

College Resources

Searching for the Right College

Choosing Your **College Priorities**



Regardless of how prestigious a college is or how much it costs, college success is all about finding the right college fit. It won't matter if your parents graduated from there, or if all of your high school friends plan to enroll there in the fall, if the college isn't a good fit for you. This means finding a college that offers what you need in terms of academics, location, campus and social life. If these factors don't fit you, then little else will matter.

The chart below contains many college fit factors. Select the five that are the most important to you. What do you need most to be comfortable and succeed? Then, select five that are the least important to you. These are factors that, for you, don't matter as much if your other needs are met. Prioritizing what matters to you will help you add or eliminate potential schools from your college search.

Location

- Distance from home
- Weather
- Off-campus setting
- Geography: beaches, mountains, etc.

Academics

- Majors offered
- Academic reputation
- Teaching style
- Classes outside your major
- Class size

Campus

- Size
- Atmosphere
- Dorms
- Diversity
- Cost (tuition, room, board, fees)
- Financial aid

Social Life

- Clubs, sports and recreational opportunities
- Art scene
- Greek life
- Going to college with friends from high school

What is most important to me in a college?

What is least important to me in a college?



What Sets You Apart?



Fill this out before you begin your college search to get an idea of your accomplishments and what you want out of college. Bring this to your counselor to start a discussion.

Name

GPA

SAT Score

ACT Score

My Academic Strengths Are

Science

Math

English

Foreign Language

History

Technology

Fine Arts

How would your best friends describe you?

What adjectives would you say best describe you?

What in-school activities do you enjoy most?



What activities do you enjoy least?

What out-of-school activities do you participate in? Volunteer work?

Which talents make you stand out?

Prior to graduation I hope to accomplish ...

After high school I hope to accomplish ...

STARTING YOUR SEARCH

Where do I start? There are almost countless points on which to compare institutions. The key to beginning is in taking a careful look at yourself, and then matching your strengths/desires to the characteristics of a college. We can help too: if you can describe the institution you are seeking in general terms, we can suggest colleges that best fit that description.

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Why are you going to college?

? What do you want from your education, or what do you hope to gain?

? Are you ready to go to college, or does the prospect of a “gap year” seem appealing?

? Will one or two overriding considerations shape your choice of college? How do you want to grow and change in the next few years?

? What kind of environment would stimulate or inhibit the growth you would like to see?

? What satisfactions and frustrations do you expect to encounter?

? What are you looking forward to, and what worries you most?

? How much structure and direction do you want, or need? What academic environment is best for you?

? What balance of study, activities and social life suits you best?

? How interested are you in the substance of

intellectual life: books, ideas, issues and discussion?

? Do you want an academic program where you must work and think hard or one where you can make respectable grades without knocking yourself out?

? How important is it to you to perform at the top, or would you be satisfied with the middle or bottom?

? Are you more interested in the breadth of the liberal arts or the focus of pre-professional tracks? Which interests or activities do you want to pursue?

? Do they require any distinct facilities, programs, or opportunities?

What kinds of surroundings are essential to your wellbeing?

? How would you enjoy being in a different part of the country?

? Are there certain places, activities, countryside terrain, weather or pace of life that make you content? Or excited? Or overly distressed?

? Do you prefer a fast-paced environment where something is happening most of the time, or an organized environment where you can join a wide variety of planned activities, or a more serene and relaxed environment where you can go your own way?

? Would you like to be one of 20,000 students, one of 2,000, or somewhere in between?

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13

13

NARROWING YOUR PREFERENCES

Using your reflections from those questions to guide you, consider narrowing your preferences into 5 broad categories of the college search:

1. Location
2. Environment
3. Size
4. Academics
5. Cost

(region, distance, time) (city, suburbs, small town, rural) (small, medium, large) (desired majors if any—most students are “undecided”—and challenge/balance) (family limits, availability of scholarships)

THE GAP YEAR OPTION

A gap year allows students to spend some time before college participating in experiential educational opportunities that might include work, travel, internships and community service, or even academic programs in new settings. A gap year offers students the opportunity to gain focus and discipline, learn to set realistic goals, and get real-world experiences.

Growing in popularity in the United States, gap year participants often report that the experience has a direct impact on their success in college in that it offers a chance to think about what they want to get out of the next stage of their education, and provides experiences that often shape their course of study and future career plans.

If you are interested in exploring the idea of a gap year, please discuss it with us. It is a good idea to begin planning a gap year early, but we also recommend that students apply to colleges, and then ask for a deferment from the college of their choice. See our website for a comprehensive listing of gap year options, but the links below offer good places to start.

RESOURCES: □ <http://www.planetgapyear.com/> □ <http://www.transitionsabroad.com/index.shtml>

PROGRAMS:

- € <http://www.americorps.org/> - Americorps
- € <http://www.cityyear.org/home.aspx> - City Year
- € <http://www.ciee.org/hsabroad/gap/index.html> - Council on International Educational Exchange
- € <http://www.elcasalbarcelona.com/index.php> - El Casal de Barcelona
- € <http://www.esu.org/> - The English-Speaking Union
- € <http://www.interimprograms.com/> - The Center for Interim Programs
- € <http://www.nols.edu/> - National Outdoor Leadership School
- € <http://www.outwardbound.org/> - Outward Bound
- € <http://www.roundsquare.org/> - Round Square

Exchange

□ € <http://www.fieldstudies.org/> - The School for Field Studies

□ € <http://www.semesteratsea.org/> - Semester at Sea

□ € <http://www.thesca.org/> - Student Conservation Association

□ € <http://www.thinkingbeyondborders.org/> - Thinking Beyond Borders

□ € <http://www.wheretherebedragons.com/> - Where There Be Dragons

SPECIAL TALENTS & CONSIDERATIONS

ARTS

In addition to the brief treatment below, we provide an extensive section on the Arts later in this handbook and on our website.

Depending on the level of your skill and achievement, your talent in the arts may well make a difference in your admission process at a school where you may otherwise be a borderline applicant.

□ •Some students have developed their artistic talents to such a high degree that they are able to prepare portfolios, CD's, or DVD's of their work to include as a part of their application— typically as supplements uploaded electronically or housed in websites that you create. Along with us, members of our Arts Department will happily consult with you as you consider and prepare any work of this sort.

□ •Many selective music and drama programs, and schools of the arts, require that applicants audition or present a portfolio for their limited spots. In such cases, the audition/portfolio can often be the deciding factor in the admission process. Students should consult with their music/drama/art teachers for information on topics like national “portfolio days” and preparing for auditions. Your college counselor can be a good sounding board, and Mrs. Ball is the point-person in our office for students who want to pursue the arts in college, but in all cases you should plan on meeting well in advance with your arts teachers for primary guidance. The process of preparing for an audition or developing a portfolio can take several months, not just a few weeks, and it is important to honor your teachers’ time and effort as much as their expertise. In addition, deadlines for arts supplements may be well before the admission application deadline, so it is important to check each college for its requirements. In the Resources section at the end of this handbook are some suggestions of helpful guidebooks for students who want to pursue the arts in college, either at an arts school or in a strong program. **ATHLETICS In addition to the brief treatment below, we provide an extensive section on Athletics later in this handbook and on our website.** If you want to compete in college athletics, it is wise to engage in an open and frank dialog now with your high school coaches to determine programs that might best fit your skills, and to begin mapping out your recruiting process during your freshman and sophomore years.

□ •You must be proactive in the control of that process—do not assume that college coaches will contact you. The process can be very lengthy and involved, and demands constant vigilance. It is your responsibility to make the initial and ongoing contact with the college coaches, and to honor your coaches’ time and effort as well as their expertise by communicating with them early and often.

□ We will work in conjunction with you and your coaches to develop your prospective college list, and Mr. Leipheimer is the point-person in our office for athletic recruiting, but your coaches will be the primary and best resource for guiding you through the specific recruiting process. It is absolutely unnecessary to pay outside private consultants to help you prepare your athletic résumé and materials. Our coaches are well versed in these needs, and college coaches do not look more favorably on “glossy” products.

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14

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15

15

LEARNING DIFFERENCES

If you have a diagnosed learning disability, you may want to research the process for securing extended-time accommodations for standardized testing. Contact Dr. Todd Hanneman, our Chair of Academic Services, to learn what is involved in obtaining extended-time accommodations and which accommodations are appropriate for your individual situation.

The testing agency (the College Board or the ACT) decides whether or not to grant accommodations; in general, the process

includes:

□ •A current diagnosis (within the past 3 years) from a recognized psychologist or learning specialist that specifically recommends extended-time on standardized tests like the SAT/ACT, and the use of extended-time on timed assignments/tests/exams in school

□ •The process of assembling, completing, and submitting the accommodation request materials takes a minimum of 8 weeks to coordinate, not including time needed to gain an updated evaluation—planning ahead is essential. Beyond the matter of standardized testing, you may want to include your disability as a factor in the college search. It is a good idea to research the services available at the colleges that interest you (academic service offices, levels/types of accommodations, etc.). Also, you may want to consider attesting to your disability in your admission application materials if you feel the disability has had an impact on your high school academic career. This is a highly individualized decision, and your counselor can help you navigate this and other related issues. The K&W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder is an excellent resource available in bookstores and in the college office.

DEEPENING YOUR SEARCH

RESEARCH

This is the step many students skip, to their detriment. Take the time to examine your options fully. Whether your research changes your mind, allows you to discover new points of consideration or concern, or simply reinforces your original thoughts, it will be well worth your effort. After all, you are considering living somewhere for the next four years! It is your education, and your reading on the school outweighs anyone else's thoughts. Others will be there to help you, and their thoughts and recommendations are important. However, you must be able to make intelligent, informed decisions.

Today, the best source for your research is the web—explore the websites of the colleges on your list. Hit the admission sites, take the virtual tours and surf the links. But don't stop there—check out the academic departments and course offerings that interest you, the activities that you want to pursue, and the information on student life.

□ For schools that interest you, sign up online to receive further materials from them. This sign-up will most often be under links like, “Contact Us” or “Request Materials.” This important effort not only places you on their mailing list to obtain more information, but also gets you into their system as a “prospective applicant.” Many colleges track interest, even by these simple requests, and use that interest as a measure in their admission deliberations.

Use guidebooks to supplement your web research—we have recommendations for guides at the end of this handbook, which you can view in our resource room or pick up at local bookstores. Some guides are exclusively objective while others contain bias, but most offer quick and helpful points of comparison.

After digesting the information, devise a filing system and keep

all of your notes and material. You will want to go back and consult it over time.

VISITS

The campus visit is one of the most important steps in your college search. It should be the most influential factor in shaping your impression of a college. Make each visit as thorough and productive as possible. No impression or review of any institution is as important as the one you form on your own. As serious as that sounds and is, don't forget to have fun with these visits—enjoy yourself!

Don't plan a long-distance trip around just one school. Countless numbers of students head out intent on one school only to return excited about a different college; often it is one visited almost as an afterthought. The point of visiting is to educate yourself regarding options.

Make your visit "official" by going to the admission office and taking the group tour and information session. If individual interviews are available, it is best to take advantage of that opportunity. Don't be surprised, though, if interviews are not offered.

□ The admission office's website is the easiest source for information on tour/information session/interview times and any pre-registration required, or you can simply give the admission office a call.

Website: <http://college-counseling.collegiate-va.org> 16

16

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Look to gain both information and the “feel” for the place—can you see yourself there, and do the students, professors, and surroundings appeal to you? Observe carefully, but also listen thoughtfully to what is said and speak up with questions of your own—see the bottom of this section for sample questions that you can ask your tour guide.

□ Ask for the business card of the admission officer that directs the information session and/or the card of our regional representative in the office. It is wise to follow your visit with a thank-you note, and that person can remain a valuable contact at the college for future questions or advice.

□ If possible, extend your visit beyond the two hours typically taken dedicated to a tour and information session. Speak with other students or spend some time in the student union. Read bulletin boards and observe what takes place on campus. Drive around the town. Have a meal somewhere. Even in the summer, a great deal of insight can be made as to a college's atmosphere.

□ If you have special interest such as music or a sport, arrange a meeting with a person in that department. Faculty members, coaches and activity leaders are often available and happy to speak with students during a visit. However, these meetings almost always need to be scheduled ahead of time. Take good notes after each visit. Often things that seem so fresh in your mind about a school will become more distant over the ensuing months. **SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR TOUR GUIDE:**

□ € How large are your classes? Who teaches them? Who grades tests and exams?

- € Do students work primarily for interest in subject matter, or are they more interested in grades?
- € What are the opportunities for undergraduate research? For internships?
- € Have you been in any faculty homes since you've been here?
- € What are the study abroad programs like? Are they popular?
- € What is the career services office like?
- € Any chance we could see a class after the tour?
- € Where do students hang out? I have a few hours—where would you suggest I go next?
- € What are the hottest issues on campus?
- € What are the primary social groups on campus? What is the social life like?
- € Why did you choose this college? What would you change about it?
- € What do you think is the most distinctive aspect of your education here?

INTERVIEWS

If you have the chance to interview, we strongly urge you to take it. A meeting with a member of the Admission staff is always productive and helpful; you can learn more about the institution and add to the information you gave (or will give) on your application. And, “doing” the interview can reflect the increasingly important “demonstrated interest” on your behalf. While interviews will often “count” as part of the admission process, they are usually not the basis on which admission

decisions are made.

Since many institutions no longer offer interviews, don't be surprised if one is not available, but some allow you to interview with alums in the local area. Ask the admission office if they schedule such interviews, especially if you have been unable to visit the campus. It shows that you are taking an active interest in that college, and gives you a chance to learn more about life on that campus, even if alum reps don't always carry decisive weight in admission.

PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW:

Even though it is impossible to predict exactly what an interviewer may ask, certain types of approaches and questions are common. The typical college interview lasts about 30 minutes, and usually opens with questions that you can answer easily and comfortably. Then, the interviewer may pose more difficult questions. Overall, the interview atmosphere will be conversational so do not feel as if you are about to face an interrogation. However, take great care to be diplomatic and respectful.

□ •Be prepared to answer questions about yourself, your school, your work, and your interests. Keep up with current events, preferably through newspapers, but at least through television and radio. The interviewer may be interested in your opinion on current news, so be sure you know what you think! It is also a good idea to be prepared to discuss something that you have read recently for your own enjoyment.

□ •In some instances, you may need to pause for a few moments before producing an answer. It is perfectly all right to say something like, "I need to think about that," and then reflect for a short while before responding or ask to come back to it later. Of equal importance are the questions you ask of the interviewer. Preparing beforehand is essential; you do not want to ask questions already

answered in the information session or on the tour, or questions about programs that the school does not have. Try to make your questions open-ended, like “Can you tell me about students’ involvement in community service?” rather than “Do you offer service programs?” After any interview, ask for the interviewer’s card. Upon returning home, you can use this card to send him/her a thank-you note. This is an important step to remember, and be sure to keep the card for future reference. Samples follow for interview questions and topics.

Website: <http://college-counseling.collegiate-va.org> 18

18

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19

19

SAMPLE QUESTIONS THE INTERVIEWER MAY ASK YOU:

- € Tell me a little bit about yourself.
- € Which subjects interest you the most? Which have been the most difficult for you?
- € What are your favorite activities outside of the classroom?
- € Have you read anything interesting lately?
- € Are you thinking about a specific major or career path? If so, what is it?

- € What specific things about this college interest you?
- € If you had a million-dollar grant to give away, who would get it, and why?
- € What are the “hot issues” at Collegiate right now?
- € What do you like best about Collegiate? What would you change?
- € Describe the qualities of the best teacher you ever had.
- € What are your best qualities? What are your limitations or what would you change? **SAMPLE TOPICS FOR QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK THE INTERVIEWER:**

- € Academics and faculty
- € The student body
- € Social life and campus activities
- € Campus facilities
- € Community outside the campus
- € Financial aid and merit aid

Common Application

Completing your Common Application

1. Create an Account

(Note: Your email address will become your username and the Common App's primary method of sending you updates and reminders, so make sure that you provide an email address that you check on a regular basis.)

- a. Email address _____
- b. Password (follow rules) _____
- c. First/given name _____
- d. Last/Family/Surname _____
- e. Address _____
- f. Sex _____
- g. Phone _____
- h. Date of Birth _____
- i. First Year/Transfer? _____

2. Gather Information

- a. Copy of your high school transcript
- b. Copy of your current schedule
- c. List of your extracurricular activities both inside and outside of school
- d. Test scores and test dates from your SAT, ACT, Subj. Tests.
- e. Parent/Legal guardian information (See below)

3. Profile Section

- a. Personal Information
 - i. First name _____
 - ii. Middle name _____
 - iii. Last name _____
 - iv. Suffix _____
 - v. Preferred name (nickname) _____
 - vi. Have you ever used any other names? _____
 - vii. Sex _____
 - viii. Date of Birth _____
- b. Address
 - i. Permanent Home address _____
 - ii. Alternate mailing address _____
- c. Contact Details
 - i. Email address _____
 - ii. Preferred phone _____
 - iii. Alternate phone _____
- d. Demographics
 - i. Religious preference _____
 - ii. US armed forces status _____
 - iii. Are you Hispanic or Latino _____

- x. Education level _____
- d. Sibling
 - i. Number of Siblings _____
 - ii. First/Given name _____
 - iii. Middle name _____
 - iv. Last/Family/Surname _____
 - v. Age _____
 - vi. Relationship _____
 - vii. Education level _____
- e. Education
 - i. Current School _____
 - ii. Date of Entry _____
 - iii. Is this a boarding school _____
 - iv. Graduation date _____
 - v. Counselor's prefix _____
 - vi. Counselor's first name _____
 - vii. Counselor's middle initial _____
 - viii. Counselor's last name _____
 - ix. Counselor's job title _____
 - x. Counselor's email _____
 - xi. Counselor's phone number _____
 - xii. Other schools _____
 - xiii. Community Based Organization? _____
 - xiv. Education interruption (have you had any?) _____
 - xv. College & University (only online or on college campus)? _____
 - xvi. Grades
 - 1. Class rank reporting _____
 - 2. Graduating class size _____
 - 3. Cumulative GPA _____
 - 4. GPA Scale _____
 - 5. GPA weighting _____
 - xvii. Current year courses (have your schedule) _____
 - xviii. Honors (awards) _____
 - xix. Future Plans
 - 1. Career interests _____
 - 2. Highest degree you intend to earn _____
- f. Testing
 - i. Do you want to self-report _____
 - ii. Have test type and detailed information _____
- g. Activities
 - i. Up to 10 activities (pick the most meaningful in order)
 - ii. Activity Type
 - iii. Position/Leadership description and organization name, if applicable (50 character max)

- iv. Describe this activity, including what you accomplished and any recognition you received, etc. (100 character max)
 - v. Participation grade levels
 - vi. Timing of participation
 - vii. Hours spent per week
 - viii. Weeks spent per year
 - ix. Do you intend to participate in a similar activity in college?
- h. Writing
- i. 5 different topics to choose from
 - ii. 250-650 words
 - iii. Disciplinary History
 - iv. Additional Information
5. Add schools to your list

Common App Activities Section Do's/Don'ts

DO...	DON'T...
<p>Be sure to list the actual name of the club/activity on the "Position/Leadership" line.</p> <p>Otherwise, colleges will know you're "Secretary," but they won't be sure which club you belong to.</p>	<p>Check "yes" for the "I intend to participate in a similar activity in college" question for <i>all</i> of your activities.</p> <p>Unless you genuinely want to engage in those types of activities in college, you should mark down the occasional "no." A long list of "yesses" can look awfully suspicious.</p>
<p>List your most impressive and relevant activities near the top of the list.</p> <p>In the event that an admissions officer only has time to skim your activities page, you'll want to ensure the first few items are the most compelling.</p>	<p>Provide minimal descriptions for your clubs and activities or type "see attached résumé."</p> <p>Follow the rules and complete the activities page as fully as possible. Most colleges don't allow students to upload separate résumés anyway, and those that do may have little time to actually review them.</p>
<p>Choose a different word at the beginning of each description line.</p> <p>Vary your vocabulary to bring linguistic interest to your list, and avoid vague words that don't reveal any particular skill. Implemented, collaborated, initiated, coached, led, coordinated, and researched are great ones.</p>	<p>Exaggerate your time commitments.</p> <p>Admissions officers know you need to sleep, and they also know that most clubs meet on average of one hour per week. Be truthful, and don't embellish the facts.</p>
<p>Use present tense for activities that are ongoing; past tense for those that have concluded.</p> <p>For example, if you're no longer a member of the school orchestra, you "performed in bi-annual concerts." If you're still involved, you "perform."</p>	<p>Abbreviate school-specific activity names.</p> <p>DRMD might mean something to all of you, but it doesn't mean anything to the Admissions Officer reading your application! Take time to spell out all of your activities.</p>

DO...	DON'T...
<p>Keep your punctuation consistent.</p> <p>If you opt to end one of your descriptions with a period, make sure they all conclude that way.</p>	<p>Feel bad if you have fewer than 10 activities to list.</p> <p>Admissions officers favor depth over breadth, so it's perfectly all right if you've left a few blank lines at the end of the page. As long as your other activities are well-documented and robust in their own right, listing just a handful of clubs/organizations is okay!</p>
<p>Give specific details about your club, rather than providing general explanations.</p> <p>For example, if you helped with fundraising efforts through Key Club, also mention the actual amount of money you raised, in addition to the name of the charity that received the funds.</p>	
<p>Inject some personality in your descriptions.</p> <p>Admissions officers know what "soccer" is, so why not describe the activity with a sense of humor or mention how you enjoy the camaraderie and sportsmanship aspects of the game the most?</p>	
<p>Think outside the box for which activities to list.</p> <p>You are not limited to only including school-sponsored clubs and organizations. If you spend 10 hours per week babysitting at home – list it! If you enjoy tinkering with computers in your spare time – that counts, too!</p>	

General Application Tips

Creating Winning Applications:

(Information shared from Richmond Area Public Schools & PCACAC Workshop August 2016)

How Colleges Read Files:

- Data Driven Read: Focus on quantitative pieces of the application. (Number of Honors/AP Courses, overall GPA, SAT/ACT scores, etc)
- “Whole” Read: Focus on Qualitative pieces of information: (Recommendations, essays, activities, and awards)

Start with a Blank Piece of Paper:

- Write down everything you want an admissions officer to know about you. This should encompass WHO you are and the lessons you have learned along the way. What are YOUR key personality traits and “signature” characteristics. The overall goal is for your application to read like a book about you.

What Matters?

- Grades in courses and course rigor are overwhelmingly the top components that most colleges list of importance. Essays, recommendations, and extra curricular activities are also highlighted as top factors for admission.

Control What Matters:

- Focus on things you can still do to improve your stats: Essay, Letters of Recommendation, and your resume.
- Essays are the highest ranked non-academic feature to an application. The less a college relies solely on data points, the greater the importance of the essay.
- Personal Statements should highlight a specific detail that demonstrates a student’s distinctive traits. It is a good idea to share your topic with your counselor and possibly a teacher so that recommendations can complement them, but not duplicate material.
- **ENSURE TIME FOR REVISION.** The writing center is a great resource for support.

Letters of Recommendation:

- Counselor Letters:
 - Summarize the whole student. Tend to focus on personal traits, setbacks, aspirations, and anything that may need explanation to a review committee. The counselor describes the student within the community and is all-encompassing.
 - Counselors use information from YOU and your PARENTS to write a quality letter. The more time you spend on completing the counselor recommendation packet, the more distinctive your letter will be. You will want to allow at LEAST 10 business days for your counselor to complete a letter after requested.
- Teacher Letters:
 - Focuses on you as a student and is written through the lens of you as a learner. Should focus on you in the classroom and how you react to challenges within academia. Written subject-specifically.

Application Resume:

- Prioritize activities and accolades that are most important to you.
- Attach meaning to activity if space allows.
- There is a template in the counselor packet for seniors that you can emulate, or you can research resume templates online to find a suitable format.

Essay Writing

The Art of Personal Writing

(Information shared from Richmond Area Public Schools & PCACAC Workshop August 2016)

Essays are typically considered the highest ranked non-academic feature of a college application.

You have one chance to make a good first impression- essays breathe “life” into your application.

Brainstorming: (Food for Thought)

- What are your major accomplishments and why do you consider them accomplishments?
- What are your most important extra-curricular activities? What made you join them? What made you continue to contribute to them?
- What is your strongest most unwavering personality trait? How would your friends characterize you? What do they write about you if they were writing the essay for you?
- If you could change anything about yourself, what would it be? Why?
- Consider your favorite books, movies, works of art, etc. Have these influenced your life in a meaningful way? Why are they your favorites?

What is a personal statement?

- Nonfiction narrative writing that tells a true story. The writer can (and should) use “I” The topic is YOU!
- This is your opportunity to provide YOUR voice/identity/personality to your application.
- Personal statements do not have a particular topic- the committee allows you to decide what the committee still needs to know in order to accurately evaluate your application. They should be no longer than 500 words.

Tips in Writing:

- Be real. “Show- don’t tell.”
- “Think small”- It is ok to focus on one item, trait, or topic.
- Be passionate and willing to take risks.
- Do not reiterate information that is already elsewhere in your application. The committee already knows these things about you and is looking for something “additional,” not a repeat of already known things.
- Do not “join the herd”, be foolish, vague, obsess about how to impress, or let your parents take over. College essay committees are looking for an essay in YOUR voice.

Preparing to Write:

- Collect a list of essays that you will need to write.
- Look for how they overlap- it is ok to reuse an essay, just make SURE that you have not put in specific details such as a college’s name.
- Develop a resume
- Create a list of everything else (Not GPA, classes, activities, or test scores) that you want the colleges to know about you.

Introductions: (Some potential ways to kick-start your essay)

- Begin with a brief anecdote
- Create a vivid sense of place
- Present a startling statistic
- Begin with a meaningful quote
- Ask a question

The Writing Process:

- Answer the question. (Do not veer off topic)
- Tell stories that belong just to you. The narrow focus is key.
- The package of essays counts- not just one.
- This is PROCESS- not a one-time event. You will need to put time into writing your essays.
- USE THE WRITING CENTER!!!

Financial Aid Resources

Helpful Websites for Financial Aid & Scholarships



www.fafsa.ed.gov

www.studentaid.gov

www.finaid.org

www.collegecost.ed.gov

www.grasp4va.org

www.schev.edu

<http://blogs.henrico.k12.va.us/godwincounseling/scholarship-news/> (Godwin's Scholarship Page)

www.fastweb.com

Myths About Financial Aid

Don't fall for these myths about federal student aid and the application process!

"My parents make too much money, so I won't qualify for aid."

Reality: There is no income cut-off to qualify for federal student aid. Many factors besides income—from the size of your family to the age of your older parent—are taken into account. Your eligibility is determined by a mathematical formula, not by your parents' income alone. And remember: when you fill out the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®)*, you're also automatically applying for funds from your state, and possibly from your school as well. In fact, some schools won't even consider you for any of their scholarships (including academic scholarships) until you've submitted a FAFSA. Don't make assumptions about what you'll get—fill out the application and find out.

"Only students with good grades get financial aid."

Reality: While a high grade point average will help a student get into a good school and may help with academic scholarships, most of the federal student aid programs do not take a student's grades into consideration. Provided a student maintains satisfactory academic progress in his or her program of study, federal student aid will help a student with an average academic record complete his or her education.

"My ethnicity or age makes me ineligible for federal student aid."

Reality: There are basic eligibility requirements (which you can find at StudentAid.gov/eligibility), but ethnicity and age are not considered.

"I support myself, so I don't have to include parent info on the FAFSA®."

Reality: This is not necessarily true. Even if you support yourself and file taxes on your own, you may still be considered a dependent student for federal student aid purposes. If you are independent, you won't need to include your parents' information on your FAFSA. But if you are dependent, you must provide your parents' information. The FAFSA asks a series of questions to determine your dependency status. You can preview the questions at StudentAid.gov/dependency.

So what's next?

Go to fafsa.gov, fill out the application, and see what you get!

For more information about federal student aid, see StudentAid.gov. For help with the FAFSA process, use the help screens or live chat functionality on fafsa.gov, or contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243); TTY: 1-800-730-8913; for inquirers without access to the toll-free number: 334-523-2691; e-mail: studentaid@ed.gov

Find this fact sheet at StudentAid.gov/resources and share it with others!

Federal Student Aid: Find the Information You Need

Financial aid is a complicated topic, so finding your way through the process can be challenging. But we've got resources to help.

Topic	Resource
FAFSA®	
Fill out the FAFSA®	fafsa.gov
FAFSA changes for 2017-18	StudentAid.gov/fafsa-changes
Basic FAFSA info: what is it and how do you fill it out	StudentAid.gov/fafsa and StudentAid.gov/complete
FSA ID (username and password for FAFSA & other sites)	StudentAid.gov/fsaid
Dependency status for FAFSA purposes	StudentAid.gov/dependency
Determining which parent's info to report on the FAFSA	StudentAid.gov/fafsa-parent
How aid is calculated (including link to detailed EFC info)	StudentAid.gov/how-calculated
Types of Aid/Getting Aid	
Types of financial aid	StudentAid.gov/types
Who can get federal student aid	StudentAid.gov/eligibility
Pell Lifetime Eligibility Used	StudentAid.gov/pell-limit
Finding and applying for scholarships	StudentAid.gov/scholarships
Loan interest rates and fees	StudentAid.gov/interest
Aid for military families	StudentAid.gov/military
Avoiding financial aid scams	StudentAid.gov/scams
Student Account Access	
My Federal Student Aid (log in to see grant and loan records)	StudentAid.gov/login
Repaying Loans	
Loan repayment	StudentAid.gov/repay
Repayment Estimator (helps you compare repayment plans)	StudentAid.gov/repayment-estimator
Income-driven repayment plans (e.g., Pay As You Earn plan, Income-Based plan)	StudentAid.gov/idr
Public Service Loan Forgiveness	StudentAid.gov/publicservice
Loan forgiveness in general	StudentAid.gov/forgiveness
Loan forgiveness for teachers	StudentAid.gov/teach-forgive
Preparing for College	
College Preparation Checklist: academic and financial preparation, for elementary school through adult students	StudentAid.gov/checklist
Middle school preparation	StudentAid.gov/early
Special Audiences	
Info for parents (tax benefits, support your child, college costs)	StudentAid.gov/parent
Graduate school funding	StudentAid.gov/grad
Financial aid for adult students	StudentAid.gov/resources#adult-students
Non-U.S. citizen eligibility	StudentAid.gov/noncitizen
Going to college in another country	StudentAid.gov/international
Publications, Videos, Infographics	
Fact sheets, infographics, brochures, videos on all topics	StudentAid.gov/resources
Social Media	
@FAFSA Twitter feed	www.twitter.com/FAFSA
Federal Student Aid YouTube channel	www.YouTube.com/FederalStudentAid
Federal Student Aid Facebook page	www.Facebook.com/FederalStudentAid

Download this fact sheet at StudentAid.gov/resources#find-aid-info.

FEDERAL STUDENT AID AT A GLANCE

2017–18

WHAT is federal student aid?

Federal student aid comes from the federal government—specifically, the U.S. Department of Education. It's money that helps a student pay for higher education expenses (i.e., college, career school, or graduate school expenses).

Federal student aid covers such expenses as tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, and transportation.

There are three main categories of federal student aid: grants, work-study, and loans. Check with your school's financial aid office to find out which programs the school participates in.

WHO gets federal student aid?

Every student who meets certain eligibility requirements can get some type of federal student aid, regardless of age or family income. Some of the most basic eligibility requirements are that you must

- demonstrate financial need (for most programs—to learn more, visit StudentAid.gov/how-calculated);
- be a U.S. citizen or an eligible noncitizen;
- have a valid Social Security number;
- register (if you haven't already) with Selective Service, if you're a male between the ages of 18 and 25;
- maintain satisfactory academic progress in college or career school; and
- show you're qualified to obtain a college or career school education by
 - having a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate or a state-recognized equivalent; or
 - completing a high school education in a home-school setting approved under state law; or
 - enrolling in an eligible career pathways program.

Find more details about eligibility criteria at StudentAid.gov/eligibility.

HOW do you apply for federal student aid?

1. Create an FSA ID. Students, parents, and borrowers should create an FSA ID, made up of a username and password, to submit their *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®) online and to access U.S. Department of Education websites. Your FSA ID is used to confirm your identity and electronically sign your federal student aid documents. To create an FSA ID, visit StudentAid.gov/fsaid.

2. Complete the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®) at fafsa.gov. If you plan to attend college from July 1, 2017–June 30, 2018, you'll be able to submit a 2017–18 FAFSA beginning on Oct. 1, 2016. You'll be required to report income and tax information from 2015. Schools and states often use FAFSA information to award nonfederal aid, but their deadlines vary. Check with the schools that you're interested in for their deadlines, and find state deadlines at fafsa.gov.

NOTE: In the past, you couldn't submit the FAFSA until January 1 of the year you planned to attend college. The change to October 1 is a permanent change, and you'll be able to complete and submit your FAFSA as early as October 1 every year.

3. Review your *Student Aid Report*. After you apply, you'll receive a *Student Aid Report*, or SAR. Your SAR contains the information reported on your FAFSA and usually includes your Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The EFC is a number (not a dollar amount) used to determine your eligibility for federal student aid. Review your SAR information to make sure it's correct. The school(s) you list on your FAFSA will get your SAR data electronically.

4. Contact the school(s) you might attend. Make sure the financial aid office at each school you're interested in has all the information needed to determine your eligibility. If you're eligible, each school's financial aid office will send you an aid offer showing the amount and types of aid (from all sources) the school will offer you. You can compare the aid offers you received and see which school is the most affordable once financial aid is taken into account.

Federal
Student
Aid

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HAVE
QUESTIONS?

Contact or visit the following:

- StudentAid.gov
- a college financial aid office
- studentaid@ed.gov
- 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) toll-free
- 1-800-730-8913 (toll-free TTY for the hearing impaired)

Program and Type of Aid	Program Information	Annual Award Amount (subject to change)
Federal Pell Grant Grant: does not have to be repaid	For undergraduates with exceptional financial need who have not earned bachelor's or professional degrees.	Amounts can change annually. For 2016–17 (July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017), the award amount is up to \$5,815. Visit StudentAid.gov/pell-grant for more information.
Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG) Grant: does not have to be repaid	For undergraduates with exceptional financial need.	Up to \$4,000. Visit StudentAid.gov/fseog for more information.
Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant Grant: does not have to be repaid unless student fails to carry out service obligation	For undergraduate, postbaccalaureate, and graduate students who are completing or plan to complete course work needed to begin a career in teaching. As a condition for receiving this grant, student must sign a TEACH Grant Agreement to Serve in which the student agrees to perform four years of qualifying teaching service and meet other requirements.	Up to \$4,000. Visit StudentAid.gov/teach for more information.
Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant Grant: does not have to be repaid	For students who are not Pell-eligible due only to having less financial need than is required to receive Pell funds; whose parent or guardian died as a result of military service in Iraq or Afghanistan after the events of 9/11.	The grant award can be equal to the maximum Federal Pell Grant amount (see above), but cannot exceed your cost of attending school. Visit StudentAid.gov/Iraq-Afghanistan for more information.
Federal Work-Study Work-Study: money is earned; does not have to be repaid	For undergraduate and graduate students; part-time jobs can be on campus or off campus. Money is earned while attending school.	No annual minimum or maximum amounts. Visit StudentAid.gov/workstudy for more information.
Direct Subsidized Loan Loan: must be repaid with interest	For undergraduate students who have financial need; U.S. Department of Education generally pays interest while the student is in school and during certain other periods; student must be at least half-time. Interest rate is 3.76% for loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2016 and before July 1, 2017, and fixed for the life of the loan. Visit StudentAid.gov/interest for more information.	Up to \$5,500 depending on grade level and dependency status. Visit StudentAid.gov/sub-unsup for more information.
Direct Unsubsidized Loan Loan: must be repaid with interest	For undergraduate and graduate or professional students; borrower is responsible for all interest; student must be at least half-time; financial need is not required. Interest rate is 3.76% (undergraduate) and 5.31% (graduate or professional) for loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2016 and before July 1, 2017, and fixed for the life of the loan. Visit StudentAid.gov/interest for more information.	Up to \$20,500 (less any subsidized amounts received for same period), depending on grade level and dependency status. Visit StudentAid.gov/sub-unsup for more information.
Direct PLUS Loan Loan: must be repaid with interest	For parents of dependent undergraduate students and for graduate or professional students; borrower is responsible for all interest; student must be enrolled at least half-time; financial need is not required; borrower must not have an adverse credit history. Interest rate is 6.31% for loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2016 and before July 1, 2017, and fixed for the life of loan. Visit StudentAid.gov/interest for more information.	Maximum amount is cost of attendance minus any other financial aid received. Visit StudentAid.gov/plus for more information.
Federal Perkins Loan Loan: must be repaid with interest	For undergraduate and graduate students with exceptional financial need. Eligibility depends on the student's financial need and availability of funds at the school. For questions on Perkins Loan eligibility, students must contact the school's financial aid office. Interest rate is 5% and fixed for the life of the loan.	Undergraduate students: up to \$5,500; graduate and professional students: up to \$8,000. Visit StudentAid.gov/perkins for more information.

Note: The information in this document was compiled in spring 2016. For updates or additional information, visit StudentAid.gov.

LOOKING FOR MORE SOURCES FOR FREE MONEY?

Try StudentAid.gov/scholarships for tips on where to look and for a link to a free online scholarship search.

MAY 2016

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