



## **THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS**

### **A glossary of terms**

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# THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

## A Glossary of Terms

*The college application process is filled with special terms, forms, deadlines, requirements, standardized tests, college “searches” and visits—and more. It is daunting, especially for students who are the first in their family to go to college. On these pages, we offer a list of terms and definitions students, parents, and community mentors will encounter along the way. We have grouped the terms, alphabetically, in these categories: (1) applying; (2) college entrance exams; (4) types of institutions; (3) college acceptance terms (4) some college lingo; (5) types of post-secondary degrees.*

*We’ve created a separate section for the financial aid process.*

### APPLYING

**Applicant:** Any student who has completed the college application process at a particular institution.

**Application:** A college application is part of the competitive college admissions system. Admissions departments usually require students to complete an application for admission that generally consists of academic records, personal essays, letters of recommendation, and a list of extracurricular activities. Most schools require the SAT or ACT. Deadlines for admission applications are established and published by each college or university.

**Application Deadline:** The date, set by college admissions offices, after which applications for admission will not be accepted.

**Advanced Placement (AP):** AP courses are college-level classes taught in the high school following guidelines and covering material that will instruct students in AP subject areas and should prepare them to take Advanced Placement tests offered by The College Board.

**“Best Fit”:** The college search is not about getting into the *best* college. There is no school that is best for all students. Some students do best at large public universities; others excel in small liberal arts colleges; still others want to study far from home. If you want to make the most of college, don't just apply to the big-name schools or the ones your friends are excited about. Do your own research to find schools that are the best fit for *you*.

**Campus Interview:** This is a personal, face-to-face interaction between an admissions applicant and an institutional representative (admissions officer, alumnus, faculty, etc.). Interviews are rarely required.

**Campus Visit/Tour:** A service by the college admissions office for prospective students, allowing them to visit various campus buildings, meet key institutional personnel, and get a first-hand look at campus life.

**Catalogue:** A catalogue is a comprehensive publication that provides a detailed overview of an institution, including its mission, programs, costs, admissions requirements, faculty and administration, etc.

**College Essay:** A brief composition on a single subject, required by many colleges as part of the application process for admission.

**College Fair:** An event at which colleges, universities, and other organizations related to higher education present themselves in an exposition atmosphere for the purpose of attracting and identifying potential applicants.

**College Rep Visit:** This is when a college or university admissions representative visits a high school or community site for the purpose of recruiting students for admission to the institution.

**College Search:** These are the steps you take in the early phases of college planning in order to identify, locate, and investigate college-level programs that meet your individual interests, abilities, and needs as a student.

**Common Application:** The Common Application (informally known as the Common App) makes it possible for students to use one admissions application to apply to any of 456 member colleges and universities. There is a Common Application for First-Year Admission and a Common Application for Transfer Admission. Both versions allow the application to be filled out once online and submitted to all schools with the same information going to each.

**Demonstrated Interest:** This includes a student's expression of his or her desire to attend a particular college through campus visits, contact with admissions officers, and other actions that attract the attention of college admissions personnel. While not all institutions use this as a factor in accepting students for admissions, studies have shown that more than half of schools do consider demonstrated interest in their admissions decisions.

**Extracurriculars:** Extracurricular activities are simply anything you do that is not a high school course or paid employment (but note that paid work experience is of interest to colleges and can substitute for some extracurricular activities). You should define your extracurricular activities in broad terms—many applicants make the mistake of thinking of them solely as school-sponsored groups such as yearbook, band or football. Not so. Most community and family activities are also "extracurricular."

**GPA (Grade Point Average):** Quantitative measure of a student's grades. The GPA is figured by averaging the numerical value of a student's grades. It is cumulative, starting freshman year: grades count every year. A poor GPA in ninth grade can drag down the overall average, despite, for example, good grades junior year.

**Honors Classes:** The difference between a regular class (such as English 1) and the honors class (English 1 Honors) is not necessarily the amount of work, but the type of work required and the pace of studying. Honors courses are not advanced in the same sense that high school Advanced

Placement and International Baccalaureate courses are. Rather, honors courses are enriched; they offer the same material in greater depth and with a faster pace.

**Instate (Resident) Student:** A student whose permanent residence is in the same state as the college or university he or she attends or hopes to attend. In-state students pay lower tuition than do out-of-state students.

**Prospective Student:** Any student who is a potential applicant for admission, particularly those who have shown interest in attending the institution or in which the institution has shown interest.

**Out-of-State (Non-Resident) Student:** Student whose permanent residence is in a different state than that of the college or university which he or she attends or hopes to attend. Out-of-state students generally pay higher tuition than do instate students.

**“Reach School”:** A college or university that you have a *chance* of getting into, but your test scores, GPA and/or class rank are a bit on the low side when you look at the school's profile. The top U.S. colleges and top universities should *always* be considered reach schools.

**Recommendations:** Statements or letters of endorsement written on a student's behalf during the college application process.

**“Safety School”:** A college or university where you clearly meet the admission requirements: minimum GPA, test scores, etc. It's important, though, that the school also be one that you would want to attend, should you not gain admission to more selective colleges.

**School Profile:** This is an overview of your high school's program, grading system, course offerings, and other features that your school is submits to admissions offices along with your transcript. For better or worse, admissions offices use this information to weigh your GPA, placing a student's GPA against the academic reputation of the school she or he attends.

**Selectivity:** Selectivity is the degree to which a college or university admits or denies admission based on the individual student's record of academic achievement. In general, a highly selective school admits 25% of applicants, a very selective school admits 26% to 49% of applicants, a selective school admits 50% to 75% of applicants and a school with open admission admits applicants based on space availability.

**Transcript:** This is the official document containing the record of a student's academic performance and testing history. The school at which a student is or has been officially enrolled must issue the transcript, certified by the signature of an authorized school administrator. The school's official seal or watermarked school stationery may also be used to authenticate the transcript.

**Virtual Tour:** This is an online feature offered by some colleges and universities to allow prospective students to view various aspects of campus life without visiting the institutions in person.

## COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS

**ACT:** A two-hour-and-55-minute examination that measures a student's knowledge and achievement in four subject areas -- English, mathematics, reading and science reasoning -- to determine the student's readiness for college-level instruction. There is also an optional writing test that assesses students' skills in writing an essay. The ACT is scored on a scale of 1 to 36 for each of the four areas. The four subject area scores are averaged to create a Composite Score.

**PLAN Test:** This test is usually taken in the sophomore year to prepare the student for the ACT.

**PSAT Test:** This exam prepares students for the SAT and is used to qualify students for the National Merit Scholarship semifinals and other academic awards.

**SAT:** This is a widely used college entrance examination program. This includes the SAT Reasoning Test, which assesses students' critical thinking skills as they relate to the ability to manage college-level instruction. It is a 3-hour exam measuring verbal and mathematical skills, as well as grammar/conventions and the ability to write a brief essay. Students may earn a total of up to 2400 points on the three-hour exam (up to 800 points in each of the exam's content areas: verbal, math, and writing).

**SAT Subject Test:** SAT subject tests (also known as SAT II tests) are offered in many areas of study including English, mathematics, many sciences, history, and foreign languages. Some colleges require students to take one or more SAT subject tests when they apply for admission.

## TYPES OF POST SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

**Art School (Arts College, Art Institute, Conservatory):** An institution specializing in the visual, performing, and/or creative arts.

**College:** An institution of higher learning, often referred to as a "four-year" institution, which grants the bachelor's degree in liberal arts or science or both.

**Community College:** Community colleges, sometimes called **junior colleges**, **technical colleges**, or **city colleges**, are primarily two-year public institutions providing higher education and lower-level courses, granting certificates, diplomas, and associate's degrees. Many also offer continuing and adult education. After graduating from a community college, some students transfer to a four-year liberal arts college or university for two to three years to complete a bachelor's degree.

**Graduate School:** Usually within universities, these schools offer degree programs beyond the bachelor's degree.

**Historically Black College:** Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are institutions of higher education in the United States that were established before 1964 with the

intention of serving the black community. There are 105 HBCUs today, including public and private, two-year and four-year institutions, medical schools and community colleges. Almost all are in former slave states.

**Liberal Arts College:** A degree-granting institution where the academic focus is on developing the intellect and instruction in the humanities and sciences, rather than on training for a particular vocational, technical, or professional pursuit.

**Private Institution:** This is a college or university funded by private sources without any control by a government agency. The cost of attending a private institution is generally higher than the cost at a public institution.

**Proprietary Institution:** This is a term used to describe postsecondary schools that are private and are legally permitted to make a profit. Most proprietary schools offer technical and vocational courses.

**Public Institution:** A college or university that receives public funding, primarily from a local, state, or national government that oversees and regulates the school's operations is considered a public institution.

**University:** A "post-secondary institution" that consists of a liberal arts college, a diverse graduate program, and usually two or more professional schools or faculties, and that is empowered to confer degrees in various fields of study.

**Vocational or Technical School:** This type of institution is similar to a community college in that it offers specific career-oriented programs that last from a few months to a couple of years. Most are specialized and offer intense training in one specific skill area.

**Religion-Based Institution:** These are colleges and universities established by and currently operating under the sponsorship of a church, synagogue, or mosque; a denomination; or a particular religion.

**Single-Sex (or Single-Gender) College:** This is a college that accepts either women only or men only.

## COLLEGE ACCEPTANCE TERMS

**Acceptance:** The decision by an admissions officer or committee to offer the opportunity for enrollment as a student at a particular institution.

**College Selection:** The act of choosing and making the decision to enroll in and attend a particular higher-education program.

**Deferred Admission:** A category of admission used in conjunction with early (action, decision, notification, or acceptance) plans to indicate that a student has not been admitted early but will

remain in the applicant pool for reconsideration during the review of applications for regular admissions.

**Deferred Enrollment:** This is a category of admission available at some institutions for fully accepted students who wish—for a justifiable reason—to take a semester or year off before enrolling in college.

**Denial:** The decision by an admissions officer or committee to not offer a student admission to a particular institution.

**Early Action:** Early action is when a prospective student applies for admission by early deadline (before the regular admission deadline) and receives notice of acceptance, denial, or deferment with no obligation to the university to enroll, if accepted for admission.

**Early Admission:** Through this program, qualifying high school juniors with outstanding academic records may forego their senior year in high school and enroll in a college or university.

**Early decision:** Through this program offered by many post-secondary schools, students willing to commit to a school if accepted submit their application by a date well before the general admission deadline. If accepted, the student must enroll in that school, so students should only apply early decision to their first choice school.

**Gap-Year Programs:** Year-long programs designed for high school graduates who wish to defer enrollment in college while engaging in meaningful activities, such as academic programs, structured travel, community service, etc.

**Notification Date:** The date by which applicants who are accepted for admission are expected to notify the institutions of their intent to enroll and make enrollment deposits. That date is often on or around May 1st.

**Rolling Admissions:** This is a practice used by some institutions to review and complete applications as they arrive, rather than according to a set deadline.

**Waitlist:** An applicant is put on the waitlist when an admissions officer or committee decides to offer the applicant the opportunity to enroll in the institution only if there is space available in the incoming class after fully admitted students have responded to their offers to enroll. This category of admissions is reserved for students whose profiles are strong, but who are marginally qualified in comparison to the overall strength of others in the pool of applicants.

## SOME COLLEGE LINGO

**Alumni:** This is a group of people who have graduated from a college or university.

**Audit:** To attend a class without receiving credit for the class.

apartments, parents with children at home, and full-time workers—in sum, students for whom campus residency is not an option. Work or family obligations often mean that commuter students are unable to spend additional time outside of the classroom on campus. More than 85 percent of college and university students do not live in university-owned housing.

**Course Numbers:** Numbers assigned to specific classes.

**Credit (or Semester) Hour:** Credit given for attending one lecture hour of class each week for 15 weeks or equivalent. Most college classes are three credit hours, meaning their total meeting time for a week is three hours.

**Developmental Education:** Instructional and support activities designed to keep unprepared students in college and help them improve their basic skills so that they can successfully complete a program and achieve their educational goals.

**Enrollment:** The action of enrolling or being enrolled. The number of people enrolled, typically at a school or college.

**First-Generation Student:** A student whose parents have no college experience.

**First-Year Student:** A college freshman.

**Matriculation:** The payment of deposits, tuition, fees, and other charges to enroll in a program of studies at an educational institution. A university might make a distinction between "matriculated students," who are actually accumulating credits toward a degree, and a relative few "non-matriculated students" who may be "auditing" courses or taking classes without receiving credits.

**Major:** A student's concentrated field of study.

**Minor:** A student's secondary field of study.

**Placement Tests:** Colleges and universities use these examinations to place students in courses—most often mathematics and foreign languages—that match their proficiency. In some cases, a student's level of competency on the test may exempt them from having to take a course required for graduation.

**Prerequisite:** A course that must be taken prior to enrollment in another course.

**Registration:** Enrollment in classes.

**Residence Halls:** Dormitories, apartments, houses, and other living quarters provided for students by the college or university in which they are enrolled.

**Student Persistence:** This is the act of working, progressing, and earning credits toward graduation in an academic environment.

**Student Retention:** This is the degree to which students remain enrolled as members of the college or university community and persist toward graduation.

**Undergraduate Student:** A student enrolled in a 4- or 5-year bachelor's degree program, an associate's degree program, or a vocational or technical program below the baccalaureate.

## **TYPES OF POST-SECONDARY DEGREES**

**A.A.:** This stands for an "associate of arts" degree, which can be earned at most two-year colleges.

**A.A.S.:** This refers to an "associate of applied science" degree, which can be earned at some two-year colleges.

**B.A. or B.S.:** B.A. stands for "bachelor of arts," and B.S. stands for "bachelor of science." Both degrees can be earned at four-year colleges.

**Graduate Degrees:** These degrees are earned beyond the bachelor's degree when the student completes graduate school curriculum requirements. Common examples include the MA (master's degree), PhD (doctoral degree) MBA (master's degree in business administration), MD (medical doctor).

**Certificates:** In an economy that increasingly rewards specialization, more and more institutions are offering certification programs, typically a package of five or six courses, for credit or not, taken over three to 18 months. Some cost a few thousand dollars, others much more.

*We have tapped a number of sources to create this glossary, with special shout outs to [www.mycollegeoptions.org](http://www.mycollegeoptions.org) and [www.unt.ed](http://www.unt.ed).*



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## Financial Aid Terms

*The financial aid terms offered here are intended for high school students, their families, and mentors. Applying for financial aid for college may seem overwhelming, like a maze. But the payoff can be substantial. Ask for help from those who know the process. Keep an eye out for free workshops—at school and in the community—where you can get hands-on assistance filling out the FAFSA.*

### SOME BASICS

**Award Letter:** An award letter from a school states the type and amount of financial aid the school is willing to provide the student, if s/he accepts admission and registers as a full-time student.

**Cost of Attending College:** This is the total cost of going to college, including tuition, room and board, books, transportation, fees, and personal expenses.

**Demonstrated Need:** This is the difference between the cost of attending a college and your expected family contribution.

**Expected Family Contribution (EFC):** The EFC is the amount of money you and your family could be expected to pay for one year of college costs, based on the data gathered from the FAFSA and determined by a federal formula applied to that data. This figure often differs from the actual amount you will be required to pay.

**FAFSA:** This is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, a federal form required as the application from all students who wish to apply for need-based financial aid, including grants, loans and work-study awards.

**Fees:** These are charges that cover costs not associated with the student's course load, such as costs of some athletic activities, clubs, and special events.

**Financial Aid Package:** The total amount of financial aid a student receives. Federal and non-federal aid—such as grants, loans, or work-study—are combined in a "package" to help meet the student's need. Using available resources to give each student the best possible package of aid is one of the major responsibilities of a school's financial aid administrator.

**Need-Blind Admission:** Full consideration of an applicant and his or her application without regard to the individual's need for financial aid.

**Tuition:** This is the amount of money that colleges charge for classroom and other instruction and use of some facilities such as libraries.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

*A scholarship is a sum of money given to a student for the purposes of paying at least part of the cost of college. Scholarships can be awarded to students based on students' academic achievements or on many other factors. Scholarships do not need to be repaid.*

**Academic Scholarships:** Academic scholarships are based upon academic achievement as reflected in your college application.

**Athletic Scholarships:** These scholarships are based upon athletic ability and your prospective college's departmental needs. Division I, II, and III college athletic scholarships are very difficult to receive because of fierce competition.

**Corporate Scholarships:** These scholarships are awarded to help employees and their families, show community support and to encourage future job seekers toward a career in the company's area of business. Corporate scholarships are much less competitive than other types of scholarships because of geography, employment and the relatively low number of applicants. Start with your family's employers, check out the newspaper and see which companies in your area are awarding scholarships, and then contact these businesses to find out how to apply.

**Private Organization Scholarships:** These scholarship opportunities number in the millions. Places of worship, labor unions, school districts, chambers of commerce and philanthropic organizations are all excellent sources for college scholarships. Sit down with your family and make a scholarship search list of potential sources (you may be amazed at what's right in your own backyard).

## LOANS

*A loan is a type of financial aid that is available to students and to the parents of students. An education loan must be repaid. In many cases, however, payments do not begin until the student finishes school.*

**Federal Perkins Loans:** These loans are similar to Stafford loans in that no interest accrues while you are in college. The interest rate is lower, and the repayment grace period is longer than that of a Stafford subsidized loan. The need-based standards are more stringent for the Perkins loan and funds are awarded based on the FAFSA Student Aid Report.

**Institutional Loan:** Any student loan administered by the college or university using the institution's funds as the source of funding. Perkins Loans may also be considered institutional loans.

**PLUS Loan:** The Federal Parent Loan for Undergraduate Students (PLUS) allows parents, regardless of income, to borrow up to the total cost of education minus the amount of any other financial aid awarded by the institution or the government.

**Stafford Loan:** This is a federal student loan for college students used to supplement personal and family resources, scholarships, grants, and work-study. A Stafford Loan may be subsidized or unsubsidized, depending on whether it is need-based.

**Subsidized Loans:** These loans are need-based loans with interest paid by the government and payments deferred as long as the student is enrolled in a post-secondary program of studies.

**William Ford Direct Loan Program:** The William Ford Direct Loan Program is administered by the U.S. Department of Education to provide loans that help students pay for their post-secondary education.

## GRANTS

*Grants, like loans and most scholarships, are based on financial need. A grant may be provided by federal or state governments, an institution, a foundation, or some other nonprofit funding source and does not have to be repaid.*

**Federal Pell Grant:** This grant is a form of financial aid provided by the Federal government to students whose FAFSA indicates a high level of financial need.

**Institutional Grant:** This is a need-based grant provided by an institution and offered to students whose families are unable to pay the full cost of college. Institutional grants do not have to be repaid.

**Merit-Based Grant:** A form of gift aid (does not require repayment) based upon your grade point average, academic excellence and extracurricular involvement with some attention to your financial need.

**Need-Based Grant:** This grant is offered, as a part of the financial aid package, when a student and his or her family are unable to pay the full cost of attending an institution. The grant does not need to be repaid.

## WORK-STUDY PROGRAMS

Most colleges offer work-study programs. They allow students to work part time during the school year as part of their financial aid package. The jobs are usually on campus and the money earned is used to pay for tuition or other college charges.

## LINKS

### College Goal Sunday

[www.collegegoalsundayusa.org](http://www.collegegoalsundayusa.org)

This free on-site service for filling out the FAFSA service typically takes place in January, in cities and towns across the country.

**FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)**

[www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

Learn all about the FAFSA, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, usually the first step in seeking financial aid for higher education.

**FastWeb**

[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)

This free service from Monster.com allows users to search over 1.3 million scholarships worth more than \$3 billion.

**The Student Guide**

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

Available in English and Spanish, the Student Guide is a comprehensive resource on student financial aid from the U.S. Department of Education.

*We have gathered terms and adapted definitions from a number of sources to create this glossary (special shout outs to [www.mycollegeoptions.org](http://www.mycollegeoptions.org) and [www.unt.edu](http://www.unt.edu)).*