

College Admission Requirements Key Terms

By *Peterson's Staff*

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The special and technical terms that schools and admissions personnel use can seem like a foreign language. Learn how to crack the code and get accepted into the school that's right for you.

If you're new to college admission requirements or the college admission process in general, there may be special or technical terms that the schools use that you're unfamiliar with. Here is a guide to help you.

Academic adviser

Your adviser is a senior faculty member in your area of concentration who is assigned to advise you on course selections and requirements. Before you declare your major, you will be assigned a temporary faculty adviser.

Accelerated study

An accelerated study program allows you to graduate in less time than usual. By taking summer terms and extra courses during the academic year, you may finish your bachelor's degree in three years instead of four.

Admission decisions

- **Admit:** Congratulations, you're in! You've been offered admission to the college you selected.
- **Admit/deny:** The school you applied to agreed to admit you, but has denied you financial aid. It's up to you to figure out how you are going to pay for school.
- **Deny:** This unfortunately means you weren't accepted.
- **Waitlist:** You're not in yet, but you've been placed on a waitlist in case an opening becomes available. Waitlists are ranked by priority and there are some years when more competitive schools never draw from theirs.

Advanced Placement (AP) courses

AP classes are high-level courses that are administered through the College Board. They provide curriculum equitable to college courses and are only open to eligible students. A college may award college credit or advanced placement to you, depending on your score. Criteria for credit awards vary — check your school's policy on AP credits.

Alternative admission

The alternative assessment method personalizes the college admission process and offers you a chance to be evaluated individually and more holistically. There's less emphasis placed on standardized test scores and more on the interview, portfolio, recommendations, and essay.

ACT

An alternative to the SAT, this test is widely accepted by a broad range of institutions and is administered throughout the school year. The ACT assesses English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning, and these scores can be used in lieu of SAT Subject Tests. Check with the schools you're interested in to see if ACT scores are part of their college admission requirements.

Associate's degree

A degree granted to you by a college or university after the satisfactory completion of a full-time, two-year program or its part-time equivalent. The Associate of Arts (A.A.) and the Associate of Science (A.S.) degrees are usually equivalent to the first two years of a four-year college curriculum. The Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) is awarded upon completion of a technical or vocational program.

Bachelor's or baccalaureate degree

After you satisfactorily complete a full-time program of study or its part-time equivalent at a college or university, you'll be awarded with a Bachelor of Arts (B.A) or a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree. There are a few other types of bachelor's degrees, but these are the most common.

Branch campus

You may choose to attend a smaller campus that is a part of a large university's continuum of academic services. Some students spend their first two years at a branch campus and then transfer to the main campus to complete their baccalaureate degree. Branch campuses provide smaller, more personal environments that may help you mature personally and academically before moving to a larger and more impersonal environment. Branch campuses may also be a good option for you if you want to remain close to home or wish to work and attend classes on a part-time basis.

Candidates Reply Date Agreement (CRDA)

If you're admitted to a college, you don't have to reply until May 1. This allows you time to hear from all the colleges to which you applied before making a commitment to any of them. This is especially important because financial aid packages vary from one school to another and the CRDA gives you time to compare packages before deciding.

College-preparatory subjects

You can take courses in high school that are valued by colleges and universities as strong preparation for college. Classes are usually in the five major areas of English, history, world languages, mathematics, and science. The courses may be at grade level, but also occur as honors or AP classes and as such are often weighted when your GPA is calculated.

Common Application

These college application forms can save you hours of work during the college admissions process! The colleges and universities that accept these standardized forms give them equal weight with their own forms.

Control

A college or university can be under public or private control. Publicly controlled universities are dependent on state legislatures for their funding, and their policies are set by the agencies that govern them. Private colleges and universities are responsible to a board of

directors or trustees and usually have higher tuition and fees to protect the institutions' endowment.

Cooperative education

A college program that alternates between periods of full-time study and full-time employment in a related field. You're paid for your work while gaining practical experience in your major — this helps you apply for jobs after graduation. Co-op programs can take longer: up to five years to obtain your bachelor's.

Course load

The number of course credit hours you take in a semester is referred to as your course load. Twelve credit hours is usually the minimum to be considered a full-time student, but the average course load per semester is 16 credit hours.

Credit hours

Your amount of credit hours per week is equivalent to your credits for financial aid, and they are used to determine your status as a full- or part-time student.

Cross-registration

Some colleges agree to permit students from another college or university to enroll in courses at their school without formally applying for admission. If you're attending a smaller college, this can help expand your options or to simply experience another learning environment.

Deferred acceptance

This simply means that the admission committee has declined to make a decision about your acceptance until a later date.

Double major

Available at most schools, you can obtain a double major by completing requirements for both degrees simultaneously.

Dual enrollment

You can earn college credit under this policy while you're still in high school! Certain course credits can be transferred to a degree-granting institution, especially if you maintain a minimum B average. Not all colleges allow this, so if you're considering dual enrollment, talk with the admissions offices at the colleges you're considering to see if they'll accept credit transfers.

Early Action (EA)

With Early Action, you can apply to a school early in your senior year (usually between October 30 and January 15), and request an early application review and notification of admission. It usually takes three to four weeks to get a response. If you're accepted, you aren't obligated to attend that school but can "bank" this admission while still applying to other colleges during the regular admission cycle.

Early admission

Some colleges admit certain students who haven't actually completed high school, usually exceptional juniors. They are enrolled full-time and don't complete their senior year of high school. Colleges usually award high school diplomas to these students after they've completed a specified amount of college-level courses.

Early Decision (ED)

Sometimes confused with Early Action, the Early Decision plan allows you to apply to an institution early in your senior year (usually between October 30 and January 15), and to request an early notification of admission. You and your guidance counselor will have to sign a contract with the school at the time you apply to acknowledge that if you're accepted, you're obligated to attend that school. Some colleges and universities offer both ED and EA options, so read the college admission requirements carefully to make sure you know what you're applying for.

Emphasis

This refers to an area of concentration within a major or minor. For example, if you are an English major you may have an emphasis in creative writing.

External degree program

Without ever physically attending class, you can earn credit through independent study, college courses, proficiency examinations, distance learning, or personal experience. External degree colleges generally have no campus or classroom facilities and are sometimes referred to as "colleges without walls."

Greek life

Sororities and fraternities are known as the Greek system, and often greatly influence the campus social life of a college or university.

Honors program

Honors programs offer you an enriched, top-quality educational experience that usually includes small class size, custom-designed courses, mentoring, enriched individualized learning, hands-on research, and publishing opportunities. These programs are a great way to attend a large school that offers enhanced social and recreational opportunities, all while receiving a high-end education at a reduced cost.

Independent study

With this option, you may be able to complete some of your credit requirements by studying on your own. You and your faculty adviser decide on the topic in advance (as well as how to approach it), and then meet periodically to discuss your progress. At the end of the term, you hand in a final report for a grade.

Interdisciplinary

Faculty members from several disciplines contribute to the development of a course of study and may co-teach the courses.

Internship

An experience-based opportunity that is related to your major, many students schedule their internships during breaks in the academic calendar. Internships are usually required but you'll receive credit towards your degree for your supervised work experience.

Major

This is the main focus of your studies. Your college or university specifies the number of credits you will need to take to complete your major, as well as the sequence and level of the courses necessary to earn your degree.

Minor

This is an area of concentration in your studies that requires fewer credits for completion than a major. Your minor can be related to your major — or not. For example, you may major in English but pursue a minor in theater.

Non-matriculated

If you're taking classes even though you haven't been admitted (or have been academically dismissed), then you are considered a non-matriculated student. As such, you won't be eligible for financial aid or participation in the athletic program at your school.

Open admission

When a school does not review your academic qualifications as part of its college admissions process, then it has an open admission policy. Many public junior or community colleges will admit you under this guideline as long as you have a high school diploma or its equivalent.

PSAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test

Similar in format to the SAT, this test is usually taken in October of your junior year, but is shorter and takes less time. It is a qualifying instrument for the National Merit Scholarship Awards Program and can be helpful for early college guidance.

Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)

Each branch of the military sponsors a ROTC program. In exchange for a certain number of years on active duty, you can have a portion of your college education paid for by the armed forces.

Residency requirement

"Residency" has more than one meaning. It may refer to a college's policy requiring a specific number of courses to be taken on campus to receive your degree, or it may refer to the legally required amount of time you must reside in a state to be considered eligible for in-state tuition at one of its public colleges or universities. Check the college admissions requirements to find this information.

Retention rate

This is the number and/or percentage of students returning for the sophomore year.

Rolling admission

Under a rolling admission policy, there is no deadline for filing a college application. This concept is used most often by state universities. After you apply, you'll receive a response within three to four weeks. If you're accepted, you aren't required to confirm your enrollment until May 1 (in most cases). If you're an out-of-state resident applying to a state university, you should apply as early as possible.

SAT

A popular college admission exam, the SAT assesses critical reading, math, and writing. It's offered throughout the academic year at approved test centers. Check with the schools you're interested in to see if SAT scores are part of their college admissions requirements.

SAT Subject Tests

SAT Subject Tests are given on the same test dates and in the same centers as the regular

SAT. In recent years, there has been more emphasis placed on these tests for admission purposes as well as for placement and exemption decisions.

Seminar

A class that has a group discussion format rather than a lecture format.

Silent scores

This term is applied to PSAT scores because only you and your guidance counselor see the scores. They're not reported to colleges and this policy is considered the "practice-without-penalty" feature of the PSAT.

Standby

If you register for an SAT or ACT testing date and there are no seats available, you may accept a standby position; that is, if a seat becomes available the day of the test, you'll be able to take the test. You'll need to go to the testing center and wait to see if a spot opens. There is a fee for registering for standby.

Student-designed major

Under this policy, you design your own major. It gives you the opportunity to develop nontraditional options not available in the existing catalog of majors.

Transfer program

This program is usually found in a two or four-year college that offers associate degrees. It allows you to continue your studies in a four-year college by maintaining designated criteria specified when you're admitted to the two-year program. It's not necessary to earn an associate degree to transfer.

Transfer student

If you move from one college or university to another, then you are known as a transfer student. Credits applied toward the transfer are evaluated by the receiving school to determine how many of your credits it will accept. Each school sets different policies for transfers, so if you're considering transferring, you should seek college admissions assistance.

Upper division

This term refers to your junior and senior years of study. Some colleges offer only upper-division study and may require that you complete your lower division classes at another institution before entering their program.

Waiver to view recommendations

This is a form you may be asked to sign which waives your right to review your recommendation letters before they are sent to the colleges or universities to which you're applying.

Yield

This is the percentage of accepted students who actually enter a college or university in the freshman class.