

College-Bound Resource Guide

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Artwork by Mina Silva



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Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Foreword	7
Disclosure	8
Types of Colleges, Universities, and Higher Education Schools	9
Community or Junior College (Two-year College)	9
Four-year College or University	10
Online College or University	10
Vocational or Trade School	10
Challenge Early College	11
AP (Advanced Placement) Courses	11
CLEP (College-Level Examination Programs) Exams	12
Standardized Testing	13
PSAT (Preliminary SAT)	13
SAT	13
SAT Subject Tests	14
ACT (American College Testing)	14
Do I Need to Take Both the SAT and/or ACT?	15
Should I Take the SAT or ACT?	15
Guessing Penalty	15
Fee Reductions for AP Exams, PSAT, SAT, SAT Subject Tests, and ACT	16
How to Prepare for Standardized Tests	16
What to Bring to the Test	17
Sending Scores to Colleges	17
Financial Aid: Fee Reductions, Scholarships, Grants, and Student Loans	18
Fee Reductions for AP Exams, PSAT, SAT, SAT Subject Tests, or ACT	18
Fee Reductions for College Applications	19
Scholarships	19
FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)	19
National Merit Scholarship	20
Types of Scholarships	20
Local Scholarships	20



Student Loans	20
Work-study Programs	21
Military Tuition Assistance	22
College Applications	23
What Colleges Look for in an Applicant	23
What's Involved in a College Application	24
Personal Statement	25
Whether to Declare Your Major in Your College Application	25
How Many Colleges to Apply to	27
What to Do While Waiting to Hear Back	28
Deciding on a College	29
Visit Colleges	29
Logistics	29
Possible Activities	29
How to Prepare	29
Criteria to Consider When Choosing a College	30
Academic Standing and Reputation	30
Acceptance Rate	30
Class Offerings	31
Distance from Home	31
Extracurricular Activities	31
Support and Accommodations for Mental Health and Disabilities	31
Tuition (In-State v. Out-of-State and Private v. Public)	32
Your Impressions	32
Accepting Your Offer of Enrollment	33
Housing	34
Know Your College Resources.....	36
Orientation	36
Offices and Services	36
Financial Aid and Scholarships Office	36
Health Center/Counseling Center	36
Libraries	36

Office of Admissions	36
Office of Disability Services	37
Office of the Registrar	37
Student Affairs	37
Student Learning Center	37
Parking and Transportation Services	37
People and Organizations	38
Professors	38
Graduate Student Instructors (GAs) or Teaching Assistants (TAs)	38
Mentors and Advisors	38
Student Organizations and Clubs	39
Tips to Succeed	40
Study Locations	40
Study Techniques	40
During Class	41
After Class	41
SMART Goals	42
Resumes	45
Basic Sections of a Resume	45
How to Organize Your Resume	45
How to Write an Amazing Resume	46
GED (General Educational Development) Test	47
Helpful Organizations and Resources	48
ACT	48
Big Future	48
Café College Houston	48
Children At Risk *	48
College Board	48
College for All Texans	48
College Niche	49
edX	49
Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)	49

Generation TX (GenTX) 49
Genesys Works 49
Khan Academy 50
National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)* 50
National Center for Educational Statistics 50
National College Access Network* 50
Project GRAD 50
Posse Foundation 51
SER-Jobs 51
References..... 52



Foreword

Have you heard people say “adulting is the worst!”, “ugh, #adulting”, or something else along those lines? If not, let us define adulting. To adult (v): to behave like an adult [...] and hold responsibilities. Well, unfortunately (or fortunately...depending upon your opinion) we all have to grow up, become independent, and take on responsibilities. That process can be very complicated, and we often hear adolescents and young adults asking for a guidebook that can help with the adulting process, especially with education after high school. This guidebook was designed to help navigate that transition. Our particular target audience are adolescents and young adults whose caregivers have not personally navigated the college process. We hope, however, that it will be useful to everyone. Our team of researchers and providers dedicated to helping transition-age youth (that’s you!) investigated and examined heaps of transition-related materials and eventually condensed it down into this trim and attractive guidebook. Well, we haven’t yet created a guidebook to traverse the *entire* process of becoming an adult, but we hope that this College-Bound Resource Guide will help you and other young adults navigate the process of preparing, applying, and deciding to go to college!

Here are some suggestions to best utilize this guidebook:

- Read the entire College-Bound Resource Guide (or at least skim it) and then focus on certain sections
- Review the Table of Contents and see if there are certain sections you’d like to focus on or skip
- Identify necessary documents necessary to apply to college
 - Create a document or binder with all the relevant sections (e.g. transcripts, letters of recommendations, applications, resume, awards and trainings, financial aid/scholarships, health information)
 - Collect information and documents you will need for your college applications
- Refer back to the College-Bound Resource Guide as a checklist even after college acceptance

Note: Many adolescents and young adults pursue college because it seems to be the norm in today’s society, but it is important to consider if college is right for you, how to pay for it, how to apply, how to be accepted, how to graduate, and what you’re going to do after you receive your degree. If you want to go to college, note that there are many types of colleges and it is important to consider which one will help you achieve what you want to do. Although we will discuss many factors that play into these questions, we suggest that you discuss all of this with your parents/caregivers, guidance counselors, teachers, mentors, or any trusted adult who knows you well.

Disclosure

This guidebook does not cover everything; it is just a general overview of the college application process and contains tips to help guide you and your family through a complicated process. The College-Bound Resource Guide does not have a financial bias nor political agenda. We at Baylor College of Medicine/Texas Children's Hospital do not endorse or support any particular organization or company mentioned in this manual. Please refer to the standardized testing websites and official college websites for application requirements and other details that may have changed since the last edition of this guidebook.



“Colleges are like zebra stripes, the same but different.”

Artwork by Emily Wei, MPH

Types of Colleges, Universities, and Higher Education Schools

There are an overwhelming number of colleges and higher education schools out there, and there are a number of factors that you should take into account when considering a college. As with all decisions, there is always a 'buyer beware' factor and as a result, it is important to do your proper research. This is particularly critical with online colleges as many seem to be official but don't have recognized accreditation (i.e. an outside, legitimate authority has not verified that the education provided by that college meets certain standards). Although accreditation does not guarantee quality, it increases the probability of oversight and higher standards of education. Please see below for some questions to consider when choosing a college:

- Is the college accredited? See <https://www.ed.gov/accreditation> and <https://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/>
- What is the college's reputation? This may factor into how employers may view your school and the quality of your education
- Is the college for-profit or non-profit? The business model may influence the environment and overall standards

At this point you might be asking yourself, so if not all colleges are equal, where can I look up the reputation of colleges and ensure that information is reliable and unbiased? We recommend starting with Consumer Reports (<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/resources/streaming/college-choices/final/college-choices.htm#>) as it has helpful resources to guide you through the steps of choosing a college. U.S. News and World Report can help you narrow down which colleges to consider as it provides rankings of various colleges (<https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges>). These rankings include a quick snapshot of the college including in-state and out-of-state tuition, room and board, application deadline, and a quick blurb about the college and its history.

Community or Junior College (Two-year College)

People go to community colleges for a variety of reasons. These reasons include: increasing general knowledge, earning a two-year associate degree (i.e. an undergraduate degree awarded by universities upon completion of a two year program), and preparing to transfer to a four-year college. One of the most notable things about community colleges is that they can be significantly cheaper than four-year colleges. For that reason, many people who want to attend a four-year college but can't initially afford it opt to attend a community college for two years before transferring to a four-year college.

The majority of community colleges are commuter schools as they rarely offer on-campus housing. This can significantly impact the campus environment and it may be harder to get involved with the student body. Additionally, the student population of a community college is often more diverse than a typical four-year college as it may incorporate not only adolescents and young adults pursuing a

degree, but also younger adolescents or older adults who are taking classes for a variety of different reasons.

Four-year College or University

The experience one gets from attending a four-year college is often referred to as the traditional college experience. Some of the reasons why people choose to attend a four-year college include: achieving a well-rounded education, graduating with the minimum education/eligibility criteria required by many jobs, earning more money than students with associate degrees or high school diplomas, and preparing for graduate school. There are two main types of undergraduate degrees one can graduate with from a four-year college:

- **Bachelor of Science (B.S.)** degree programs are usually more focused on the technical and practical aspects of one field and include majors such as computer science, nursing, math, biochemistry, and physics
- **Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)** degree programs tend to be more generalized (and lean towards the liberal arts) than B.S. degrees and include majors such as English, art, music, modern languages, and communication

Note of clarification: we will use the terms “college” and “university” interchangeably throughout this guidebook. In the U.S., a general rule of thumb is that college offers only a bachelor’s degree (i.e. undergraduate) while a university offers both a bachelor’s degree and a graduate degrees (e.g. masters and doctorates).

Online College or University

Many people find it difficult to attend college due to other ongoing demands on their time or their financial situation. Online colleges are one solution to those issues as they offer flexible scheduling and (sometimes) financial savings. It is important to note that online colleges require more self-discipline and motivation as it’s easier to procrastinate since classes don’t meet on a regular basis.

Some online colleges and universities have degrees that may be completed online while others have some courses must be taken in-person at either the school’s physical campus or in a location of the individual’s choosing.

Vocational or Trade School

Vocational schools are different from other types of colleges because they are focused on giving you the specific skills and training required to do a specific job (e.g. nurse, welder, firefighter, elevator repairer, radiation therapist, geological and petroleum technician, dental hygienist, diagnostic medical sonographer, electrician, plumber, HVAC technician, etc.) rather than giving you a more generalized education that may fit many more jobs. For example, at a four-year college you may be required to take English, science, history, and foreign language classes even if these classes are outside your

job plan. At a trade school, these courses are likely not required. Graduates from vocational schools often have a high employment rate in this specific trade and minimal to no student loan debt.

Although we'd love to be able to give you specific websites to go to, it really depends on the job or trade. The best we can do is suggest that you talk to your guidance counselor or conduct some online investigation about vocational or trade schools near you that offer courses related to that job or ask someone you know in that job how they got there or what they recommend.

Challenge Early College

There are some high schools that allow for challenge early college. This means that after high school graduation, these graduates may either leave to pursue higher education or opt to stay for an extra year during which they will primarily be enrolled in college level courses. The students who opt to stay a 5th year will eventually graduate with not only a high school diploma (and sometimes even an associate degree), but also some college credits, which they can transfer to a university. This type of college allows students to gain skills in a specific area and focus on a particular career path.

This type of college is typically designed for youth from resource-limited areas who may struggle with the cost of college as it allows for students to experience rigorous high school and college-level courses while still in high school/before enrolling in college. This is one method that can provide more support for transition-age youth as they transition into college and adulthood in general.

AP (Advanced Placement) Courses

AP courses are high school courses that are taught at the college level. AP tests are then administered in May and if a student scores a high enough score on this test (the maximum score is 5), he/she can earn college credit, which might help reduce the overall college tuition bill. Every high school offers different AP classes. There are over 38 AP test options and each test costs \$92.

You can take an AP class and not take the AP test. You can also take the AP test without taking the AP class (this might be more difficult as the AP class is designed to prepare you for the AP test). Although the AP test scores will not affect your GPA, just the fact you took an AP class can look good on your college application as it demonstrates that you like to challenge yourself.

The AP tests are administered by The College Board (same organization that administers the SAT) and you have to register for the AP exams through your school. If you have an AP Coordinator at your school, talk to him/her. If you don't have an AP Coordinator at your school, you can call AP Services (<https://www.collegeboard.org/contact-us>) no later than March 1st to organize the logistics to take the AP test(s). Nearly all U.S. colleges accept AP test scores but it's up to you to verify each college's individual policy.

CLEP (College-Level Examination Programs) Exams

CLEP exams are designed so that students can demonstrate their knowledge of introductory college-level material and earn college credit. There are 33 CLEP exams available and most are designed to correspond to one college semester (although some correspond to one- or two-year college courses). Each exam costs \$80 and a passing score can earn you three or more college credits. Go to <https://clep.collegeboard.org/test-center-search> to find a test center and schedule your exam. CLEP is sponsored by the College Board but it is up to the individual colleges to accept the CLEP college credits. You need to look at each college's individual policy. More than 2,900 colleges accept CLEP college credits.

Table 1: Types of Colleges and Higher Education

	Degree/Purpose	Pros	Cons
Community college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associate degree • Prep to transfer to four-year college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheaper than four-year college • Can live at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No on-campus housing • Lacks traditional college experience
Four-year college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor of Arts • Bachelor of Science 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-rounded education • Minimum education requirement for many jobs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More costly
Online college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depends on the online school and what you want to do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be cheaper • Flexible schedule 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-discipline (you have to hold yourself accountable as there is less structure) • Harder to network
Vocational school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give you the skills to enter a specific job field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faster to graduate • High employment rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No generalized education
Challenge early college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associate degree • Prep to transfer to four-year college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May help reduce overall college tuition • More support in transition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not always available
AP courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earn college credit • Strengthen your resume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce overall college tuition • Strengthen your resume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be stressful and challenging to take college-level courses • Have to score very high for transferable college credit • Additional cost to take test

CLEP exams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earn college credit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce overall college tuition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional cost to take test • Not all colleges accept CLEP college credits
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Standardized Testing

There are a few standardized tests that the majority of colleges use for college admissions and merit-based scholarships.

PSAT (Preliminary SAT)

The PSAT has two main **purposes**: 1) to earn scholarship money from the National Merit Scholarship and 2) to practice for the SAT and ACT. The majority of people take the PSAT to practice for the SAT/ACT as it's difficult to earn scholarship money (you have to score very high).

The **test format** is similar to the SAT with three main sections: 1) reading, 2) math, and 3) writing and language. The test takes a total of 2 hours and 45 minutes; the reading section is 60 minutes; the math section is 25 minutes without a calculator and 45 minutes with a calculator; the writing and language section is 35 minutes.

The **maximum score** you can get on the PSAT is 1520. The PSAT is only offered once a year in October and you should **register** at least 5 weeks before the test date through www.collegeboard.org. It is recommended that you take it in 10th or 11th grade. The **cost** varies according to the school, but it is typically \$15.

SAT

The SAT has two **purposes**: it is used for 1) college admissions and 2) merit-based scholarships.

Test format: Similar to the PSAT, there are three required sections: 1) reading, 2) math, 3) writing and language and one optional section, 4) essay. You should check with individual colleges about whether they require or recommend the essay. We recommend taking the optional essay just in case you decide later on to apply to a college that requires the essay; taking the essay keeps your options open. The test takes a total of 3 hours and 50 minutes if you include the essay portion. If you exclude the essay, the test takes a total of 3 hours.

The **maximum score** you can get on the SAT is 1600. The SAT is offered 7 times a year (October, November, December, January, March/April, May, and June) and you should **register** at least 5 weeks before the test date through www.collegeboard.org. Although you can take the SAT an unlimited number of times, we recommend that you thoroughly prepare for the test. It is recommended that you take it in the Fall or Spring of 11th grade. The **cost** is \$54.50 with the essay and \$43 without the essay portion.

SAT Subject Tests

Although it is not necessarily required (it depends on the particular college's admission requirements), the SAT Subject Test has one **purpose**: to stand out in college admissions. Although it is not required that you take a SAT Subject Test (in most college applications), it is an opportunity to highlight your strengths and interests. Some colleges explicitly state that although SAT Subject Tests will provide information that will assist them in the evaluation process, individuals who do not take the tests are often not at a disadvantage in the admission process. It is important to note that if you do poorly on a SAT Subject Test it might actually work against you (e.g. if you have a good GPA and do poorly on a SAT Subject Test, it might indicate that your school curriculum isn't rigorous and you actually aren't learning much).

Test format: Unlike the PSAT and SAT, each subject has its own test. There are a number of subjects available, including English literature, U.S. history, world history, languages (Chinese, French, Hebrew, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latin, and Spanish), math level 1, math level 2, biological-ecological science, biology-molecular science, chemistry, and physics. Each Subject Test takes 1 hour.

The **maximum score** one can get on an individual SAT Subject Test is 800. The SAT Subject Tests are offered 6 times a year and you should **register** at least 5 weeks before the test date through www.collegeboard.org. It **costs** \$26 for the test date (during which you can take up to three subject tests) AND \$20 for each SAT Subject Test. For example, taking two tests in one sitting would cost \$66.

ACT (American College Testing)

The ACT has two **purposes**: it is used for 1) college admissions and 2) merit-based scholarships.

The **test format** is slightly different than the SAT as the ACT is more science focused. There are four required sections: 1) English, 2) math, 3) reading, 4) science reasoning, and one optional section, 5) essay. You should check with the individual colleges about whether they require or recommend the essay. We recommend taking the essay just in case you decide to apply to a college that requires the essay later on. Taking the essay keeps your options open. The test takes a total of 2 hours and 55 minutes if you include the essay. If you exclude the essay, the test takes a total of 2 hours and 15 minutes.

The **maximum score** you can get on the ACT is 36. The ACT is offered 6 times a year (September, October, December, February, April, and June) and you should **register** at least 5 weeks before the test date through www.act.org. Although you can take the ACT up to 12 times, we recommend that you thoroughly prepare for the test. It is recommended that you take it in the Fall or Spring of 11th grade. The **cost** is \$56.50 with the essay and \$39.50 without the essay.

Do I Need to Take Both the SAT and/or ACT?

Most colleges accept both the SAT and ACT, though some colleges are test optional. Test optional means that the college does not require standardized test scores as part of a complete application. This does not mean that the college won't consider your test scores if you submit them. Without the test scores, greater weight is given to other aspects of your application, such as your grades.

We strongly recommend that you check the requirements of the colleges or universities you want to apply and see what they accept. Also, check if they require the essay portion of either test.

Should I Take the SAT or ACT?

Whether you decide to take the SAT or ACT depends on which test (e.g. content, test format, essay requirements) caters to your strengths.

Most community colleges do not require the SAT or ACT for admission, so you don't need to sign up for either test. However, certain programs within community colleges, especially those in health sciences and engineering, may have more selective requirements for entry than the school as a whole (e.g. standardized test scores). If you are thinking about applying for a specific program within a community college, you might want to check the program's admission requirements.

However, if you are planning on transferring to a four-year college or university, standardized test scores may be required as part of the application.

Guessing Penalty

You might have heard your older siblings or parents complain about the "guessing penalty" when they took standardized tests. The "guessing penalty" is when $\frac{1}{4}$ point is subtracted from your score for every wrong answer. There is no longer a "guessing penalty" for bubbling in an incorrect answer in the ACT, SAT, or PSAT. Therefore, you should fill in an answer for every question as you have nothing to lose!

Table 2: Standardized Tests (PSAT, SAT, SAT Subject Test, and ACT)

	Purpose	Cost	Sections
PSAT	Practice for SAT and ACT	\$15	1) Reading, 2) math, and 3) writing and language
SAT	Used for college admissions and merit-based scholarships	\$54.50 with essay \$43 without essay	1) Reading, 2) math, 3) writing and language and one optional section, 4) essay
SAT Subject Test	Bolster college application	\$26 for test date AND \$20 for each subject test	N/A

ACT	Used for college admissions and merit-based scholarships	\$56.50 with essay \$39.50 without essay	1) English, 2) math, 3) reading, 4) science reasoning, and one optional section, 5) essay
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Fee Reductions for AP Exams, PSAT, SAT, SAT Subject Tests, and ACT

Please see “[Financial Aid: Fee Reductions, Scholarships, Grants, and Student Loans](#)” section for more details.

How to Prepare for Standardized Tests

The process of choosing how to prepare for the standardized test might be overwhelming, but it is worth thinking about your strengths and weaknesses and then working on developing certain skills. The SAT has changed significantly over the years so make sure when you’re choosing your study method or guide that it is up-to-date!

Some options you have to prepare:

- Take a practice test (e.g. PSAT, SAT, ACT)
 - PSAT: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/psat-nmsqt-psat-10/practice/full-length-practice-tests>
 - SAT: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/practice/full-length-practice-tests>
 - ACT English: <http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/test-preparation/english-practice-test-questions.html?page=0&chapter=0>
 - ACT Math: <http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/test-preparation/math-practice-test-questions.html?page=0&chapter=0>
 - ACT Reading: <http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/test-preparation/reading-practice-test-questions.html?page=0&chapter=0>
 - ACT Science: <http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/test-preparation/science-practice-test-questions.html>
 - ACT Writing: <http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/test-preparation/writing-sample-essays.html?page=0&chapter=0>
- Purchase a test prep book (e.g. The College Board, Princeton Review, Kaplan, Barron’s etc.)
 - These prep books usually range from \$10-\$25 dollars
- Sign up for a prep class (in class or online)
 - Some high schools offer these at a reduced cost
- Hire a private SAT or ACT tutor

As with everything else, preparing for the standardized tests can be expensive (e.g. purchasing a new test prep book, enrolling in a prep class, hiring a private tutor etc.), so some low-cost options might include:

- Purchasing an up-to-date prep book through Half Price Books, Amazon used, or another discount book store
- Renting an up-to-date prep book from the library
- Finding more (free or cheap) online resources
- www.vocabulary.com which is a tool to improve your vocabulary (it's free!)
- <https://www.khanacademy.org/> which has prep materials (it's free!)
- Hiring a private tutor for a group of friends (rather than just for yourself) to share the cost
- Start a study group with your friends

What to Bring to the Test

Necessary: 1) admission ticket (printed from your College Board account), 2) acceptable photo ID, 3) Number 2 pencils with erasers, and 4) approved calculator.

Recommended: 1) college's CEEB four-digit codes (see below) you want to send your test scores to, 2) watch (to track the time), 3) extra batteries (for your calculator) and other backup materials, 4) drinks and snacks

Sending Scores to Colleges

When you take the SAT or ACT you have the option to select up to four colleges to send your official scores for free. Usually it costs money to send your scores to colleges so this is a nice option. In order to do this, you need to decide which colleges you want to send your scores to when registering for the test. Look up the SAT CEEB codes (four-digit codes assigned to every college in the U.S.) here: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/k-12-school-code-search>. Look up the ACT codes here: <http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/scores.html>. Don't panic if you decide to apply to another college later on; you can always send your scores after test day, you'll just have to pay.

Some students wait to see how well they scored before sending their scores to college. This may be especially true if they plan to take the SAT or ACT more than once.

Financial Aid: Fee Reductions, Scholarships, Grants, and Student Loans

There are various types of financial aid (we have listed the main types in Table 3) but we will focus on explaining fee reductions and scholarships.

Table 3: Financial Aid Options

Type of financial aid	Description
Fee reduction	Methods to decrease the overall cost of a standardized test such as the SAT or ACT.
Scholarships	Financial aid that does not need to be repaid. Often merit-based.
Grants	Financial aid that does not need to be repaid. Often need-based.
Student loans	Students and their parents can borrow money to pay for college that needs to be repaid (with interest). Student loans have benefits that other loans don't have. For example, they may have low fixed interest rates, income-based repayment plans, cancellation of certain types of employment, or deferment options.
Work-study	Part-time jobs (on- or off-campus) for both undergraduate and graduate students with financial need.

Fee Reductions for AP Exams, PSAT, SAT, SAT Subject Tests, or ACT

There are fee waivers available for the PSAT, SAT, SAT Subject Tests, and ACT for some students. Please look at each website (<https://professionals.collegeboard.org/testing/waivers> or www.act.org) as the eligibility criteria and what the fee waiver covers vary.

Table 4: Fee Reductions for Exams and Standardized Tests

	Eligibility	Fee waiver covers	Website
AP Exams	Depends on whether the school/districts participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$31 fee reduction (from the College Board) AND \$9 rebate (from school) Final cost after fee waiver: \$53 per exam 	https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/ap-coordinators/exam-ordering-fees/exam-fees/reductions
PSAT	Low-income 11th graders who qualify for or are enrolled in the NSLP (National School Lunch Program)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final cost after fee waiver: free! 	https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/psat-nmsgt-psat-10/k12-educators/requesting-fee-waivers
SAT	Low-income 11th and 12th grade students in U.S. or U.S. territories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to two SATs with or without the essay Sending test scores to four colleges 	https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register/fees/fee-waivers

SAT Subject Tests	Students in 9th-12th grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to two SAT Subject Tests administrations 	https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register/fees/fee-waivers
ACT	Low-income 11th or 12th grade students in U.S., U.S. territories, or Puerto Rico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic registration fee Sending test scores to four colleges 	https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/registration/fees.html

Fee Reductions for College Applications

Just applying for colleges can be expensive! We've already covered fee waivers for the standardized tests. Every income-eligible student who uses a fee waiver to take either the SAT or SAT Subject Tests are also eligible to apply to over 2,000 participating colleges for FREE! Please see the following website for more details: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/about/benefits/college-application-fee-waivers>.

In addition to just checking the fee reduction application options offered by The College Board, you should also investigate if individual colleges offer application fee waivers.

Scholarships

There are many scholarships available. You just have to go find them! Asking your high school guidance counselor to help you find scholarships is one option. Nowadays most applications are available online so the best advice we can give you is to just Google and see what you can find. Some scholarships have set deadlines but others are rolling (applicants can submit their application at any time) or don't have a deadline at all. The key to scholarships is applying for as many as you can, as often as you can! Don't forget to check if you can and/or need to renew your scholarship (this is easy money) for the following year(s) of your education!

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

The FAFSA has one main purpose: to help determine whether students are eligible for federal loans, grants, scholarships, or work-study programs. Some colleges require students to complete the FAFSA to even qualify for scholarships. The FAFSA is federal student financial aid dedicated for college bound students.

There is no fee to file the FAFSA. This is a free application and you can potentially get financial aid as a result of submitting this application. The FAFSA is released on October 1st, and you should apply at <https://fafsa.ed.gov/> as soon as the application is released. The deadline to submit depends on your state of legal residence and the school year. You can find deadline details at <https://fafsa.ed.gov/deadlines.htm>

National Merit Scholarship

Please see the “[PSAT \(Preliminary SAT\)](#)” section for more details.

Types of Scholarships

This U.S. News article contains a lot of great links that discuss different types of scholarships:

<https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/paying-for-college/scholarships>.

Here is a short list of the various types of scholarships that are available so you can get an idea of different types of scholarships (don't limit yourself to these!)

- Academic and merit-based scholarships
- Athletic scholarships
- Community service scholarships
- Ethnicity-based scholarships
- Financial need scholarships
- First-in-family scholarships (you are the first in your family to attend college)
- Legacy scholarships (your parents/grandparents attended that college)
- Local scholarships
- Military scholarships
- National scholarships
- Writing scholarships

Local Scholarships

Local scholarships deserve their own section in this manual as many of our youth and young adults have emphasized the importance of applying to local scholarships as they are often easier to get since you aren't competing with as many students. These types of scholarships are often only available to residents of a particular geographic region and as a result, chances of winning a local scholarship is greater than winning national scholarships. As they are often less money than national scholarships, they are often overlooked, but remember money is money!

You might be wondering where to find these local scholarships, so we have provided a couple suggestions to help you out. Check out the City of Houston's scholarship page (<http://www.houstontx.gov/education/ccp-scholarships.html>) and The Greater Houston Community Foundation scholarship page (<https://www.ghcfscholar.org/>). Best of luck!

Student Loans

You should create a budget to figure out how much money you need to borrow. This budget might include: tuition, cost of living, your family's contribution, your financial aid award, etc. It is important to note that you don't have to accept the entire amount of a loan you are offered. As stated in Table 3, a loan is not free money. You will have to repay all of the money you borrowed with interest.

There are different types of loans including federal, state, college, and private loans. At this point, you might be asking yourself where to search for student loans. We recommend checking out <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/loans/types-of-college-loans> which provides an easy, general breakdown of places to look for loans such as the federal government, state government, banks and other financial institutions, private organizations and foundations, and colleges.

The U.S. Department of Education has two federal student loan programs: 1) the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Program and 2) the Federal Perkins Loan Program. For more details about federal loans, please see <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types/loans>. It is important to note that to apply for a federal student loan, you must complete the FAFSA (as detailed above).

If you don't understand all the aspects of the loan, don't be afraid to ask questions! Important things to consider include interest rates, fees and repayment options. You should definitely shop around and discuss the differences between the various student loan options. Some example questions you might ask the financial aid officer include:

- How much will this loan cost in total?
- What will my monthly payments be?
- When will I have to start paying my monthly payments (i.e. can I start paying the loan back after I graduate)?
- Is the interest rate fixed or variable?
- Can I get a lower interest rate?
- What fees do I have to pay?

Depending on the loan, a credit check might be required and if you don't have a credit history you will need a cosigner with a good credit history and credit score. A cosigner is someone who promises to pay back the loan if you do not (so your cosigner is someone who trusts you a lot). Typically, the better the cosigner's credit history and credit score is, the better the interest rates, fees, and repayment options will be.

Work-study Programs

Work-study programs allow students to work part-time, where they earn money to help pay for school-related expenses. There are two types of work-study programs, Federal Work-Study (FWS) and Non-Federal Work-Study (NFWS).

FWS provides part-time jobs for students with financial need. This program emphasizes employment in civic education and work related to your course of study, whenever possible. These jobs may be either on- or off-campus. See more details at <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types/work-study>.

NFWS provides part-time jobs for students who were not awarded a FWS as part of their financial aid package and/or did not demonstrate financial need based on their FAFSA.

Each college has their varying details regarding its work-study program. Depending on the school's program, these work-study programs may come with other benefits such as qualifying for in-state tuition.

Military Tuition Assistance

Note that if you are an individual on active duty, in the National Guard, or Reserve Component, you are eligible for the Military Tuition Assistance program. It is important to investigate the details of the program, but it may be used for the following programs: vocational/technical programs, undergraduate programs, graduate programs, independent study, and distance-learning programs. See more details at http://www.militaryonesource.mil/voluntary-education?content_id=268274.



“The man who couldn’t walk now flies.”

Artwork by Samay Shivshankar

College Applications

What Colleges Look for in an Applicant

When preparing to apply to college you may be asking yourself what colleges are looking for in an applicant. The general answer is that they want someone who is well rounded, demonstrates leadership and initiative, and shows dedication to things he/she is passionate about. There is no clear method to demonstrate that you have all of these traits as they can be shown an infinite number of ways. If we had to pinpoint four things colleges look at in an applicant, we would focus on 1) academics, 2) standardized test scores, 3) extracurricular activities, and 4) letter(s) of recommendation.

1. Academics such as your GPA (grade point average) and the types of courses you took throughout high school (and potentially community college) might illustrate your academic achievements and dedication. The types of classes you chose to take and their corresponding rigor might demonstrate how you challenge yourself.
2. Your standardized test scores (e.g. SAT, SAT Subject Tests, ACT) might show how well you test and allow you to be academically compared to other students across the nation. Some might argue that these standardized tests are unfair to those who don't test well, but there are a variety of prep materials out there and taking the time to study to improve your test taking abilities demonstrates your dedication and persistence. Additionally, just note that standardized testing is used throughout life, not just in college admissions, so it can be helpful to practice those skills.
3. Colleges are typically partial to hearing about your extracurricular activities as they are an opportunity to showcase how you are a unique, well-rounded individual. When we say 'extracurricular activities', we aren't just talking about sports, we mean anything you do outside of school which can include volunteer and leadership positions, part-time jobs, etc. These types of activities may demonstrate initiative, dedication, and passion. If you want to take it an extra step, take a leadership position in an organization; you'll be surprised by how much you can learn in that position. Think about using these experiences when writing your personal statement.
4. Most colleges and scholarships require letters of recommendation. It is always good to develop strong relationships with teachers, coaches, and other adults in your life who can write a great letter of recommendation for you. Some people don't feel comfortable declining a request for a letter of recommendation so make sure you put a lot of thought into who you ask! Make sure that you ask someone who knows you well (and likes you!) and won't just write a general (or even worse, weak) letter of recommendation. You should give the person a description of the scholarship or college to which you are applying, an envelope with the university address on it, your resume, and ask what information might be helpful to him/her;



this will really help him/her write the letter of recommendation. Give that person enough time to write a strong letter of recommendation; this is typically at least four weeks (the absolute minimum is two weeks). That person may ask you to write a draft for them; we can tell you from experience writing a draft of your letter can be difficult, so make sure to give yourself enough time for this.

What's Involved in a College Application

There is no one universal college application, but there are six general aspects that are typically included in every college application: 1) application fee, 2) general information application, 3) standardized test scores, 4) official high school transcript, 5) letters of recommendation, and 6) personal statement or essay.

1. Application fee range from \$30-\$60 (this is an estimation).
2. Most colleges will require a general information application. It might be college-specific or a generic form accepted by multiple colleges. This general information application might include basic information about you, your family, school, GPA, extracurricular activities, and awards, etc.
3. Standardized test scores (e.g. SAT, SAT Subject Tests, ACT). There is typically a fee associated with sending standardized test scores to colleges. Please see the "[Sending Scores to Colleges](#)" section for more details.
4. It depends upon your particular high school, but there are a variety of methods you can use to request your high school official transcript including: 1) contact your student services at your high school, 2) contact your school district, 3) contact your state's Department of Education (this is probably only necessary if you are not a recent graduate), and 4) check your high school's online services. Please look at your college's application requirements in regards to how they'd like to receive your high school transcript (i.e. hard copy or online). If you get a hard copy, do NOT open the envelope/break the seal; this will make the transcript unofficial and the college will not accept it!
5. Typically, college applications request at least two letters of recommendation. Requirements are determined by the particular college. Please see the previous section "[What Colleges Look for in an Applicant](#)" for more details.
6. The prompts for personal statements vary from college to college. Please see the following section "[Personal Statement](#)" for more details.

To find a college's specific application, we recommend that you Google the name of the college and "application". For instance, Googling "University of Houston application" shows these as the top two results: <http://www.uh.edu/admissions/apply/apply-freshman/> and <http://www.uh.edu/admissions/apply/apply-transfer/>

Personal Statement

The personal statement varies from college to college but typically asks you to describe what makes you unique and your academic achievements despite challenges. Think about your desires, goals, special events in your life, etc. Personal statements are typically 300-500 words so make sure you leave plenty of time to edit and re-edit your statement. Don't restate information from your transcript or application; they already have those documents and this is your opportunity to showcase your personality and individuality! There are a lot resources and examples to help you write a fantastic personal statement which may include Google, your local library, English teacher, and guidance counselor. We recommend checking out: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/> and <http://admissions.berkeley.edu/personalstatement> to get a general idea of how to write a personal statement and possible essay topics.

Here are some personal statements that have worked (the applicants got into the college): <https://apply.jhu.edu/apply/essays-that-worked/>. We particularly liked this webpage because it included the reasoning the Johns Hopkins Undergraduate Admissions Committee used to determine admissions in addition to the personal statement itself. Don't forget to click on the various years (e.g. Class of 2019, Class of 2018, etc.) for more examples!

Whether to Declare Your Major in Your College Application

Some applications may ask you to state what you are going to study/major in or ask you to apply to a certain program (sometimes called a school) within a college (e.g. School of Engineering at TAMAN or School of Business at University of Texas Houston). Deciding whether to declare your major in your application can be pretty daunting as you haven't even been admitted or taken any courses! There are a lot of factors that may influence your decision whether to declare a major in your college application and these vary depending on each college's admissions policy. However, you can contact the college's admission office to figure out how the college considers declared majors.

For instance, if a student applies to a competitive program within a college, here are some scenarios of how the college might treat his/her application:

- Student is admitted to the competitive program
- Student is rejected from the competitive program but accepted to general studies (the student may be allow student to transfer/apply to competitive program later)
- Student is rejected from both the competitive program and general studies

Each college has a different policy in regards to treating applications with declared majors (v. undeclared). If you decide to declare a major, some colleges may only view it as your academic interest and not factor it into admissions, while others may base your admissions by comparing your application against other students in that program (v. the entire general student population).

Table 5: Declare Your Major in Your College Application

	Pros	Cons
Declaring a Major	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More attractive candidate for acceptance (if underrepresented major) and financial aid (major-specific scholarships) • Allows you to start coursework early/give you priority to enroll in certain courses • An advisor who specializes in that area • Strengthens overall application (showcase your interests, firm direction, and future plans) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admission standards might be higher for competitive majors (you'll be competing against more competitive applicants) • Difficult to change majors later on
Applying Undecided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for academic exploration • Research your potential field and confirm your original interests • Take the first year of college build a strong GPA prior to applying to a specific program (esp. if your high school GPA is not strong in the program's related courses) • More likely to graduate on time (compared to those who declared immediately) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to change to competitive major later on • Miss specific financial aid • Spend more time and money (missed required courses and need to wait until they are offered again or took courses not required for your major)

Table 6: Methods and Timelines to Apply to College

	Definition	Deadline to apply	Notified of college's decision	Deadline to accept
Early decision	You apply and hear back early. If accepted, you MUST go	Early November	End of December	N/A
Early action	You apply and hear back early. If accepted, you have a choice to attend or not	As early as possible. Typically November	End of December	May 1st
Regular decision	You apply and hear back according to regular timeline. If accepted, you have a choice to attend or not	Early January	Late March or Early April	May 1st
Waitlist	You are still being considered by the college and depending on how many students decide to enroll, you may be offered a letter of acceptance. Your	Depends on how you applied (e.g. early action or regular decision)	See your waitlist letter for details	See your waitlist letter for details

	waitlist letter should include your chances of being accepted and the date you will receive the final word			
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****Note: This is just a general timeline and does not apply to all colleges. Check with the individual college application instructions for deadlines****

How Many Colleges to Apply to

You can only apply to one **early decision** college and it should be your first choice. Remember, if you are accepted, you **MUST** attend that university (or possibly defer to another year). We recommend that you apply to other colleges (not as early decision though) just in case you are not accepted to your early decision college. Some early decision contracts include a statement that allow you to break the contract if the college does not provide sufficient financial aid but we recommend that you don't rely on this statement; you should only apply to one early decision school and it should be your first choice!

If you decide to apply **regular decision**, you can apply to an unlimited number of colleges, however we recommend 5-8 colleges as the application costs can add up quickly! The colleges you apply to should be a combination of safety schools (1 college), probable schools (2-4 colleges), and reach schools (1-2 schools). Safety schools are defined as colleges you have little chance of being rejected from. Probable schools are defined as colleges which you would be okay going to and would fulfill your needs and desires. Reach schools are colleges that are your top choices but are less likely to accept you. You can figure out which schools are safety, probable, and reach schools by reviewing the college's acceptance rate in addition to profiles of students who have been accepted in the past.

What to Do While Waiting to Hear Back

1. Ensure (and review it for accuracy) that you received an e-receipt from the college acknowledging your application has been received within a day or two of your submission. Call the college's admissions office if any information is incorrect or if you don't receive the e-receipt within two days of your submission.
2. Visit colleges! See the "[Visit Colleges](#)" section for more information.
3. Figure out where you want to live. If you are interested in living on campus, you should apply for student campus housing as it is often very competitive. Living on campus for at least the first year is often beneficial for a number of reasons which include getting to know other freshmen, being exposed to new student activities, and having a meal plan included in your tuition. It is worth noting that off campus housing can be cheaper. See the "[Housing](#)" section for more information.
4. Don't slack off! Most colleges reserve the right to rescind your offer if you fail your classes.



Artwork by Mina Silva

Deciding on a College

Visit Colleges

Visiting colleges is a great way to get a feel of the university and gather information and opinions from various contacts including current students, graduate student instructors/teaching assistants, faculty, admissions office, and student affairs.

If you're still in high school, look into the various camps (e.g. summer, art, sports, leadership, etc.) that are often hosted at colleges. These camps are a cost-effective, immersive, and fun way to learn about college. These camps often have scholarships and other types of financial aid available and you just have to inquire about them. Plus, it's worth noting that these camps look great on college applications as they demonstrate an interest in the college.

Logistics

First off, contact the college's admission office to see what they offer in regards to college visits and then decide whether you'd like a formal or informal visit. Decide on how long you want to visit (e.g. one hour or overnight). We recommend you visit during the week (Monday-Thursday) so you can really see what the campus is like when classes are in session. For the same reason, we highly recommend that you do NOT visit during the following times: 1) when class is not in session (e.g. finals week, weekends, Thanksgiving weekend, winter and spring break, and summer, unless there is a summer session), 2) when the admission office is closed.

Possible Activities

We recommend that you plan your visit so that you can get the most out of your visit. Feel free to contact the admission office to see if they offer specific activities for prospective students. Some potential activities include:

- Attend a class
- Attend a club meeting (i.e. extracurricular activities)
- Attend information session
- Eat in dining hall
- Go on a campus tour
- Meet with an admission officer
- Meet with a financial aid officer
- Meet with a current student
- Spend the night in the dorm

How to Prepare

There are a number of things you can do to prepare for your college visit which include:

- Review college's official website and any material you received
- Brainstorm questions for current students, alumni, staff, professors
 - What is the average class size?
 - What is the campus meal plan?
 - What are the dorms like?
 - What are the demographics of the students?
 - Ethnically, commuter v. campus students, age, etc.
 - What extracurricular activities are available?
 - Is there an active Greek life (i.e. fraternities, sororities)?
 - What do you like/dislike about this college?
 - Why did you choose this college?
 - What is it like to live here?
- Brainstorm questions for admission officers
 - What scholarships and/or work-study opportunities are available? How many?
 - What is the cost of living?
 - What is the graduation rate?
 - What is the employment rate immediately after graduation?
 - What is the average salary immediately after graduation?
 - How engaged are the alumni?
 - Is there an active alumni association?
 - Is there a mentoring program?
- Find a map of college campus and locate admission office
- Take notes of your impressions
- Take pictures

Criteria to Consider When Choosing a College

Academic Standing and Reputation

To a certain extent, a college education is a college education, but a lot of the time academic standing and reputation goes a long way as it can help you build your professional network. If your college is known for the quality of its graduates, potential employers might be more inclined to take a risk on hiring you. Additionally, a strong alumni association and mentoring program can play a significant role in helping you find internships and jobs as many alums want to give back to their college.

Acceptance Rate

You should investigate the college's acceptance rate and the acceptance rate of your (potential) major as it might provide a quick snapshot of how rigorous the college is/classes will be and your

classmates. If the college has a very high acceptance rate, it might reflect that the college accepts most students who apply, ranging from those who are very driven to those who are not. If the college has a very low acceptance rate, it might reflect that the college is very choosy about who they pick and will only accept those who are very driven and already know what they want to specialize in.

Class Offerings

You should also investigate whether all classes (both requirements and electives) are offered each semester to ensure that you will be able to graduate on time. Additionally, if required classes are not offered every semester, you should create a graduation schedule that outlines which classes you are planning to take which semester for your entire college experience. Granted, you might not stick to this schedule exactly, but it will help you ensure that you graduate on time. Think of this as being proactive!

Distance from Home

As we've said, college can sometimes be an overwhelming experience and it's nice to be able to lean on your family or friends for support (e.g. get care packages and food delivered when you're freaking out during midterms). Other times you might want to jump into the ocean and be completely independent and away from home. In this age of technology, you might be half way across the world and still be able to call or text home. Despite this, being able to drive home whenever you want is not quite the same as texting your parents. There are pros and cons to how close you want to be home and each student seeks a unique experience.

Extracurricular Activities

College is more than just the educational experience. It is important to consider the extracurricular activities that are available. They can be great ways to make new friends and try new things. College is a perfect time to branch out of the familiar and consider who you want to be (we're not saying you have to because you are awesome as you are but sometimes it's hard to try new things if everything around you stays the same). Extracurricular activities can include internships, volunteer activities, Greek Life, and sports etc. See the "[Student Organizations and Clubs](#)" section for more information.

Support and Accommodations for Mental Health and Disabilities

It is incredible to investigate what accommodations your college offers in regards to mental health and disabilities. If you already have a mental health diagnosis or disability, it is even more crucial that you investigate what accommodations your college offers. College is a stressful time and you never know what might happen. You don't want to assume that it will be handled in an efficient and respectful manner; be proactive and figure it out before you're in crisis! See the "[Health Center/Counseling Center](#)" and "[Office of Disability Services](#)" sections for more information.

Tuition (In-State v. Out-of-State and Private v. Public)

It is incredibly important to consider how much your undergraduate college education will cost you. We've already discussed scholarships, grants, and loans, but let's take a couple minutes to discuss the cost of in-state, out-of-state, private, and public colleges.

When we talk about in-state, we are referring to students who are current residents of the state of the college. When we talk about out-of-state, we are referring to students who are not current residents of the state of the college. In-state is often cheaper than out-of-state.

There are significant differences between private and public universities that mirror the differences between the two at the high school level. One of the key differences is how they are funded which in turn results in major differences in the tuition. Public schools receive governmental funding which subsidize costs while private schools do not receive governmental funding. Due to the fact that private schools do not receive additional funding, they need to make up the cost through higher tuition rates. In addition to the tuition differences, private schools often are smaller, are more specialized/focused academic field, and have smaller classes (which often results in closer relationships with peers and professors). Larger universities can offer more experiences (e.g. more class selection, more majors, specialized training or preparation for graduate school).

Table 7: Tuition (In-State, Out-of-State, Private, and Public)

	In-State (per year)	Out-of-State (per year)
Private (Rice University)	\$44,900	\$44,900
Public (University of Texas at Houston-Undergraduate Nursing)	\$6,060	\$23,244

Your Impressions

Don't underestimate your impressions of the college! Review your notes and pictures from your college visit. Review your research and college materials/information. Potentially most important, listen to your gut!

As a review, here is a list of major things to consider when choosing your college:

- Financial cost
 - Tuition
 - In-state v. Out-of-state
 - Private v. Public
 - Review scholarship offers
- Academic standing and reputation
- Acceptance rate
- Which classes and/or majors are available and how often

- What extracurricular activities are available
- Distance from home
- Support and accommodations for mental health/disabilities
- Your impression
 - Review notes and pictures from college visits
 - Review college material/information
 - Listen to your gut!

Accepting Your Offer of Enrollment

The deadline to inform your college is typically May 1st. Most colleges will want you to respond to their offer of enrollment online, but the specific details will be stated in the letter of acceptance. Please refer to your offer of enrollment for details.

Housing

Unfortunately, we can't provide you the same amount of detail in regards to the housing application process as the rest of this manual as the housing application process varies so much from college to college. Some colleges require that you live on-campus for your first two years while others don't guarantee you on-campus housing for any of your years at the college. The timeline for housing application varies as well; some require you specify your housing preferences in your original college application while for other colleges you are only eligible to apply for housing once you've submitted your Letter of Intent (to register for that college). Bottom line is that you have to just check the requirements and timeline for each college.

We have provided some things to consider while investigating your housing options:

- Timeline for housing application/due dates of the college for signing up or giving preferences
- Housing requirements (e.g. are you required to live-on campus?)
- Is there usually a waitlist for on-campus housing?
- Non-refundable application fee
- Are there different types of housing? (e.g. theme housing etc.)
- Accommodations for special needs (e.g. wheelchair, service animal, allergies etc.)
- Distance from campus
- Shuttle service
- Dining and meal plans
- Parking
- Cost
- Number of roommates
- Co-ed or single gender
- Bathroom style (in room, in suite, in hallway)

Often times on-campus housing is in demand so the sooner you apply the greater chance you have of getting the housing you want. If you wait to the last minute you might not get any on-campus housing (and will be forced to live off-campus). Some people love living off-campus, but it's important to consider the differences between living on-campus and off-campus.

Table 8: On- and Off-Campus Housing

	Pros	Cons
On-campus housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Immersed in campus life/instant social life• Facilities and amenities are readily accessible• Close to campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited quiet time• Communal bathrooms

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probably on meal plan • Living with other undergrads 	
Off-campus housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More space and privacy • More independence • More integrated in community • No dorm rules (e.g. curfew, kitchen rules etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolated from peers • Increased demands and responsibilities (e.g. bills, amenities, cooking)

If you decide to live off-campus, it's important to consider the aforementioned items. You may want a roommate to reduce housing costs but before signing the lease we encourage you to meet up (or at the very least talk/email) your potential roommate. Here are some important things to consider when searching for a roommate:

- Schedules (e.g. early bird or night owl)
- Light or sound sleeper
- Eating habits (e.g. cooking, sharing food etc.)
- Activity preferences (e.g. hosting friends/parties, studying at home, being a homebody etc.)
- Smoking or drinking
- How to problem solve (e.g. passive aggressive)
- Cleanliness (e.g. washing dishes, vacuuming etc.)
- Significant others and friends and boundaries for house guests or visitors
- Their past roommates (e.g. have they had troubles with past roommates?)
- Other quirks (e.g. temperature, music/silence when sleeping etc.)

Know Your College Resources

Orientation

Every college has an orientation process and we highly encourage you to attend it! Orientation is a great opportunity to learn where everything is located, find friends and student organizations/clubs, and meet mentors/advisors.

Offices and Services

Financial Aid and Scholarships Office

The Financial Aid and Scholarships Office helps students navigate the financial aid processes, teaches students about financial literacy and their financial options, and offers financial aid programs.

Health Center/Counseling Center

Most colleges require students to have health insurance, either through their parents (or some other method) but if they don't have coverage, they can get it through the college. The student health insurance is usually very affordable. The college health center is often available to all students (does not depend what type of health insurance they have) and offers many medical and mental health services at affordable prices.

- General medicine services (e.g. treatment of minor injuries, physical exams, routine health assessments, laboratory services, specialist referrals, immunizations, etc.)
- Men's clinic services (sometimes these are in a separate building or in the same building)
- Counseling clinic services (e.g. anxiety, depression, learning struggles, advisement, etc.)
- Women's clinic services (e.g. well-woman exam, pap smear, breast exams, contraception, etc.)

Libraries

Libraries are awesome resources located right on campus. They often have different types of study rooms (for individuals or groups), computers, textbooks, journals, and librarians. It is important to not underestimate librarians as they are a fantastic resource who can help you find valuable resources and conduct literature reviews. Additionally, you can often save a lot of money by using the textbook at the library instead of purchasing one yourself!

Office of Admissions

The purpose of the Office of Admissions is to guide students with recruitment, campus tours, and admission. We previously mentioned the "Office of Admissions" in the "[Visit Colleges](#)" section.

Office of Disability Services

The Office of Disability Services works with students who are disabled to promote and ensure equal access to all college programs and services. Accommodations might include extra time on assignments/tests, testing in a room with limited distractions, interpreters, course substitutions, priority registration, textbooks in alternate format etc. There are varying policies according to each college in regards to requesting certain services, disclosing to instructors, and renewing services, however, you will need to coordinate that with the Office of Disability Services.

Office of the Registrar

The Office of the Registrar creates and maintains the class schedule, facilitates student registration and enrollment, and manages all the academic records of current and former students. Students are not in contact with the Office of the Registrar until after admission to the university.

Student Affairs

Student affairs is dedicated to providing services and programs that support and improve the student experience. Oftentimes, student affairs functions as the go-to spot where students can ask for help or information. It can also serve as a resource to guide students to the correct department or person.

Student Learning Center

The Student Learning Center (SLC) is an on-campus location which offers free tutoring services to students. The goal of the SLC is to support college students to foster their academic skills/knowledge and succeed in their classes. The large majority of colleges have a SLC but you can ask Student Affairs to confirm if the college has one, and if not, what other services they would recommend (e.g. tutors, off-campus services, etc.). Although the services vary from university to university, the SLC usually focuses on writing, math, science, study skills, and time management.

Parking and Transportation Services

Each university has varying parking and transportation services however, we've included some common services that you might want to investigate:

- Public transportation (e.g. bus, rail, train etc.)
- Parking (e.g. free or paid)
- Biking (e.g. bike parking, bike safety, rental bicycles etc.)
- Campus shuttle (free to students)

In addition to regular parking and transportation services, there are often night safety services available and we encourage you to use them (we want you to be safe!)

- Walking escorts (i.e. Community Service Officers from a student-run operation that provide walkers who walk you to your designated location which is within a reasonable distance from campus)
- Night campus shuttle (free to students)
- Door-to-door night campus shuttle (free to students)

People and Organizations

Professors

Don't be afraid to approach your professors with questions! Feel free to drop by their office hours, snag them after class, or schedule an appointment with them. It might be intimidating but remind yourself that they have chosen to work at a college because they are dedicated to teaching the next generation! They can help you not only understand class concepts, but also help you network and eventually get a job. You'll want 2-3 to serve as references for your later job search or graduate school application.

Graduate Student Instructors (GAs) or Teaching Assistants (TAs)

Similar to professors, GAs and TAs can help you understand course content and even give you general life advice. If you are a little nervous approaching your professor, GAs and TAs can seem a bit more approachable. They are also perhaps a bit more relatable as they are typically closer to your age and your stage of life (they were undergraduates themselves not so long ago...well, compared to professors!). They may have their own office hours to help with class content questions.

Mentors and Advisors

Mentors and advisors are fantastic resources. They can be anyone including professors, GAs, TAs, a staff member, or an older student. A good mentor is someone who is willing to share his/her knowledge and experiences with you in an attempt to help you grow both personally and professionally. See below for a list of characteristics of a good mentor:

- Takes a personal interest in mentoring
- Values ongoing learning and personal/professional growth
- Provides guidance and constructive feedback
- Respected by colleagues and employees

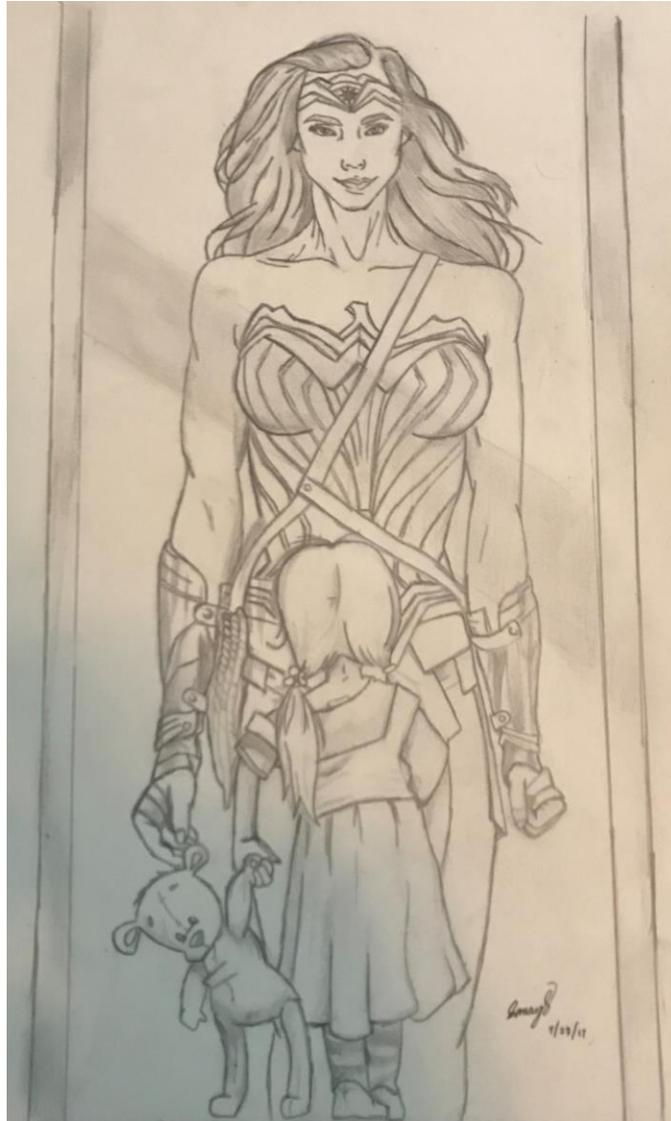
Remember, it's not all about the mentor; you have to be a good mentee! See below for a list of characteristics of a good mentee:

- Be proactive and inquisitive
- Be interested and enthusiastic
- Be respectful

- Have follow-through

Student Organizations and Clubs

Student organizations are a great way to make friends in a new and sometimes difficult situation as college is unfamiliar and everyone is still adjusting. You can often make friends who might be as confused as you are and work together to navigate this unfamiliar environment. Additionally, you might find a mentor through these student organizations. Finally, student organizations are a fantastic method to try a new activity or continue pursuing an old passion.



“The most important thing in the world is how you see yourself.”

Artwork by Samay Shivshankar

Tips to Succeed

From our own experience, we know that college can be challenging and tempting to quit but we hope you to stick with it! College is about learning to conquer those challenges and learning how to learn (and also learning the subject matter at hand). Gaining the knowledge, determination, and skill set to overcome these challenges you encounter in college will serve you throughout life. Although these challenges may seem insurmountable, there are actually a lot of resources and support networks available in college compared to many other aspects of life, you just have to know where to look. Don't be afraid to talk to people and ask for help. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, it's actually a sign of strength and resourcefulness! If you don't know where to start, you can check out our recommendations listed in "[Offices and Services](#)", "[People and Organizations](#)", and "[Helpful Organizations and Resources](#)".

Be proactive! Being proactive can help you deal with these challenges. When a person is proactive, he/she plans ahead and takes preventative actions to control a situation (which often reduces potential stress) rather than frantically responding to the chaos which is a result of an uncontrolled action. An example of being proactive in regards to your college career (e.g. achieving good grades, developing a strong professional network etc.) would include getting to know your professors, creating a study plan, developing social connections, and managing stress.

- Be determined
- Ask for help
- Be proactive

Study Locations

There is no universal study location that works for all of us (and that's good otherwise we'd all be packed like sardines!). Studying in various locations can help to figure out what works best for you. Some common locations might include your room, the lounge, coffee shops, the Student Learning Center, and libraries. Wherever you end up studying, we recommend that you don't get too comfortable because if you're already tired you might end up falling asleep! Additionally, it might be a good idea to study with a friend if you like to have someone to keep you accountable or share resources.

Study Techniques

College is not the same as high school; be prepared for an increased workload that you may be expected to do more independently! We've divided up our list of study techniques into three sections: 1) During Class, 2) After Class, and 3) SMART Goals. <http://slc.berkeley.edu/study-and-success-strategies> is a great webpage created University of California, Berkeley that details fantastic study tips.

During Class

We know that this may sound obvious, but listen and pay attention when you go to class! There's no point in going to class if you are just going to sleep (you may think you'll absorb the information through osmosis, but trust us, that doesn't really work). You may have heard this a million times before, but it's repeated because it's important; don't be afraid to ask questions! If you don't like asking questions during lecture, catch your professor, graduate student instructor, or teaching assistant after class. Also, you can always drop by or schedule office hours (those are great times to talk to your instructor because it's one-on-one and your instructor can really get to know you). Please don't be intimidated by them; remember, they are instructors because they like to teach.

There are a variety of ways to take notes and you just have to figure out what works best for you. If you're a fast typist, perhaps you'd like taking notes on your computer. If you learn best by writing things out, then write in a notebook. You might want to think about developing a shorthand so you won't fall behind when taking notes. In shorthand, "change" might be replaced with "Δ", "question" might be replaced with "Q", "answer" might be replaced with "A" etc. You should also factor in the subject as it might be hard to type math notes (think about all those equations and symbols!).

- Pay attention
- Ask questions
- Take notes (written or typed)
- Develop a shorthand

After Class

It's important to think about how much you need to study, when to study, how long study sessions should be, how to keep track of your assignments and deadlines, who to study with, and what type of notes best fit your learning style. First off, don't procrastinate despite how tempting it might be! You will be regretting it when something super fun comes up later and you can't go because you still have to do your assignment. We recommend studying difficult subjects when you are alert (aka study them first), planning to study two hours for every one hour spent in class (e.g. if you spend 3 hours in lecture a week, plan to study 6 hours outside of class each week), and study in smaller blocks of time instead of one gigantic block (e.g. 1-3 hour blocks instead of one 9 hour block). It's important to let your brain process information over time and that's why people say "let me sleep on it"! Additionally, we've found using planners and calendars incredibly helpful to keep track of deadlines (e.g. homework, projects, midterms, finals etc.) and to-do lists.

Study groups can be helpful in figuring out hard concepts and also motivating you to not procrastinate! Don't be afraid to ask classmates, they probably want study-mates as well! If you are having trouble finding/asking classmates, feel free to ask your graduate student instructor or teaching assistant to help you find study-mates.

We mentioned it a bit earlier, but everyone has different learning styles and you need to figure out which is the best for you (e.g. visual, auditory etc.) and tailor your study habits accordingly. There are various websites available that can help you figure out your personality traits and what learning style best fits you including www.16personalities.com. If you are a visual learner, rewriting/organizing your notes from class or creating notecards might be effective. Nowadays in the age of technology, you can create notecards online (e.g. TinyCards (phone app) or www.vocabulary.com) or write them down the old fashioned way. If you are an auditory learner, then listening to the textbook recording might be more effective (and then you can multitask as you walk across campus!).

- Don't procrastinate!
- Study difficult subjects when you're alert
- Plan to study for two hours for every one hour spent in class
- Study for small blocks of time instead of one huge chunk
- Use a planner or calendar to keep track of deadlines and to-do lists
- Create a study group
- Tailor study habits to your learning style

SMART Goals

A SMART goal is a method to clarify a goal and break it down into smaller, achievable pieces. Each letter represents a characteristic of goal setting that helps make the goal more attainable: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. We will apply this method to a situation you might encounter in college and first glance, this might seem a bit overwhelming, but let's break it down.

Broad Goal: Write an 18 page research paper this semester (10 weeks)

- Specific: I will generate ideas and conduct research with the help of the librarian and Student Learning Center
- Measurable: I will write three pages each week for weeks six weeks
- Achievable: Yep! I know I can write three pages each week
- Relevant: Yep! This is important to me OR This will get me closer to where I want to be
- Time-bound: I will complete the research in the first two weeks and aim to write three pages each week for six weeks, leaving two weeks for editing

SMART Goal: Within the first two weeks I will generate ideas (with the help of the librarian and Student Learning Center) and conduct research which will serve as a basis for this paper. For the next six weeks I will write 3 pages each week which will provide a rough draft of the paper. I will spend the last two weeks editing the paper and turn it in on time.

Now then, this assignment doesn't seem as bad right?! Check out <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm> and <https://www.thebalance.com/smart-goal-examples-2951827> for more information and examples about SMART Goals.



Artwork by Mina Silva

Table 9: Timeline of Overall College Application

Timeline	Activities
Before, throughout, and after high school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide what is important to you (it might not be college!) • Save money for college • Take courses that can earn you college credit to save money (e.g. AP) • Achieve good grades • Participate in extracurricular activities (e.g. sports, volunteer, job) • Create and update resume • Investigate colleges • Network with colleague and maintain relationships • Talk to your mentor, advisor, or school counselor
10th grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take PSAT • Attend camps and college fairs
11th grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT • Apply for scholarships
12th grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take SAT and/or ACT • Apply for scholarships • Visit colleges • Investigate college's resources (e.g. student affairs) • Apply to college (e.g. early decision, regular decision) • Notify college if you will enroll
Freshman in college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend college orientation • Discover college's resources (e.g. student affairs, professors, graduate student instructors, teaching assistants) • Become involved in student organizations
Sophomore in college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intern at an organization and/or company
Junior in college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intern at an organization and/or company
Senior in college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply for jobs (at least 6 months before graduation)
Post-college (1 year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay at that job for at least 1 year
Post-college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take educational seminars and/or attend conferences to increase your knowledge and skill set • Reflect on your job and which aspects of the job you like. This will help you figure out what you want in your next job • Negotiate for a promotion or raise • Apply for other jobs

Note: Check out Generation TX (GenTX) for some awesome downloadable material to help you navigate the entire process including timeline checklists! <http://gentx.org/resources/make-it-happen/>

Resumes

A resume is a written document that contains a summary of your education background, work/volunteer experience, relevant skills, and awards/achievements. You should start making a resume while in high school. It's always good to have an up-to-date resume on hand because they take a while to perfect and you never know when you're going to need it! Additionally, having an up-to-date resume is helpful in that it forces you to keep track of all of that information.

There are many different ways to format a resume, so put some effort and thought into how you want to organize your resume and don't be afraid to ask others for their input. It will take a fair amount of time to perfect your resume. Resumes are 'living documents' and should constantly be updated. Additionally, you should know that a recruiter will sometimes spend only a short time reviewing your resume so make sure it's easy to read.

Basic Sections of a Resume

- Name
- Contact information (email, address, LinkedIn)
- Education (school, graduation date, degree, major, GPA)
- Professional/work history (organization, dates, your title, your responsibilities)
- Volunteer/community service/extracurricular activities
- Awards/achievements
- Relevant skills (depends on the job)

How to Organize Your Resume

In regards to choosing how to organize your resume, there are two main templates: 1) chronological (by time) and 2) functional (suited for the job or school). For chronological resumes, you start by listing your work/professional history in reverse chronological order with your most current job/school first. These are one of the most common resume types and allows you to easily showcase your work/professional history (<https://www.thebalance.com/what-is-a-chronological-resume-2061944>). Functional resumes focus on your skills and experience rather than your work/professional history; you can organize by theme such as skills or qualifications (<https://www.thebalance.com/what-is-a-functional-resume-2061997>). If you decide to use a functional resume, you should still include your employment history at the bottom of resume as well as write a very strong cover letter.

Table 10: Chronological and Functional Resumes

	Chronological resume	Functional resume
Emphasis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skills and qualifications

Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most common type of resume and recruiters are familiar with it • Emphasizes work history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizes specific skills and capabilities (rather than job titles and amount of time at a job)
This is for me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have relevant work experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are new to the workforce • If you have gaps in work history • If you are looking to change careers/industries • If you are applying to a job with very specific requirements
This is not for me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have gaps in work history • If you have frequently changed jobs or careers/industries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have relevant work experience and no gaps in your work history

How to Write an Amazing Resume

Crafting a resume is not an easy task; it takes skill and practice. As we said before, do not be afraid to ask others for their opinion and help! It is helpful to have someone else look over your resume and offer feedback as they provide a fresh new set of eyes. Learn from the experiences of others (this applies to everything, not just resumes). We've boiled it down to the following steps broken into two sections: content and formatting.

Content Tips:

- Use action verbs to describe your job (<http://career.opcd.wfu.edu/files/2011/05/Action-Verbs-for-Resumes.pdf>)
- Look at the jobs you want and include similar wording from the job description
- Be detailed when describing your job experiences; include numbers and percentages to showcase your effort and impact
- Questions to ask yourself might include: How many people attended the event, what was the exact budget, how large was your team, how many people did you supervise, how many events did you organize, and how many reports did you write?
- Don't try to generalize all of your job responsibilities into one or two sentences if they don't fit as it will result in a description so vague that it actually says nothing
- Highlight your job responsibilities in the best possible light and the skills and knowledge gained
- Be mindful that everything you include in your resume you'd actually be able to talk about in an interview; don't exaggerate!

Formatting Tips:

- Make your resume easy to read!!!
- Don't underestimate the power of white space!

- Ensure that formatting is consistent throughout your entire resume
- Avoid typos
- Keep it short and sweet (typically no more than two pages)

GED (General Educational Development) Test

A GED is an official certificate that is equivalent to a high school diploma; it demonstrates that one has the academic knowledge and skills equal to a high school graduate. It is designed for people who did not graduate from high school for whatever reason. The GED is available in English and Spanish.

If you are thinking about earning a GED over a high school diploma, we encourage talking this option over with several people you respect (e.g. a parent, teacher, someone who chose a GED) to consider the pros and cons.

There are four sections: 1) reasoning through language arts, 2) mathematical reasoning, 3) science, and 4) social studies. The test is about 7.5 hours long; reasoning through language arts is 150 minutes, mathematical reasoning is 115 minutes, science is 90 minutes, and social studies is 90 minutes.

The cost of GED varies from \$0 to \$40 depending on the state and fee reductions. If you feel that you need to prepare you can find study materials at www.GED.com (preparing for the GED is similar to preparing for any other standardized test, so please refer to the section on "[How to Prepare for Standardized Tests](#)"). You can sign up to take the GED at www.GED.com

Helpful Organizations and Resources

There are a number of resources and websites that may help you apply to college or transition to adulthood in general, including:

ACT

ACT.org is where you register to take the ACT for college admissions (and send scores to colleges). See more details at www.act.org

Big Future

Big Future is an organization supported by College Board and has resources to help you navigate the college application process ranging from figuring out what you want, investigating colleges, applying to colleges, and finally paying for college. See more details at www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org

Café College Houston

Café College Houston is the result of a partnership between the Houston Public Library and Project GRAD and is supported by the City of Houston. Although it is dedicated to helping low-income students and those who are first in their family to go to college, services (which are all free) are available to all students. The services revolve around college entry and enrollment, financial aid, college transition, career planning, and goal setting. Services are available in English and Spanish. See more details at <http://cafecollegehouston.org/>

Children At Risk *

Children At Risk is an organization that both conducts research and houses advocacy programs dedicated to helping first generation college students complete their education. There are a lot of students who start college but drop out due to various issues ranging from financial, emotional, or situational problems. As a result, a significant number of those students end up with debt and no way to pay it back. Children At Risk helps young adults by educating public policy makers about various factors that impact the lives of adolescents and young adults. See more details at www.childrenatrisk.org

College Board

Collegeboard.org is where you go to register to take AP/CLEP exams, PSAT, SAT, and SAT subject tests. See more details at www.collegeboard.org

College for All Texans

College for All Texans is a website that is dedicated to providing all the information necessary to consider and apply to college (similar to this manual!). Topics include finding the right college, paying for college, taking standardized tests, and transferring college credits. In addition to the

aforementioned topics, there are tailored plans for students, military, and adult learners. These plans may help you create a timeline to prepare and apply for college. See more details at <http://www.collegeforalltexas.com/>

College Niche

College Niche is a college search website with school profiles and rankings (e.g. admission rates, tuition fees, student population, campus life, and median earnings after graduation). See more details at www.niche.com

edX

edX was created by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard University in May 2012. It hosts university-level courses in different disciplines (ranging from computer programming to project management to food science). If you are interested in earning a verified certificate you have the option of paying a nominal amount of money, otherwise you have the option to audit the courses for free. See more details at <https://www.edx.org/>

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

Fafsa.ed.gov is where you go to apply for the FAFSA to help determine whether students are eligible for financial aid (e.g. federal loans, grants, scholarships, or work-study programs). It is also a prerequisite for some colleges for their own scholarships. The FAFSA is federal student financial aid dedicated for college bound students. See more details at www.fafsa.ed.gov

Generation TX (GenTX)

Generation TX is an organization that works to clarify the steps needed to go to college and career education. These steps include applying to college, paying for college, and figuring out which classes and tests to take. They have some awesome downloadable material to help you navigate the entire process including timeline checklists (don't underestimate the power of these as they will help you stay organized!) and financial aid resources. See more details at www.gentx.org

Genesys Works

Genesys Works is an organization that works to help disadvantaged high school students by giving them the skills and knowledge to succeed in college/their career. It provides an eight week training during the summer in addition to a paid, year-long internship (20 hours per week), college/career coaching, and alumni support. Students must apply to be a high school junior on track to graduate (see the website for other eligibility requirements). Please note that this program is in addition (not a replacement) to high school. See more details at <http://www.genesysworks.org/about-us/locations/houston/>

Khan Academy

Khan Academy is a non-profit organization that provides short YouTube educational lectures on various topics, including college applications and SAT prep. The college application section includes: getting started, making high school count, exploring college options, applying to college, paying for college, and wrapping up. Khan Academy has partnered with College Board on the SAT prep section which includes eight official full-length practice tests, study and test-taking tips, etc. See more details at www.khanacademy.org

National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)*

National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) is an association composed of individuals, institutions, and organizations dedicated to serving admission counseling professionals. Their work is seen much more on the policy level as they promote high ethical practices, encourage diversity and social justice, and conduct legislative advocacy. See more details at <https://www.nacacnet.org/>

National Center for Educational Statistics

National Center for Educational Statistics is a government site that collects data on all the colleges. Information provided includes tuition fees, financial aid, enrollment/graduation rates, accreditation, and campus security, etc. See more details at <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>

National College Access Network*

National College Access Network is an organization dedicated to empowering communities to improve access to colleges, especially for those who are underrepresented in postsecondary education. The Network works towards this goal by providing member organizations with resources (e.g. professional development, networking, and up-to-date information) that help support those organizations deliver college access to students. Additionally, the Network advocates for policies to improve college access for students at the national level. See more details at <http://www.collegeaccess.org>

Project GRAD

Project GRAD is a Houston-based non-profit organization dedicated to working with low-income communities and supporting students on the journey to achieving their higher education aspirations. Starting in ninth grade and continuing through college, Project GRAD provides free support and resources to help young adults succeed and achieve their goals. There are a variety of services available including: Café College, College Institute Summer Programs, “CLASS ACT” (rigorous, well-defined, college prep curriculum), financial aid/scholarships, College Transition Conferences, text-based mentoring, and mentoring programs (Project GRAD at the University, i-MENTOR for College Success, and GRAD Ambassadors). See more details at <https://www.projectgradhouston.org/>

Posse Foundation

Posse Foundation is an organization that selects certain public high school students with noteworthy potential for academic and leadership achievements and both places them in supportive environments designed to help them succeed as well as provides them with four-year full tuition leadership scholarships. See more details at <http://www.possefoundation.org>

SER-Jobs

SER-Jobs is an organization that is designed to empower individuals, businesses, and communities by providing education, training, and employment services. SER-Jobs matches clients with a career coach to help the clients take control of their situation and also embrace their already existing strengths. Their programs include: job training (e.g. skilled trades, building trades, environmental training, and safety training), updated job postings, a financial services center, and educational classes. Most notably, SER-Jobs offers these services (education, training, and employment services) to young adults (16-24 years) for free! See more details at <http://www.SERhouston.org>

*Organizations that are geared towards legislative action and are more policy-based

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