




Finding Scholarship and Merit-Based Aid Opportunities

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What is the Difference Between Financial Aid and Scholarships?

One of the most important questions students and families have to consider in the college search and application process is how they will pay for college. Financial Aid is a general term that describes the processes and resources in place to help students pay for college, and scholarships are ONE way in which students receive financial aid to pay for college. There are two primary types of aid that students may receive for college: need and merit. Need-based aid is awarded to students who demonstrate a lack of financial resources to pay for college. Merit-based aid is awarded to students who perform exceptionally well in a particular area (like athletics, academics, service, performing arts, etc.) Most scholarship opportunities available to students fall into either the need-based category or the merit-based category, but some do consider both as part of their eligibility requirements. This document will focus on merit-based aid.

**Please see our [Understanding the Financial Aid Process](#) document for information about need-based aid.*

What is Merit-Based Aid?

Merit-based aid, often called scholarships, is money for college that is awarded to students for one or more the following types of reasons: academic performance, athletic abilities, performing arts talent, service in the community, leadership experience, membership in a particular group, designation in a particular demographic (race/ethnicity, religion, geographic location, socio-economic status, etc.), pursuit of a particular major or career, and/or any number of other criteria. Merit-based aid typically falls into to two categories: college/university sponsored scholarships and private scholarships sponsored by businesses, non-profit organizations, or community groups.

College/University-Sponsored Scholarships

In most cases, the largest amount of money students are awarded in the form of scholarships falls into the category of college/university-sponsored scholarships. Most schools offer merit-based scholarships to students, but not all follow the same process for awarding scholarships. Some schools automatically consider students for merit-based scholarships when they apply for admission by a particular deadline, while others have separate scholarship applications that students must complete. These scholarships may be awarded completely based on merit or some combination of merit and need, and may range in amounts from several hundred dollars to a “full ride” that covers tuition, fees, and living expenses. The selectivity or competitiveness for these scholarships varies widely. The best resource for identifying this type of scholarship is the college or university website. Often these opportunities are found on an admissions page and/or a financial aid and scholarships page. Students and families are encouraged to read information about school-sponsored scholarships carefully to be certain they understand the eligibility requirements as well as the processes and deadlines for applying.

Private Scholarships

There are thousands of scholarships offered by organizations, businesses, and community groups, and the eligibility requirements vary widely. Some scholarships are local in nature and are only available to students at a particular high school or who live in a particular city, county, or state; while other scholarships are regional or national in their scope. Many of these scholarships are merit-based, but it is not uncommon for financial need to be a factor in the selection process. The application processes are different from one organization to the next, and students are encouraged to read scholarship applications carefully to be sure they meet all requirements and deadlines. Like college/university sponsored scholarships, private scholarship amounts range from a few hundred dollars to full-tuition and expenses.

When Should Students Apply for Scholarships?

Scholarship opportunities are made available year-round, however the vast majority are announced in the fall and often have winter or early spring deadlines. Most scholarship opportunities that are catalogued and announced through Carmel High School are for graduating high school seniors, but there are a handful of scholarships for underclassmen. Students are encouraged to begin researching scholarship opportunities as they are researching college options, particularly the school-sponsored scholarships. Even if students are not able to apply until their senior year, it does not hurt to know what types of scholarships they may be eligible for prior to or early in their senior year.

How Do Students Find Information About Scholarships?

There are many resources for identifying scholarships, and students should take advantage of any and all that they can. In addition to checking specific college and university websites for scholarship information, Carmel High School students can utilize the following resources to start their scholarship search:

1. Students should check the Carmel Education Foundation website for information about over 100 local scholarships at www.ccs.k12.in.us/foundation/Scholarships
2. Students should have their parents check with their place of employment to determine whether there are scholarships offered to children of employees. Students who work should also check with their own employer about scholarship opportunities.
3. Students should check for scholarship opportunities offered by community agencies with which they are involved such as churches, service organizations, civic organizations, etc.
4. The Carmel High School Counseling Department maintains a database of scholarships that are sent to the office in Naviance Student. Your Naviance Student account also includes a national scholarship search tool. Seniors are encouraged to check the scholarship list in Naviance Student regularly as new information comes in throughout the school year.
5. A significant number of scholarship opportunities are announced via social media, so be sure to like us on Facebook at “Carmel High School College Counseling” and/or follow us on Twitter @CHSCollege411 or on Instagram @chscollegcareer.
6. There are many scholarship search resources available online. A few are listed below.

PLEASE NOTE: students and families should be aware of scholarship scams and should NEVER have to pay for a scholarship search.

How Do Students Apply for Scholarships?

The application process for scholarships differs widely. Some require an online application, while other require a paper application. Some require transcripts, essays and/or letters of recommendation, while others may not. Once students have identified scholarships for which they meet the eligibility requirement, they should take care to read the application instructions carefully and be mindful of all deadlines.

Be Sure to Report Your Scholarship Awards!

Carmel High School enjoys celebrating our students' accomplishments, and scholarships are no exception! We ask that seniors report the scholarships they have been awarded to the Counseling Office using the Scholarship Confirmation Form. Each year Carmel High School recognizes college-based scholarships as well as private scholarships in the Graduation Bulletin.

Additional Scholarship Search Resources

Fast Web! www.fastweb.com

MeritAid.com www.meritaid.com

FinAid www.finaid.org

Indiana Commission for Higher Education
<http://www.in.gov/sfa/>

Cappex www.cappex.com/scholarships

Chegg www.chegg.com/scholarships

Scholarships.com www.scholarships.com