



Getting Started on the Road to College

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a black and white striped shirt, is sitting at a wooden table. She is looking at a laptop screen. A man wearing a baseball cap and a plaid shirt is sitting across from her, looking down at a book. On the table, there is a laptop, a notebook, a plate of food, and a cup. The background shows a window with curtains.

Here is your toolkit for
the first phase of this exciting process.
Let's do this!

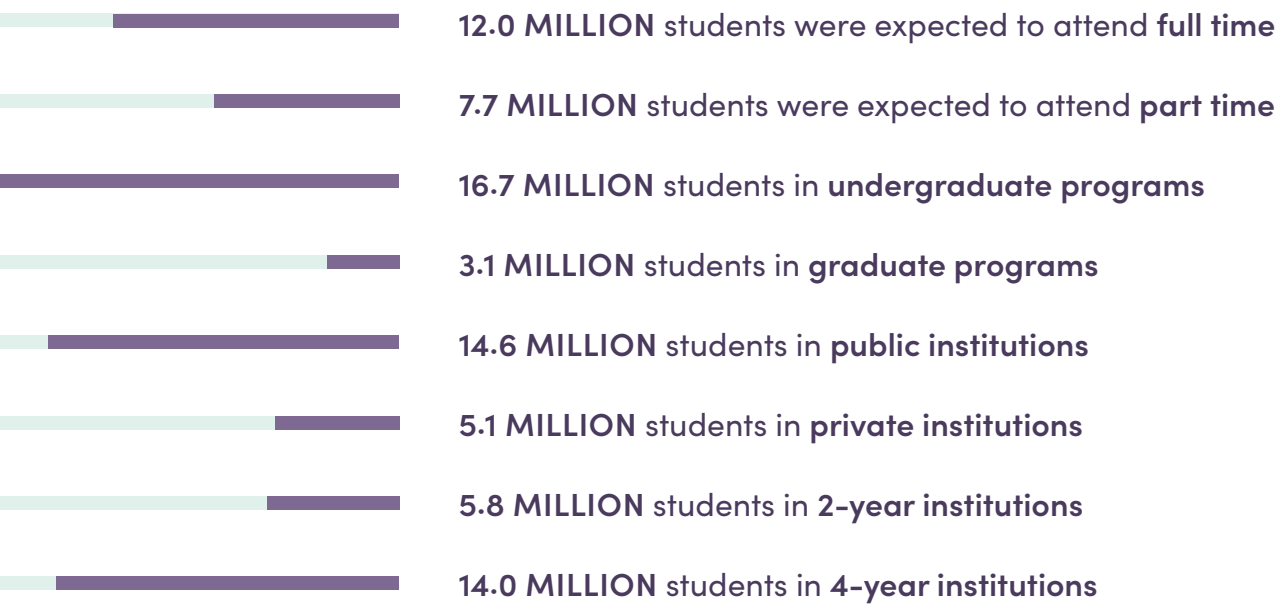
What's In the Kit:

- 3 The Big Picture
- 4 Key Guidance
- 6 Resources
- 7 Helpful Terms

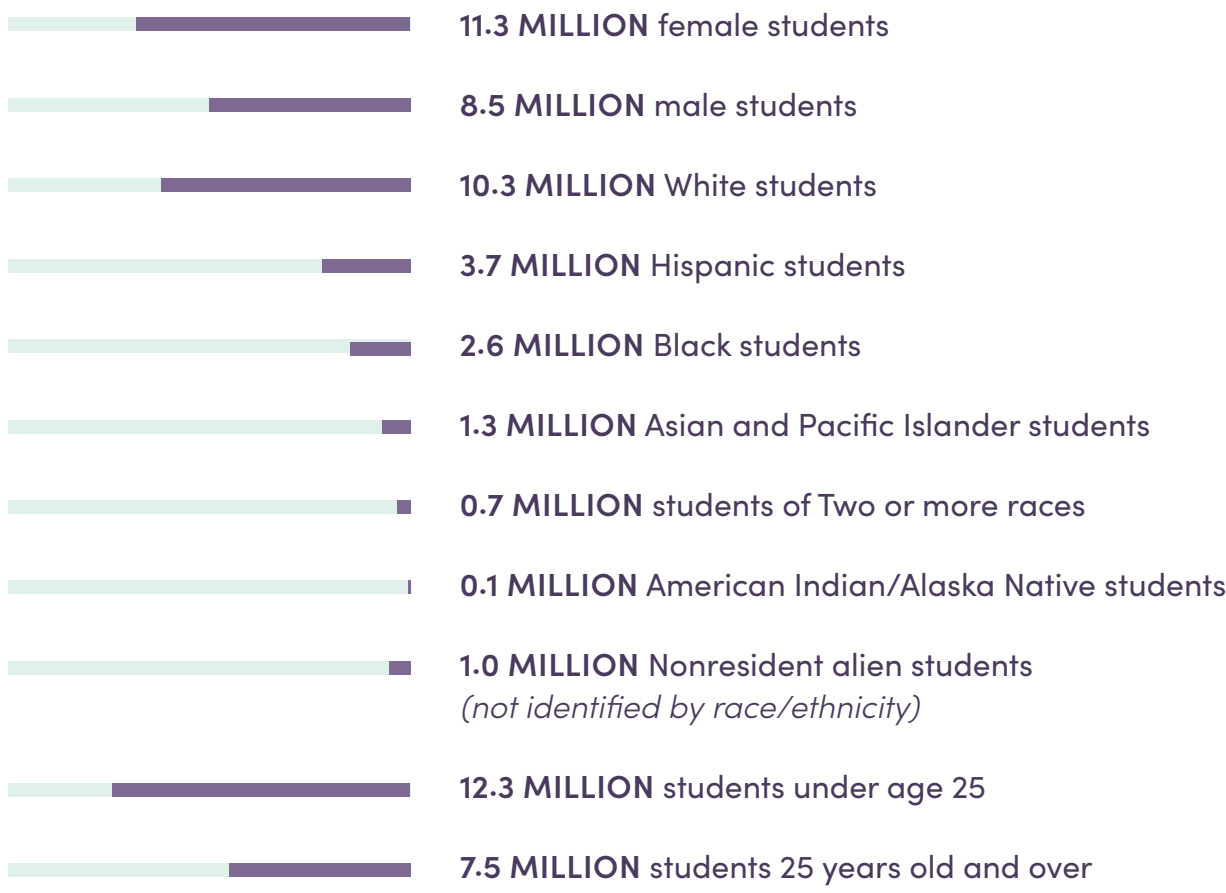
What do we know about our nation’s students and schools?

College by the Numbers:

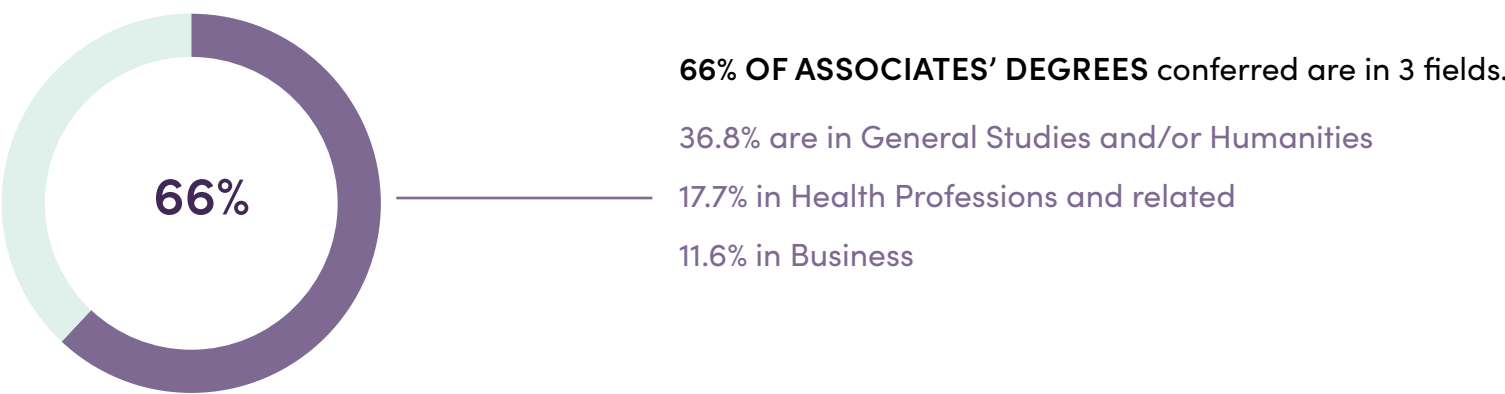
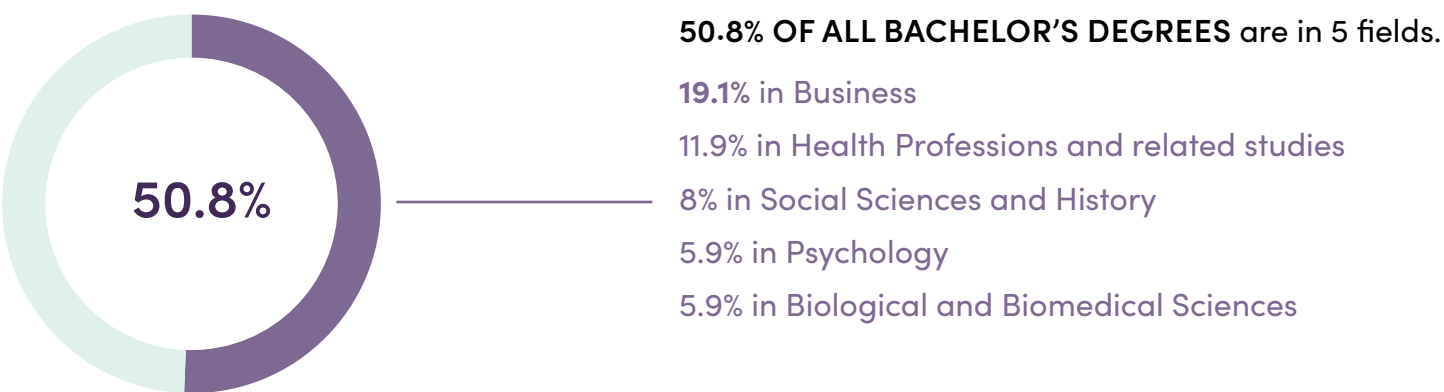
19.7 Million Students were
Projected to Attend Colleges
and Universities in Fall 2020



College Student Demographics
in Fall 2020



Statistics on Degrees:
Source: [EducationData.org](https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/collegenew/)



Source: [National Center for Education Statistics](https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/collegenew/)

The Seasonal College Planner for High School Juniors

Why go to College?

Step back and think. Are you sure you want to go to college? It's not mandatory and other paths can also lead to personal success and fulfillment. For those who do choose college, there is a significant upfront investment but, in the long-run, you can expect higher earnings and job security.

Whatever you pursue, your personal motivation and level of engagement will drive your success.

WINTER

- ☐ Begin to identify your academic and personal strengths and interests. Make a list of factors (geographic, campus community and setting, activities) that matter to you most. Begin reading about and comparing colleges and universities online, with your preferences in mind.
- ☐ Take a practice ACT and SAT to determine which test you prefer.
- ☐ Register for spring test dates. Before you do, check out a few colleges' test requirements and policies.
- ☐ Select senior year courses with attention to both your strongest interests and college admission course requirements, including math, science, and foreign language.
- ☐ Talk to your parents/guardians about college costs and financing expectations.

SPRING

- ☐ Meet with your school counselor to discuss college plans.
- ☐ Reach out to teachers (2), advisors, and coaches to request letters of recommendation.
- ☐ Create a resume listing your achievements and interests to share with recommenders.
- ☐ Plan an interesting summer: Get a job or internship, do community service work, take community college courses, or attend a summer program related to your developing interests.
- ☐ Take ACTs or SATs, if testing dates and sites are available. Think of this as a dry run.
- ☐ Participate in virtual or in-person tours and info sessions at colleges of interest.
- ☐ Organize your research in a notebook, on your phone, or anywhere that feels comfortable to you.
- ☐ Preview the Common or Coalition App online and [personal statement essay prompts](#).

SUMMER

- ☐ Confirm and thank your recommenders. *(Some teachers and counselors may ask you and your parents to complete questionnaires.)*
- ☐ Begin narrowing your list of colleges (likely; target; reach; reach+), considering admissibility, personal fit, and affordability.
- ☐ Create a place to keep track of application deadlines, test policies, essay prompts, etc.
- ☐ Begin brainstorming and drafting your personal essay(s).
- ☐ Visit more colleges virtually or in person.
- ☐ The [FAFSA](#) opens on Oct 1, but it makes sense to get familiar with FAFSA requirements earlier, so that you have time to gather supporting materials, such as tax filing documents.
- ☐ Do some test prep in advance of taking the ACT or the SAT. (See Resources below.) It's best to do the test prep as close to your test date as possible, when the material is still fresh in your mind.
- ☐ Register to take the test (ACT or SAT) in late summer or early fall.

What to Do Now



Focus on your classes.

You're in acceleration mode. Grades this year and next are the best predictors of your future academic success; colleges know this.

Begin now.

Investigating areas of interests, evaluating college options, assessing finances and preparing applications all takes time. Pacing yourself, by creating space in your weekly schedule to make incremental progress in these areas, will enable you to learn as you go and feel less stressed.

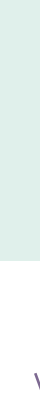
Prioritize.

Concentrate on activities (extracurricular, family, work) that most matter to you, leaving room for studying and self-care. Now isn't the time to stuff your resume with everything under the sun—it's the time to focus your efforts and do the essential things well.

Get organized.

- Personalize the Seasonal College Planner based on all your different commitments. Researching and applying to colleges takes time—the key is to plan your work ahead of time.
- Commit to researching a few schools and careers each week. (See suggested resources, below.) Create your support team. Connect with counselors, teachers, family members, coaches/instructors/advisors who can provide guidance and serve as your sounding boards.
- Make an "initial college list" that you can refer back to, over time, and refine.

Keep in Mind...



Academics first.

Quite simply, grades are the best predictor of college academic performance, retention, and graduation. Your high school transcript provides the most reliable indication of readiness for college-level coursework. So strive to take progressively more challenging courses and earn strong grades in those courses through your senior year.

Consider college costs both now and later.

Although costs alone shouldn't dictate where you apply, it's smart to consider both higher-and-lower-priced options now, so that your eventual college choices reflect your priorities and are affordable.

Who you are outside the classroom is as relevant as who you are inside the classroom when choosing a program of study.

Now is the time to think carefully about both your academic strengths and personal interests in deciding what and where to study.

Don't be swayed by prestige.

National rankings and admission selectivity can't tell you whether a college's offerings and campus community are right for you. Focus on the overall fit between you and the college, knowing that, when reviewing your application, colleges are focused on this, too.

Maintain a balanced perspective.

Much of what you'll hear in the coming months may make you worried about getting into college, but the truth is that the great majority of schools where most students apply offer admission to more students than they refuse, and many schools are likely a good match for you.

Focus Your College Search

[Corsava](#)

Corsava asks questions that help you discover your college preferences in main categories (geographic, cultural, academic and other) to focus your search.

[MyMajors](#)

MyMajors provides an assessment tool and searchable database for guidance on possible majors, including info about courses, careers, salary, etc.

[Big Future](#)

Big Future allows you to select and save filters for your college search, such as test scores, activities, majors, financial aid and more.

[MyOptions](#)

MyOptions is a free platform and tool for learning about and searching for college and career options. You can make a plan and connect with teachers and experts to gain advice in your search.

[Fiske Guide to Colleges](#)

Fiske Guide to Colleges is a thorough guide to 320 of the best and most compelling four-year colleges and universities. It has been published yearly for over 30 years and is a go-to resource for students and parents.

Get Smart about College Costs and Outcomes

[The College Scorecard](#)

College Scorecard enables students to compare colleges based on fields of study, costs, graduation and admission rates, and post-graduation salary and debt levels.

[Net Price Calculator](#)

The Net Price Calculator is offered by the US Government and all colleges. It is used to find what a student pays after subtracting scholarships and grants. Individual college Net Price Calculators can show a prospective student what students with similar financial situations and opportunities are required to pay towards their tuition.

[Edmit](#)

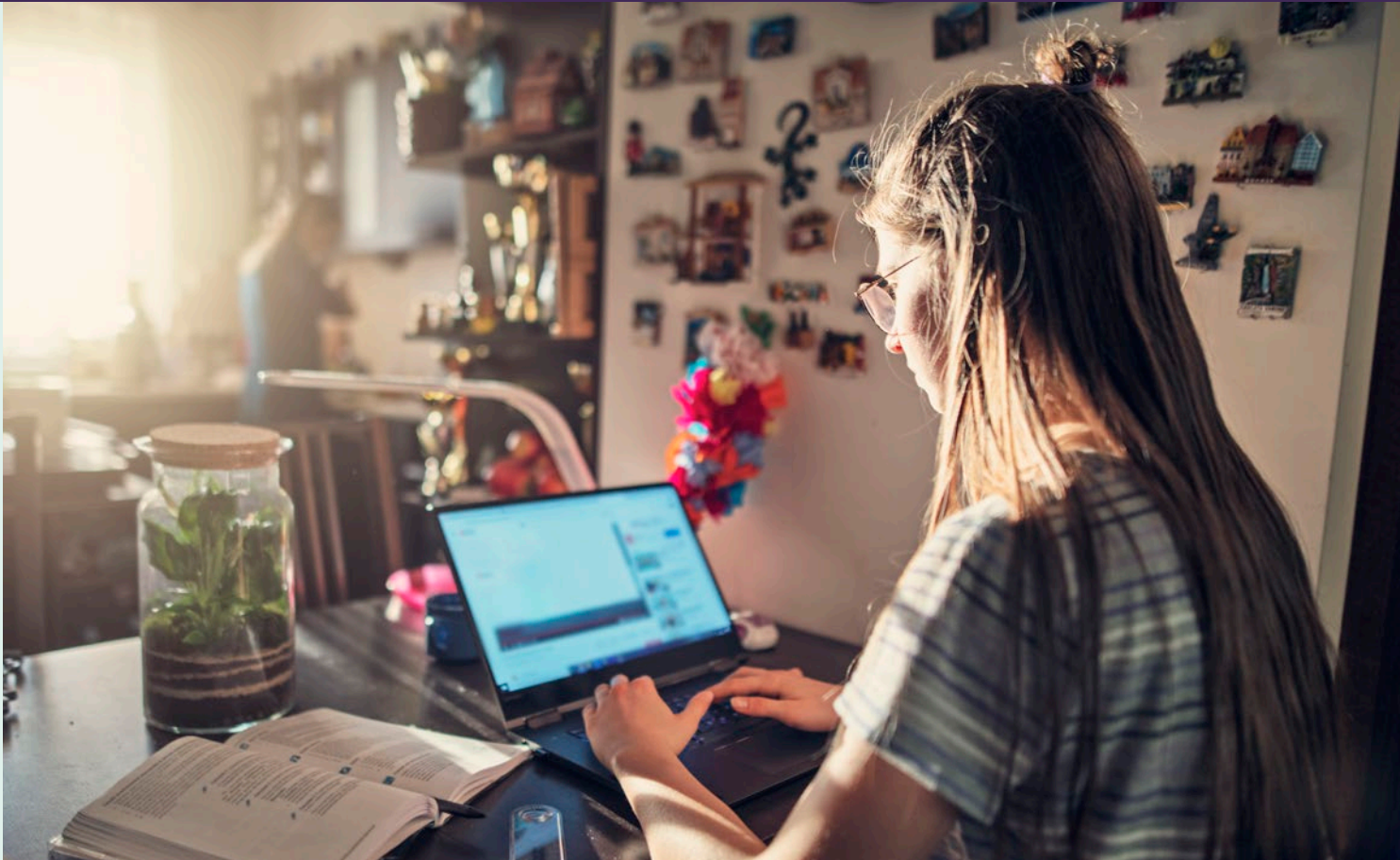
With a combination of data and personal advice, Edmit guides students and parents on how to make the best college decision with more aid and less debt.

Explore Gap Year Options

[EF Gap Year](#) offers immersive, international gap year programs for ages 18-22. Learn a language, participate in service learning, and intern around the world for a semester, school year, or summer with our customizable programs.

[Center for Interim Programs](#) is the longest running gap year consulting service in the U.S.

[Gap Year Association](#) offers a list of gap year programs as well as a planning guide for families.



To Register & Prepare for Standardized Tests:

[ACT Registration](#)

[ACT Test Preparation](#)
(Free)

[SAT Registration](#)

[SAT Test Preparation](#)
(Free)

Associate's Degree:

A post-secondary (after high school) two-year degree. An Associate's Degree can count as the first two years towards a four-year Bachelor's Degree and can be completed at your own pace, depending on the institution. All Associate's Degree programs have some general education curriculum and many are geared towards specific professions such as police officer, dental hygienist, web developer and many others.

Application Platform:

A variety of online platforms make it easy for students to apply to multiple schools at once. Students input basic information like name, birthday, high school, etc. They may also upload resumes, essays and other application components to the platform and then decide to which schools they wish to have their materials transmitted. Some schools require supplemental materials. The platforms make it easy for students to understand and manage these requirements all in one place and keep track of application deadlines, as well. Examples of widely used application platforms include: Common Application, Coalition for College Access App, University of California Application, Common Black Application, Universal College Application.

Bachelor's Degree (BA, BS, BSE, BFA):

A Bachelor's Degree is awarded to students by a college or university after successful completion of a specified program of study, including coursework in a major or concentration. Average time to complete a Bachelor's degree is four years and the degree type (BA, BS, BSE, BFA)[^] reflects the student's concentration or major. For example, a student who majors in a humanities or social science field is awarded at BA; a student who majors in math or chemistry is awarded at BS. [^]BA: Bachelor of Arts; BS: Bachelor of Science; BSE: Bachelor of Science in Engineering; BFA: Bachelor of Fine Arts

Financial Aid:

Money awarded to pay for college. In order to qualify for financial aid, a student must submit a financial aid application. Each school has its own deadlines and procedures for the awarding of various types of aid, including scholarships, work-study programs, federal grants, and private loans.

Gap Year:

A period of time, usually an academic or calendar year, in which a student takes a break from school to work, volunteer or travel, typically after completing high school and before starting college. Students who take gap years often grow in maturity and are better prepared to access resources and opportunities at college.

GPA:

GPA is your Grade Point Average. This number shows how you have performed in your courses on average on a typical scale of 1.0 to 4.0. Your GPA collects all the numbers/points corresponding to your letter grades from your courses (A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, F=0) and averages them. A **cumulative GPA** is the sum of all the numbers/points from your grades in your courses divided by the sum of your degree credit hours for all the courses. A **weighted GPA** can change the range of your GPA to 0 to 5.0 and takes into account the difficulty of your class. AP, IB and Honors courses have a higher degree of difficulty and this is reflected in your GPA. Ask your school counselor what type of GPA your school uses.

Major or Concentration:

In order to earn a four-year degree a student must formally declare a major. There are many academic disciplines from which to choose, such as: political science, chemistry, art, philosophy, or civil engineering. A student's major is their primary focus of study, though they are typically able to take some courses outside of their major.

Pre-professional Program:

Pre-professional programs are pathways that prepare you for work in a professional field following graduation and/or a professional degree after you have completed your bachelor's degree. Pre-professional programs typically include specific course work and applied (internship or research) experiences, as well. Examples include: business, nursing, pre-med, pre-law, and pre-pharmacy.

Transcript:

A high school transcript is your academic record during high school. It includes the classes you took, in what sequence and at what level of rigor (for example college prep, honors, AP), as well as the grades you earned. The transcript typically includes your Grade Point Average (GPA) and class rank, if your school keeps track of these. Even if you've never seen it, every high-schooler has a transcript. Think of it as the summary of all of your report cards since 9th grade.

To be a successful college applicant, it helps to know the lingo.

