, such as the Pell Grant, do not get reduced. An outside scholarship is most likely to affect campus-based aid, such as the FSEOG grant, Federal Work-Study and the college's own student aid funds.) You are required to report any outside scholarships to the college's financial aid office. If you fail to report an outside scholarship, you may be required to repay the college or the government all or part of your need-based financial aid package.

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

### Scholarship scams

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

#### WARNING SIGNS

1. **"The scholarship is guaranteed or your money back."** No service can guarantee that it will get you a grant or scholarship. Review a service's refund policies in writing before you pay a fee. Typically, fraudulent scholarship search services require that applicants show rejection letters from each of the sponsors on the lists they provide to request a refund of any fees paid. If a sponsor no longer exists, if it really does not provide scholarships or if it has a rolling application deadline, letters of rejection are almost impossible to obtain.
2. **"The scholarship service will do all the work."** Unfortunately, nobody else can fill out the personal information forms, write the essays and supply the references that many scholarships require.
3. **"The scholarship will cost some money."** Some legitimate scholarship sponsors charge fees to defray their processing expenses. But before you send money to apply for a scholarship, investigate the sponsor. "Free" money shouldn't cost you a thing.
4. **"You can't get this information anywhere else."** Scholarship directories are available in any large bookstore, public library or high school counseling office. Additional information on private scholarship programs, including scams, can be found at [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org).



5. "You are a 'finalist' in a contest you never entered, or you have been selected by a 'national foundation' to receive a scholarship." Most legitimate scholarship programs never seek particular applicants and will most likely only contact you in response to an inquiry. If you think there is a real possibility that you might have been selected to receive a scholarship, investigate before you send money to be sure the sponsor or program is legitimate.
6. "The scholarship service needs your credit card or checking account number in advance." Never provide your credit card or checking account number on the telephone to the representative of an organization that you do not know. A legitimate need-based scholarship will not ask for your checking account number. Get information in writing first. An unscrupulous operation does not need your signature on a check. It schemes to set up situations that allow it to drain a victim's account with unauthorized withdrawals.

## Avoiding scams

The Federal Trade Commission and College Parents of America (CPA) have partnered to provide tips on recognizing deceptive scholarship and financial aid practices. CPA is a resource, advisor and advocate working on behalf of the millions of parents of current and future college students throughout the United States. For more information about CPA, call toll free 1-888-256-4627 or visit CPA at [www.collegeparents.org](http://www.collegeparents.org). Also visit <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types/scams> for additional information.

## 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.
- What are the deadlines for applying for each kind of aid.
- The cost of attendance and the refund policies if you withdraw.
- What are the 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.
- What is 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.
- What are the 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.



## IF YOU HAVE TO BORROW MONEY TO ATTEND COLLEGE

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

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

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

## THE FINAL DECISION



COVID-19-RELATED JOB LOSS/LOSS OF INCOME ARE SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THAT SHOULD BE REPORTED TO THE COLLEGE'S FINANCIAL AID DEPARTMENT.

## The final decision

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

### Understanding your financial aid offer 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 offer letter. This letter will detail the amount of financial support the college is able to provide for the upcoming year. You might receive the offer letter along with your notice of acceptance. Some colleges make the offer letters available online. Check with your colleges to see how they distribute the offer letters.

#### READ THE FINE PRINT

- Read your offer 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 offers, consider your final out-of-pocket cost. An offer containing loans may have a higher ultimate out-of-pocket cost than an equivalent offer that contains mostly grants.

#### MAKE YOUR COLLEGE AWARE OF ANY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

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 offer.

#### WHAT IF IT'S NOT ENOUGH?

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

- Research other sources for private scholarships. It might not be too late to apply.
- Consider any potential benefits from your parents' places of employment. Look beyond just tuition and scholarships, such as programs to lower the cost of computers, insurance or travel.
- See if your college offers a payment plan that allows tuition expenses to be spread out over the year.
- Make sure your financial aid office is aware of any unique situations that affect your ability to pay for college.

#### 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 offer you plan to accept. If you don't respond by the date indicated, your offer could be in jeopardy.

#### WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE ON AN OFFER LETTER

The offer letter provides a summary of the estimated cost of attendance along with financial aid the college is offering you.

Here's an example of an offer letter.



## Sample University financial aid offer letter

## Costs in the 2020-2021 year

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

## Grants and scholarships to pay for college

Total grants and scholarships ("Gift" aid; no repayment needed)	\$13,600/year
Grants from your college	\$8,000
Federal Pell Grant	\$3,570
Grants from your state	\$1,000
Other scholarships you can use	\$1,030

## What you will pay for the 2020-2021 year

Net price (Cost of attendance minus total grants and scholarships)	\$11,220/year
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## OPTIONS TO PAY NET PRICE

## Work options

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

Federal Direct Subsidized Loan	\$3,500/year
Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan	\$2,000/year

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

## Other Payment Options for Remaining Balance Due

Expected Family Contribution (as calculated by the institution using information reported on the FAFSA or to your institution)	\$2,323/year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Payment plan offered by the institution</li> <li>• Parent PLUS Loan</li> <li>• Military and/or National Service benefits</li> <li>• Non-federal private education loan</li> </ul>	

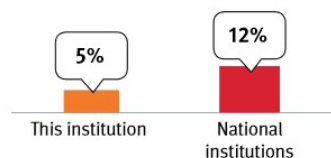
## GRADUATION RATE

Percentage of full-time students who graduate within six years



## LOAN DEFAULT RATE

Percentage of borrowers entering repayment and defaulting on their loan



## MEDIAN BORROWING

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

## REPAYING YOUR LOANS

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

## FOR MORE INFORMATION AND NEXT STEPS:

Sample University (SU)  
Financial Aid Office  
123 Main Street  
Anytown, ST 12345  
Telephone: 123.456.7890  
Email: [financialaid@sampleuniv.edu](mailto:financialaid@sampleuniv.edu)

## THE FINAL DECISION



## MAKE YOUR DECISION

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

		COLLEGE (FILL-IN)					
		Sample college					
EVALUATE	Pros	Top-rated program, low cost of living					
	Cons	May need a car, limited housing options					
COST OF ATTENDANCE	Tuition and fees	\$14,000					
	Room and board <sup>2</sup>	\$8,000					
	Books and supplies	\$1,000					
	Computer allowance	-					
	Transportation	\$600					
	Other costs	\$1,400					
	<b>Total college costs (A)</b>	<b>\$25,000</b>					
GRANT/SCHOLARSHIP AID	Federal Pell Grant	\$3,570					
	Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)	-					
	State Grant	\$1,000					
	Other grants	-					
	Scholarships	\$1,030					
	Institution-based aid	\$8,000					
	Work-Study (work to earn)	\$1,000					
	<b>Total grant/scholarship aid (B)</b>	<b>\$14,600</b>					
<b>Your net price (A – B)</b>		<b>\$10,400</b>					
LOANS		Offered	Accept/Declined	\$	Offered	Accept/Declined	\$
	Federal Direct Subsidized Loan	\$3,500	Accept	\$3,500			
	Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan	\$2,000	Accept	\$2,000			
	Federal PLUS Loan	\$4,900	Declined	-			
	Private loan	-		-			
	<b>Total loan offer (C)</b>	<b>\$5,500</b>					
SUMMARY	<b>Total financial aid (B + C = D)</b>	<b>\$20,100</b>					
	<b>Your out-of-pocket costs (A – D)</b>	<b>\$4,900</b>					

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

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





# Freshman year checklist

## Fall–Winter

### College planning

- ☐ Learn the high school courses required by colleges
- ☐ Meet with your high school counselor for advice on your college plan
- ☐ Identify your interests, likes and dislikes—to help focus on your goals

### Extracurricular activities

- ☐ Join a club or try out for a sports team
- ☐ Volunteer for something you find important

## Spring

### Academics

- ☐ Refocus your study habits and finish the year strong (<https://tinyurl.com/hs-studyskills>)
- ☐ Keep up your grades—colleges look at your grade point average (GPA)
- ☐ Set your sophomore class schedule with your counselor to include honors or Advanced Placement (AP) classes
- ☐ Create your four-year academic plan with your counselor

### Career exploration

- ☐ Start searching for summer programs (e.g., academic, work, volunteer, travel)
- ☐ Spend a day at work with a family member, friend, or community member and learn about their job
- ☐ Attend career fairs or career day at your school or in your community

### College exploration

- ☐ Attend local college fairs in your area or at your school
- ☐ Talk to current college students about their path to college and college life
- ☐ Try virtual campus tours (<https://campustours.com>)

## Summer

### Prepare for summer

- ☐ Participate in an enrichment program that expands your knowledge
- ☐ Get a job—many important skills are developed in work environments
- ☐ Volunteer with an organization you find interesting
- ☐ Apply for a service learning program
- ☐ Prepare for sophomore year by doing summer reading
- ☐ Visit college campuses

### Money management

- ☐ Open a bank account and save money for college
- ☐ Take a financial education course online ([www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/young.html](http://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/young.html))
- ☐ Talk to your parents or guardians about a college savings plan

## SOPHOMORE YEAR CHECKLIST



# Sophomore year checklist

## Fall–Winter

### Time management

- ☐ Learn how to make the most efficient use of your time
- ☐ Use SMART goals to keep you on task ([www.studyright.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/SMART-Goals-Tracker.pdf](http://www.studyright.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/SMART-Goals-Tracker.pdf))
- ☐ Include down time in your schedule

### College entrance exams

- ☐ Many campuses may be test optional, check [fairtest.org](http://fairtest.org) for the most updated list
- ☐ College placement test preparation
- ☐ Take the PSAT (Pre-SAT) to help prepare you for the SAT ([www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat](http://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat))
- ☐ Take the PLAN (Pre-ACT) to help prepare you for the ACT (<https://academy.act.org/>)

## Spring

### Academics

- ☐ Keep up your grades—colleges look at your grade point average (GPA)
- ☐ Plan rigorous academic courses for your junior year
- ☐ Review your four-year academic plan with your counselor
  - ☐ Enroll in Honors, Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, which may earn college credit
  - ☐ Take college courses while in high school and earn both high school and college credit (known as dual/concurrent enrollment)

### Extracurricular activities

- ☐ Join a club or try out for a sports team
- ☐ Volunteer for something you find important
- ☐ Explore summer opportunities—be mindful of application deadlines

### Career exploration

- ☐ Seek summer opportunities to work or volunteer in your field of interest
- ☐ Take an interest inventory—it expands your ideas for careers you may enjoy (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/explore-careers>)
- ☐ Have conversations with counselors, teachers, family and community members about their career paths and what they studied in college

### College search

- ☐ Visit campuses—think about size, location and academic programs
- ☐ Attend local college fairs in your area ([www.nacacfairs.org/attend/national-college-fairs](http://www.nacacfairs.org/attend/national-college-fairs))
- ☐ Try online college fairs and virtual campus tours (<https://campustours.com>)
- ☐ Use an online search engine to find colleges (<http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org>)

## Summer

### Prepare for summer

- ☐ Create a summer reading list from teacher recommendations
- ☐ Confirm your summer plans (e.g., work, academic enrichment programs, summer workshops, service learning, travel, camps, internship, campus tours)

### Money management

- ☐ Learn about types of scholarships and grants ([www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org), [www.studentaid.gov](http://www.studentaid.gov))
- ☐ Take a financial education course ([www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/young.html](http://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/young.html))
- ☐ Use the tools found on the College Affordability and Transparency Center website (<https://collegecost.ed.gov>) to compare and estimate your college costs
- ☐ Research Net Price Calculators on the websites of colleges and universities that appeal to you





# Junior year checklist

## Fall–Winter

### College planning

- ☐ Meet with your college counselor about your coursework and college plans
- ☐ Become or stay involved in extracurricular activities
- ☐ Check college websites for admission requirements
- ☐ Create a professional email address to use when applying for scholarships, registering for college entrance exams, and completing college applications
- ☐ Attend college fairs and/or college information events
- ☐ Meet with college and university admissions recruiters when they visit your high school

### College search

- ☐ Tour local campuses and visit non-local colleges during winter and spring breaks; consider campus size, location and academic programs
- ☐ Try online college fairs and virtual campus tours ([www.collegeweeklive.com](http://www.collegeweeklive.com), <https://campustours.com>)
- ☐ Use college search sites to explore your college options ([www.cappex.com](http://www.cappex.com))
- ☐ Prepare your college list, and sort by reach, match and safety schools

### Career exploration

- ☐ Attend a local career fair and/or a career technical education fair
- ☐ Take an online career inventory to help connect your interests and skills with a career (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/explore-careers>)
- ☐ Make a list of careers that may interest you and research the education level required for each profession
- ☐ Talk with professionals in careers you are curious about and ask about their work
- ☐ Enhance skills that would be useful in a career of interest through your extracurricular activities

## Spring

### College entrance exams

- ☐ Register and take your first college entrance exam during spring semester so you can take it again fall of senior year, if you want
  - ☐ Many campuses may be test optional, check <http://fairtest.org> for the most updated list
  - ☐ SAT, with essay option SAT ([www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)); free SAT test prep help ([www.khanacademy.org](http://www.khanacademy.org))
  - ☐ ACT, with essay option ACT ([www.act.org](http://www.act.org)); free ACT test prep help (<https://academy.act.org>)
  - ☐ Subject tests, recommended by some colleges for certain majors (<https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat-subject-tests>)

### Academics

- ☐ Prepare for Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) exams
- ☐ Plan your senior year schedule with your counselor
- ☐ Review your college preparation coursework and GPA with a college advisor
- ☐ Create a list of teachers, coaches and other mentors who will be able to write personalized letters of recommendation

### Prepare for summer

- ☐ Apply for summer jobs or internships
- ☐ Seek volunteer opportunities in your field of interest
- ☐ Register for community college courses and earn college credit while in high school, also referred to as concurrent/dual enrollment
- ☐ Review your SAT/ACT test scores to determine if retesting is needed
- ☐ Plan a test preparation schedule if you plan to retake the exams ([www.khanacademy.org](http://www.khanacademy.org), <https://academy.act.org>)

## Summer

### College application season begins

- ☐ Check websites of colleges on your list, review admissions application process and timeline
- ☐ Draft your application essays and/or personal statement; work with a college advisor for feedback
- ☐ Prepare a scholarship resume and/or a “brag sheet” that includes all your non-academic activities and honors
- ☐ Study for summer/fall college entrance exams (SAT or ACT) if you plan to retake them
- ☐ Communicate with college admission representatives for questions you may have

### College finances

- ☐ Learn about the types of financial aid (<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types>)
- ☐ Visit College Board's BigFuture EFC Calculator to see how financial aid can help pay for your education (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/paying-your-share/expected-family-contribution-calculator>)
- ☐ Search and apply for scholarships ([www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com), <https://www.collegeboard.org>)
- ☐ Learn how money works; take a financial literacy course ([www.fdic.gov/moneysmart](http://www.fdic.gov/moneysmart))
- ☐ Use the College Scorecard to compare costs, degree programs and outcomes for the colleges you are interested in (<https://collegescorecard.ed.gov>)
- ☐ Open a bank account and save money

## SENIOR YEAR CHECKLIST



# Senior year checklist

## Fall

### College planning

- ☐ Attend college information nights in your community
- ☐ Check college websites for applications, deadlines, financial aid and housing information
- ☐ Ask your counselor to evaluate your transcript for high school graduation and college eligibility
- ☐ Register to take or retake college entrance exams
  - ☐ Many campuses may be test optional, check <http://fairtest.org> for the most updated list
  - ☐ SAT, with essay option SAT ([www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org))
  - ☐ ACT, with essay option ACT ([www.act.org](http://www.act.org))
- ☐ Keep your test scores, resume and transcript organized to help in completing college applications
- ☐ Ask teachers and counselors for any required or optional letters of recommendation
- ☐ Finalize portfolios, audition materials or writing samples as required for each application
- ☐ Get feedback from a college advisor, teacher, or parent/guardian and complete revisions of all applications and essays

### Financial aid

- ☐ Review the financial aid application process and timeline required by the colleges on your list
- ☐ Register for an FSA ID, which serves as your FAFSA e-signature; student's parents/guardians must also register for an FSA ID ([fsaid.ed.gov](http://fsaid.ed.gov))
- ☐ File the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which opens on October 1 ([www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov))
  - ☐ Information from the 2019 tax year will be used for the entering class of 2021 as they apply for financial aid in the 2021-2022 academic year
- ☐ Attend financial aid workshops in your community for help completing the FAFSA
- ☐ Be aware that private colleges may require additional financial information from the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE ([www.collegeboard.org/profile](http://www.collegeboard.org/profile))
- ☐ Check your state financial aid websites for more information about in-state financial aid opportunities for undocumented and DACA students
- ☐ Search and apply for scholarships ([www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com), [www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org](http://www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org))
- ☐ Review your Student Aid Report (SAR) once FAFSA has been processed and make any needed corrections

## Winter

### College application follow-up

- ☐ Check your email frequently for additional information colleges might request within their timeline
- ☐ Send your mid-year transcript to colleges that request them
- ☐ Continue scholarship searches over winter break and continue to submit applications

## Spring

### Academics

- ☐ Keep up your grades—college admissions are conditional and can be rescinded if you do not continue academic excellence
- ☐ Check with the colleges where you have applied before considering dropping a senior year class; colleges expect you to complete all of the high school courses you listed as "in progress" on your admissions application
- ☐ Take your Advanced Placement (AP) and/or International Baccalaureate (IB) exams

### Best college and financial fit

- ☐ Check your email or college admissions portal for admission decision notification
- ☐ Visit campuses that most interest you during admitted-student's day or before
- ☐ Carefully review your financial aid offer for each campus where you have received admissions and compare each offer; ask a college advisor for help in clarifying your financial aid offers
- ☐ Finalize your financial aid; accept your financial aid offer or work with the college's financial aid office to adjust it
- ☐ Discuss your options with your parents/guardians (refer to worksheet on page 5)
- ☐ Call financial aid offices to answer questions or update them on any changes to your family's financial situation
- ☐ If you'll be attending a four year college, notify and place a deposit at the college of your choice by Decision Day (May 1)—congratulations!

### College admissions follow-up

- ☐ Sign into your college portal and review your task list and deadlines
- ☐ Check your email for correspondence and deadline reminders
- ☐ Request your final transcript be sent to your college choice from your high school registrar before the deadline
- ☐ Request AP and IB scores be submitted to your college choice





- ☐ Ask about college placement tests—some colleges require them for English and math; make sure to register in time and study beforehand
- ☐ Sign up for summer and/or fall orientation; some are mandatory and some have a cost
- ☐ Register for your classes during orientation
- ☐ Figure out housing—if living on campus, complete any roommate survey forms, sign the housing contract and submit a housing deposit to make sure you have a reserved room

## Summer

### More to do

- ☐ Work and save money during the summer and see if you can secure a campus job
- ☐ Make a budget (refer to worksheet on page 26) with your parents/guardians
- ☐ Download the college's health forms and see your doctor; colleges may require evidence of immunizations
- ☐ Plan your payments; tuition payments are due at the beginning of the semester or term so research payment options beforehand
- ☐ Make travel arrangements if you are traveling far to college; buy travel (plane, train, bus) tickets and make hotel reservations early (if necessary)
- ☐ Send thank-you notes to everyone who helped in your college process, such as counselors, college advisors and teachers who wrote letters of recommendation
- ☐ Spend with your family and friends if you will be leaving home and set expectations for while you are in college and how and when you will communicate during the school year

## SENIOR YEAR CHECKLIST



## GLOSSARY

# Glossary

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

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

**Advanced Placement (AP)**—A college-equivalent course taken in high school that allows the student, upon passing a test, to earn college credit.

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

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

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

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

**Budget**—The total “sticker price” of attending college; also known as Cost of Attendance (COA).

**Capitalization**—For Unsubsidized loans, the amount of interest that accrues while you are in college, 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, for a period of enrollment (such as an academic year), 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**—A period during which a borrower is entitled to have payments of principal and interest on a federal education loan postponed if he or she meets the eligibility criteria for the deferment. 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 number used by the college's financial aid office to determine how much financial aid you would receive to attend their college. The information reported on the FAFSA is used to calculate your EFC.

**Federal Need Analysis Methodology**—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.

**Federal School Code**—An identifier that the U.S. Department of Education assigns to each college or career school that participates in the federal student aid programs. In order to send your FAFSA information to a college, you must list the college's Federal School Code on your application. A list of Federal School Codes is available at <http://fafsa.gov>.

**Financial offer package**—The total amount of financial aid a student is eligible to receive. It might include grants, work-study, and loans, 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.

**FSA ID**—A username and password used to login to certain Federal Student Aid websites, such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the National Student Loan Data System, among others.

**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.



## GLOSSARY

**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 by December 31 of the award year
- 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 13
- Is on active duty or is a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces
- Is an emancipated minor or in legal guardianship
- Is an unaccompanied homeless youth
- Is an unaccompanied self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness

**Interest**—The cost of borrowing 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 (up to 10 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, rather than financial need.

**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.

**Net price calculator (NPC)**—Each college that participates in the federal financial aid programs is required to have a "net price calculator" on its website. A net price calculator can give you an estimate of how much it may cost you to attend each specific college, taking into account grant and scholarship aid you may receive from both the college and federal financial 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.

**Principal**—The loan amount borrowed on which interest is calculated.

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

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

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

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

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

**Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)**—The academic standard you must meet in college to continue to receive federal financial aid. Each college establishes its own SAP policy to comply with federal requirements.

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

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

**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 (COA).

**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 document.



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