



COLLEGE COUNSELING HANDBOOK

2026–2027



Director's Message

How do you choose the right college? Is there really a college for everyone? How does one start and complete the tasks of applying to, and selecting, a college? UPrep's College Counseling Office has compiled the following handbook for juniors, seniors, and their families to answer their questions. Written with the intent to minimize the pressure associated with the college application process, this how-to manual strives to guide you through this educational milestone.

The college counseling program at UPrep is an extension of our educational program. We strongly believe that students should carry the responsibility for much of the college selection process, as the student is the candidate. Collecting information, soliciting recommendations, and organizing components of the application are all good learning experiences for college-bound students.

From the UPrep College Counseling Office, you can expect a well-developed college counseling program that will not only assess a student's college options, but also has methods in place for:

- Addressing a student's search for identity
- Dealing with the many facets of separation anxiety
- Coping with the expectations that students and families bring to the table
- Confronting the feelings of vulnerability and apprehension that students and families wrestle with

The College Counseling Office is a department that:

- Helps create a college list for each student
- Hosts admissions representatives from more than 200 colleges and universities
- Provides pertinent information regarding application responsibilities
- Holds individual meetings with students from the second semester of their junior year through their senior year
- Presents college informational evenings throughout the year
- Offers ongoing support and advocacy

The exciting task of the College Counseling Office is to remain alert to the issues and trends facing our students, provide clarity about the pressures of the college process, and support each student in their college search. We are confident that all students will come through the process feeling that they have succeeded and have a range of options. We feel most fortunate to work with you.

Warm regards,

Kelly Herrington
DIRECTOR OF COLLEGE COUNSELING

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The College Search

The first and most important task to complete when starting your college search is to decide what is important to you in a school. Search for a school that fits you well academically, socially, and culturally. Don't eliminate a school solely because it's outside your comfort zone. The challenge of dealing with the unfamiliar can help you grow as a person.

The UPrep Website

This is a gateway to information about the college counseling program at UPrep. The site also has additional information on gap year programs, summer opportunities, and test prep information; go to uprep.us/college.

School-Specific Websites

Individual college and university websites have a plethora of information for students and parents/guardians. These sites provide detailed information on a variety of topics, ranging from planning a campus visit to departmental information.

College Representative Visits to UPrep

UPrep hosts more than 150 college representatives throughout the fall, and juniors and seniors are encouraged to attend presentations from schools they are interested in attending. A list of college visits can be found in Scoir and the weekly All-School Email.

Scoir, College Kickstart, and Addie: Online Tools



Scoir is a dynamic and visual college search, selection, and application tool for students, parents/guardians, and college counselors. Scoir gives each stakeholder in the college process their own individual account, as there are features in the program that

are uniquely tailored to the student and parent/guardian roles in the college process. Students and parents/guardians will receive an email inviting them to initiate their Scoir account, giving them access to this powerful and fun resource. Scoir is also the college counseling platform that students will use to manage the college application process. Students and parents/guardians can log on to Scoir at scoir.com.

Scoir Student

The student page consists of three areas related to the college search:

My Profile, **Discover**, and **My Colleges**.

My Profile

After you have logged into Scoir, you will arrive at the My Profile page. When you click on "Me" at the top right corner and select "View Profile," you will find all of the personal information linked to you. In addition to academic stats, standardized test scores, and parent/guardian information found in the My Profile section, Scoir gives students the ability to upload web links, social media posts (that are college relevant), and important documents (transcripts, resumes, a graded assignment that you might need for a college application) into a "My Drive" portal. Students can also share activities they are involved in and achievements they are proud of by clicking on the "Activities and Achievements" tab on the left-hand side and selecting "Add Activities and Achievements."

Factors in a Student's Candidacy

HELPFUL

Strength of Academic Program

Standardized Testing

School Recommendation

Teacher Recommendations

Limited and Polite Additional Information

WILD CARDS

Athletics/Arts/
Service/Leadership

Extracurricular Excellence

Demonstrated Interest in the School

Child of Alumnus/a

Diversity

Development

Financial Need

HARMFUL

Unsolicited Contact from Parents/Guardians

Too Many Ungrounded Recommendations

Overly Aggressive School Lobbying



My Colleges

Once a list of colleges is created, students will choose to “follow” a school so that it remains on their prospective college list. Students can save and/or share the schools they’re following with other stakeholders (parents/guardians or counselors) in the college process. Scoir provides comprehensive information and analysis about each college on a college list. The in-depth information is found in two areas: **Overview** includes many of the nuts-and-bolts (Academic, Admission, Student Life) information about a school; **Scattergrams** is where students can compare their academic background to students who have previously applied. Parents/guardians can browse colleges and suggest them to their students via the “Discover” section.

Scoir Parents/Guardians

Parents/guardians are an integral part of the college search process. Scoir provides each parent/guardian with their own log-in information to access Scoir’s interactive college search tools. They can assist their student in discovering schools that may be of interest to them by suggesting schools to follow; students decide whether or not to accept this suggestion. Scoir also provides a comprehensive Net Price Calculator (NPC) to assist families in seeing the cost of attendance at each school a student is following. The Parent Home page consists of three areas: **Discover**, **My Colleges**, and **Profile**. Parents/guardians will have full access to college search criteria. They can complete their own college search, independent of their student. If a student has saved their last college search, parents/guardians will have the ability to see the schools on this list.

Discover

Here you will find the NPC tool. The more detailed financial information a family can provide, the more accurate the information about the cost of attendance at each school. Families only need to fill out the NPC once; the information is stored and applied to each school in the student’s **Following**, **Applying**, and **Applied** lists.

Profile

This is where you will find all of the personal, academic, and extracurricular activities your student has listed in their Scoir account. Parents/guardians can also view any documents that their student has uploaded into My Drive.



College Kickstart is an online college counseling tool that allows student to track application details like demonstrated interest, interviews, and both campus and virtual visits. It also ensures that students have balanced college lists. College Kickstart provides detailed information about both merit- and need-based financial aid. College Kickstart is a separate online tool from Scoir.



In May of the junior year, the College Counseling Office will introduce students to Addie, an AI-powered college counseling support tool. With the constantly changing landscape of college admissions, our office is always looking for new and effective tools to provide the best college search and application experience. Addie is part of the College Counseling Office’s efforts to help students articulate the meaning behind their interests. Addie is not used by students in isolation, but rather in collaboration with their college counselor.



Book Recommendations: The College Search Process

Antonoff, Steven R. *College Match: A Blueprint for Choosing the Best School for You*. EDUconsultingMedia, 2022.

Barnard, Brennan, and Rich Clark. *The Truth About College Admission: A Family Guide to Getting In and Staying Together*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2023.

Bruni, Frank. *Where You Go Is Not Who You’ll Be*. New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2016.

Carter, Laurén. *Mindful Admissions: An Insider’s Guide to Staying Sane, Applying Well and Getting Accepted to College*. Laurén Carter, 2022.

Fiske, Edward. *The Fiske Guide to Colleges*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2024.

Furda, Eric, and Jacques Steinberg. *The College Conversation*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2021.

Green, Howard. *The Hidden Ivies: 63 of America’s Top Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities*. New York, NY: Collins Reference, 2016.

Heffernan, Lisa, and Mary Harrington. *Grown & Flown: How to Support Your Teen, Stay Close as a Family, and Raise Independent Adults*. New York, NY: Flatiron Books, 2020.

Laff, Ned, and Scott Carlson. *Hacking College: Why the Major Doesn’t Matter—and What Really Does*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 2025.

Lieber, Ron. *The Price You Pay for College*. New York, NY: Harper Paperbacks, 2022.

Lythcott-Haims, Julie. *How to Raise an Adult*. New York, NY: Holt Paperbacks, 2016.

Pope, Lauren. *Colleges That Change Lives: 40 Schools That Will Change the Way You Think About College*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2016.

Selingo, Jeff. *Dream School: Finding the Right College for You*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2025.

Selingo, Jeff. *Who Gets In and Why: A Year Inside College Admissions*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2020.

Smith, Irena. *The Golden Ticket: A Life in College Admissions Essays*. Scottsdale, AZ: She Writes Press, 2023.

College Visit

One of the most important parts of your college search is the campus visit. Visiting colleges on your list will give you a firsthand impression of the students, faculty, staff, facilities, and programs. On a visit, you can learn what the admissions office is looking for in its applicants, gain a feeling for the academic and social atmosphere, see the study/living/recreation facilities, talk with students, and get a sense of the surrounding community. We encourage college visits starting in the spring of junior year.

Why Visit?

A college website, catalog, or view book can only show you so much. To get a feel for the school, you need to walk around the campus, sit in a class, and visit the dorms. It's also an opportunity to see and experience everyday life on campus.

When to Visit?

Admissions offices are open all year, but visiting when classes are in session is best. Check a school's website for visit information; many ask you to sign up online for tours and information sessions ahead of time.

- One of the best times to visit is spring break of your junior year. At UPrep, we suggest you visit one large, one medium, and one small school to get a feeling for each. If possible, include a large state and a small private school on your tour for comparison.
- Some schools offer special visit days. These are usually daylong programs that will introduce you to many areas of the school.

Planning Your Visit

Things to Do or Consider in Your Plan:

A good campus visit takes two to four hours, including time to get a sense of the surrounding town or area. Don't try to visit more than two schools in one day.

Contact the admissions office or visit the school's website for tour information.

In addition to a campus tour and information session, you may want to include an admissions interview, a meeting with a faculty member in your area of interest, a meeting with a coach, and attending a class (allow extra time to schedule these).

Take lots of pictures. You'll be amazed by how much information you'll collect from photos. Having a camera and jotting down a few notes and impressions will help you distinguish schools from one another. Remember, a picture is worth a thousand words!

Contact former UPrep students you might know at the school before you plan to visit. They'll give you an insider's look at the campus. UPrep's Puma College Connection Program gives you access to more than 100 alumni who are eager to talk about their college experiences. You can access this list of alumni here: tinyurl.com/musw3dfh.

Before you go, make a list of items that are important to you so you know what to evaluate: Start thinking about location, size, diversity, academic programs, social atmosphere.

What to Do When You Visit

Keep These Things in Mind:

1. Focus on the people, place, and programs. Engage as many people as possible in conversation about the school.
2. Look at campus publications to get more information about the community at large. A college newspaper will give you a sense of what the students are concerned about—something a tour guide is not likely to share.
3. Wander through the student center, cafés, and bookstore and observe how students interact with each other.
4. Go on an admissions tour and attend an information session. Think about questions that you may want to ask. Listen to the tour guide, but don't jump to conclusions about a school based solely on your experience with the tour guide.

Sit In On a Class:

1. Do the professors seem knowledgeable? Are they accessible for questions or concerns?
2. What is the role of a teaching assistant (TA) in the classroom? Do they replace the professor or assist the professor?
3. Are the students participating in classroom discussion? Are they engaged? Disengaged?
4. What kinds of work are the students doing? Are they conducting advanced research? Doing group projects?
5. What size are the classes? Is this representative of all classes on campus (or do intro courses tend to be bigger than advanced)?

Speak with Current Students:

1. What is their opinion of the professors? Do they find that they can approach their professors?
2. Do the professors spend time with students to be sure they understand the material?
3. How much time is expected for studying and other work outside of class?
4. What do they like most/least about the school?
5. How do they spend their free time? Ask a student what they did the previous weekend: Was it balanced between social activities and academics? Did they remain on campus?

Speak with an Admissions Counselor:

1. Does the school offer Early Action (EA) or Early Decision (ED) options to students?
2. Do I need to declare a major on my application?
3. What unique programs does the school offer? Is there an honors program?
4. Are internships available? In the community? For credit during the school year? During the summer?
5. Based on my academic information, do I fit within the range of your profiled students?
6. Are there any unique admissions requirements? Is the Common Application accepted? Is there a supplement?



Speak with a Financial Aid Counselor:

1. Are any school-specific scholarships available? How do I apply?
2. What is the total cost of attendance, including tuition, room and board, books, supplies, incidentals, parking, travel, and health insurance?
3. When is tuition due? Is there a payment plan?
4. What types of financial aid do you offer? Is financial aid need-based, merit-based, or both? What percentage of aid is in the form of loans? Grants? Scholarships? Work-study awards?
5. What financial aid forms and/or scholarship applications do you require?
6. What is the average financial aid award?
7. When do you notify families about their financial aid award?

After the Visit

- Fill out the College Visit Checklist on the following page to help you remember the school.
- Write a thank-you note to any admissions people you met during your visit. This makes a valuable impression.

All colleges have increased their virtual visit options. Students can access these opportunities directly on a college's admissions website. Additionally, both of our online college counseling tools for students, Scoir and College Kickstart, link to colleges' virtual offerings.

Student and Parent/Guardian Roles and Responsibilities

During the college process we encourage students and parents/guardians to abide by the following precepts.

Student Roles and Responsibilities

- Know thyself.
- You are in the driver's seat.
- Be an informed consumer.
- Do your research.
- Don't let this process affect your self-esteem.
- Focus on your needs.
- Avoid the rumor mill.
- Be mindful of deadlines.
- You represent more than yourself in this process.
- Communicate.

Parent/Guardian Roles and Responsibilities

- Be realistic.
- You are in the passenger seat.
- Focus on the right fit.
- Use many sources to research colleges.
- Help your student think about who they are.
- Avoid the rumor mill.
- Avoid pronoun confusion ("We are applying").
- Value and celebrate these last two years.
- If you went through the college process, recognize that the schools and the process are different now.
- Where your student is admitted to college is not a reflection of your parenting.
- Communicate.

College Visit Checklist

COLLEGE: _____ DATE: _____



TO-DO CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Talk to professors.
- ☐ Visit the library.
- ☐ Tour campus.
- ☐ Sit in a class.
- ☐ Eat at the cafeteria.
- ☐ Talk to admissions.
- ☐ Read the college newspaper.
- ☐ Talk to students.
- ☐ Visit student housing.
- ☐ Read bulletin boards.
- ☐ Check out rec facilities.
- ☐ Check out student activities.
- ☐ Tour area around campus.
- ☐ Eat at an off-campus hangout.
- ☐ Picture yourself living here.

CITY/STATE:

Size: ☐ Rural ☐ Small City ☐ Big City

ADMISSION CRITERIA:

ACT: English: Reading: Math: Writing: Comp:

SAT: E.B.R.W.: Math: Comp:

Mean GPA:

Test-Optional? Test-Blind?

Acceptance Percentage?

Admissions Rep:

Email/Phone:

EXPERIENCE: Rated: 1 = Low / 5 = High

People: 1 2 3 4 5 Social Life: 1 2 3 4 5

Classrooms: 1 2 3 4 5 Dorms: 1 2 3 4 5

Campus Food: 1 2 3 4 5 Town: 1 2 3 4 5

ASK A STUDENT:

What is the best part of this college?

What is the worst part of this college?

What is a typical day like?

What do students do on weekends?

How are classes structured?

Why did you choose this college?

MY IMPRESSIONS:

Best features of this school?

Best part of my visit?

Worst part of my visit?



High School Years

Freshman and Sophomore Years

The College Counseling Office encourages students in their freshman and sophomore years to focus on their academic work and their extracurricular activities. A student's high school transcript tells the story of their academic preparedness for college. By the very nature of UPrep's academic program, every student is taking the requisite courses to be an exceptional college applicant.

Junior Year

Junior year is a time of tremendous growth and self-discovery, when the students begin to see themselves as emerging adults. Junior year is also when the college process begins in earnest. Throughout the junior year, the College Counseling Office hosts three large-scale grade-level programs and sends out monthly communications that highlight important and relevant college-related topics.

While the College Counseling Office works as a team, students and families are assigned an individual college counselor in December of junior year who will be their contact throughout the college process. The counselor's role is to educate, counsel, advocate, and celebrate the students during the college process. During the spring semester of the junior year, students will meet with their counselor every three weeks to begin to identify areas of interest and subjects they would like to pursue. Parents and guardians are an integral part of the college process too, but are encouraged to let the student take the lead. After the student has had their initial meeting with their college counselor, parents/guardians will meet with the counselor.

Responsibilities for the Junior Year

- **Complete junior questionnaire in Scoir.**
- **Meet with your college counselor** during spring semester. Parent/guardian meetings are scheduled after your initial student meeting.
- **Determine criteria for colleges.**
- **Participate in college admission testing programs:** PSAT, SAT, ACT, AP Exams (optional). We encourage all students to

take the SAT and the ACT during the second semester of junior year.

- **Some colleges are test-optional**, meaning students can submit scores if they would like to do so. Your counselor can help you decide which schools you want to send your scores to.
- **Attend college representative meetings.** Each fall between September and November, UPrep hosts hundreds of college representatives from around the globe. A complete list of the visit schedule can be found in the Scoir student portal; parents/guardians can see a list of visiting colleges in the weekly All-School Email. Students need to sign up in advance in Scoir to attend college representative visits. If students are going to miss class, they need to get permission from their teacher in advance, and they should not miss class if there is an important test or presentation taking place. Juniors are asked to attend at least five college visits during free periods, flex time, lunch, or class periods to learn more about the breadth of college options. However, juniors are asked to not miss more than five classes.
- **Sign (you and your parents/guardians) and return** your Release of Records form found on the Veracross Family Portal.
- **Attend college fair programs** in Seattle (National College Fair).
- **Sign** the FERPA waiver in Scoir and on the Common Application.
- **Attend** the annual Case Studies program in the spring.
- **Request** and add teacher recommendation letter requests in Scoir.
- During the winter, start to **explore College Kickstart**.

Senior Year

It's not where a student goes to college that matters most; it's the journey that should be memorable. The college counseling goal for the senior year is to help families navigate their journey through the college application process. College counselors communicate with and advocate for each student during conversations with college admissions colleagues. We celebrate each student's accomplishments and wish them success and happiness as they complete their journey. Throughout the senior year, the College Counseling Office hosts two large-scale grade-level programs and sends out monthly communications that highlight important relevant college application and matriculation topics.

Responsibilities for the Senior Year

- **Complete by July 1**, prior to the start of your senior year, your senior inventory and parent/guardian questionnaire. Run your final college list through College Kickstart.
- **Narrow your choices.**
- **Meet with your college counselor.** Visit often; we like to know how the college process is progressing.
- **Complete your applications on time.**
- **Complete your financial aid applications** (FAFSA and CSS Profile). More information about financial aid applications can be found starting on page 41.
- **Present yourself in the most positive fashion** to the colleges of your choice. Take the time and the effort to make sure your applications are authentic and polished, and work with your college counselor to go over each part of your application so you are presenting your best self.

- **Plan to attend college representative visits** held at UPrep as well as college fairs in Seattle, especially if you can't visit colleges in person. Remember that the representatives who come to the Northwest are the ones most likely to read your application and to be your advocate on their admissions committee. Therefore, it is to your advantage to get to know these representatives. Each fall between September and November, UPrep hosts hundreds of college representatives from around the globe. A complete list of the visit schedule can be found in the Scoir student portal; parents/guardians can see a list of visiting colleges in the weekly All-School Email. Students need to sign up in advance in Scoir to attend college representative visits. If students are going to miss class, they need to get permission from their teacher in advance and they should not miss class if there is an important test or presentation taking place.
- **Avoid senioritis.** Colleges always predicate acceptance upon satisfactory completion of the senior year. Students are urged to consult with the director of the College Counseling Office about any substantial changes in senior year courses or grades.

If a student's academic situation changes at any time during the senior year, colleges will be notified. Self-disclosure by the student of any academic inconsistencies is the preferred way for colleges to learn of these changes.

Communication with Colleges

We know many parents/guardians will help with certain aspects of the admissions process. Families are encouraged to support students, but to refrain from contacting admissions offices except under unusual circumstances. It is the students' responsibility to communicate directly with admissions offices to make their own tour and interview appointments, to request information, and to check on the status of their files. It is incumbent upon each student to complete their senior year with the same (or better) commitment to studies and responsibilities as in past years. Each student's academic transcript will be reported to colleges at the following times during senior year: first quarter for EAVED candidates, midyear, and end of senior year.

Glossary of College-Related Terms

ACT: The organization, based in Iowa, that administers the ACT exam. Visit actstudent.org for more information.

Admissions index: A system of ranking applicants for automatic admission to a university. SAT/ACT scores are often the only factors in an index. This practice for admitting students is not common; it is used primarily by large public universities.

Block plan: A curriculum based on one course at a time for periods of three to seven weeks each. Examples: Cornell College, Iowa; Colorado College, Colorado.

College Board: The umbrella organization that produces high school, college, and graduate assessment tests; proposes educational policy; and works on curriculum reform. Visit collegeboard.com for more information.

Common Application: More than 1,000 colleges and universities participate in the Common Application program whereby a student fills out one application and can use it for more than one college. The Common Application is available in the College Counseling Office or online at commonapp.org.

CO-OP program: A study and work system that allows students to gain practical experience related to their coursework. Example: Northeastern University, Massachusetts.

Educational Testing Service: The Educational Testing Service is responsible for the creation and administration of the SAT Reasoning Test, TOEFL, and Advanced Placement Exams.

Liberal arts: College studies comprising the arts, natural sciences, mathematics, social studies, and humanities, as distinguished from applied studies in such specialized areas as pharmacy, engineering, agriculture, home economics, etc.

NCAA Eligibility Center: The National Collegiate Athletic Association's agency that processes academic qualification forms for all Division I and II athletes. Visit athleticscholarships.net for more information.

Quarter system: The organization of the college year into four periods of approximately 12 weeks each. A regular academic year includes the fall, winter, and spring quarters. Example: University of Washington. The fourth or summer quarter is usually optional. If only three terms are offered, the system is usually referred to as a **trimester** schedule. These three terms are usually 12 weeks each. Example: Carleton College, Minnesota.

Semester system: The organization of the college year into two periods of approximately 18 weeks each. A regular academic year includes the fall and spring semesters. Example: Colby College, Maine.

SSD: Services for Students with Disabilities is a branch of the College Board that oversees extended time and special accommodations for students with learning differences or physical disabilities.

3/2 programs: An opportunity for students who wish to combine a professional program with a liberal arts education. Students attend a liberal arts college for three years and a professional program, such as engineering or architecture, for two. Example: Whitman College's 3/2 program with Duke University for forestry.



Reminder:

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR CHECKING YOUR COLLEGE DEADLINES!



The College Application

Here you will find some practical suggestions to ensure that you have a successful college application process. The College Counseling Office is ready to assist each student with advice and answers to all questions to make the college application process a positive experience. You can contact us at any time.

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Register early for SATs and ACTs. Typically, UPrep offers School Day SAT and ACT exams in October of the senior year and March of the junior year. Students can also take exams during National Weekend Testing and should register early for these offerings. If you do not adhere to this suggestion, it is possible you could be assigned a test site as far away as Tacoma, Bremerton, or Centralia on popular test dates.

Fill out your test applications for SATs and ACTs the same way every time. For example, inserting a middle initial in the second application for a test can confuse the computer systems and make it difficult to recover your scores.

Make copies of everything you send to colleges, financial aid offices, ETS (the testing arm of the College Board), and ACT.

Read and act on school announcements about college visits, deadlines, and meetings.

Check your email and voicemail! This is how colleges communicate with you about upcoming deadlines, programs, events, scholarships, and interviews. We recommend that you create a separate email account that is used for only your college

communications, and that you check that email frequently through the college application process.

Be visible in the College Counseling Office; the better we get to know you, the better we can represent you to colleges. Students should have a standing appointment with their college counselor every three weeks during the spring of their junior year and every two weeks during the fall of their senior year.

Make appointments for college interviews and tours early. This is especially true if you are visiting in the Northeast. A two- to three-month lead time is not unusual.

Missing school for college visits and interviews is not advised, but sometimes cannot be avoided. Be sure that you complete all assignments and meet all school deadlines despite any interruptions caused by the college admission process.

Write down all your usernames and passwords. You will be asked to use them frequently. Most schools communicate admission decisions via web portals, so you will need these to check your application status.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and College Admission Essays

There has been significant growth in both the availability and use of generative artificial intelligence (AI), such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Microsoft Copilot. The impact of these tools on education is unfolding and changing quickly. We believe it is important to remind students and families about the ethical use of AI during the college application process.

The Common Application, the main application platform used by more than 1,000 colleges, has an AI policy that requires each student to affirm that their application provides an accurate representation of their personal narrative, which includes the college essay and supplemental questions, accomplishments, academics, and extracurricular activities. The Common Application asks students to acknowledge the following:

I certify that all information submitted in the admission process—including this application and any other supporting materials—is my own work, factually true, and honestly presented, and that these documents will become the property of the institution to which I am applying and will not be returned to me. I understand that I may be subject to a range of possible disciplinary actions, including admission revocation, expulsion, or revocation of course credit, grades, and degree, should the information I have certified be false.

The Common App explicitly states that using AI to generate substantive content for your application is considered fraud. This is because it misrepresents your own work as being original. While the Common App does not explicitly state how it checks for AI-generated content, many colleges and universities may be able to identify it and reserve the right to revoke admission because of it.

Just as UPrep has offered guidance on the appropriate use of AI in academic work, many colleges have offered guidance around the ethical use of AI during the college application process. In particular, we have found Brown University's AI statement helpful: "While an applicant may use artificial intelligence to assist with spelling and grammar review, in the same way as any other platform that supports basic proofreading, the content of all essays, short-answer questions

and any other material submitted by an applicant must be the work of that individual." This statement mirrors UPrep's own ethical use of AI in the classroom policy, which you can find on page 45 of the UPrep Family Handbook.

We appreciate how thoughtfully our students have navigated the ethical use of AI in their scholastic work at UPrep, and we are confident this same conduct will continue as they navigate the college process.

Application Options

Early Action (EA): A process whereby a student can submit an application by a designated date (typically in November or December) and receive a decision one month later. The EA student, if accepted, is not bound to enroll. Students are not required to notify the college of their enrollment decision until May 1. They can also apply to other colleges for Early Action or Early Decision.

Restrictive Early Action (REA), sometimes referred to as Single Choice Early Action (SCEA): An early application process used by a few Ivy League universities and Stanford whereby students typically apply by mid-November and receive a decision by mid-December. Students are not required to notify the college of their enrollment decision until May 1. Under the REA policy, students are not allowed to apply to other colleges under ED or EA programs. They can, however, apply to other colleges through Regular Decision programs.

Early Decision (ED): A process whereby a student can submit an application by a designated date (typically in November or December) and receive a decision one month later that carries a binding commitment to enroll, if accepted to the college. Student and parent/guardian must sign a statement of intent that, if admitted, the student will attend the college/university regardless of financial aid award. Colleges will share ED lists, so all other applications must be withdrawn. Students not admitted under ED are either denied or deferred. Deferred applicants are reconsidered with the Regular Decision applicant candidates. Students and parents/guardians will not be informed of financial aid prior to admission. A small number of colleges have a second round of this process called Early Decision II. This deadline is usually around January 15, with notification one month later.



The Common Application for Undergraduate Admissions



Filling out a college application? Here are answers to some frequently asked questions:

- UPrep School Code: 481169. UPrep Address: 8000 25th Avenue NE, Seattle, WA 98115
- You enrolled in high school in August 2023. You anticipate graduating on June 6, 2027.
- There are 107 students in the class (as of 5/1/2026). Your grades are on a 4.0 unweighted scale, and there is no class rank.
- Kelly Herrington, Director of College Counseling, kherrington@universityprep.org, 206.832.1226
- Cris Monroy, Associate Director of College Counseling, cmonroy@universityprep.org, 206.588.8759
- Britten Nelson, Associate Director of College Counseling, bnelson@universityprep.org, 206.832.1111
- There are 52 weeks/calendar year, roughly 9 weeks/quarter, 19 weeks/semester, 38 weeks/school year.
- Each sports season lasts approximately 11 to 12 weeks.

Regular Decision (RD): The most common application process in this country. Most colleges offer some form of RD among their application choices. Students usually apply to colleges between January 1 and January 15, are notified of the decision by April 1, and then must let the college know whether they will matriculate by May 1.

Candidate Reply Date: May 1 is the date by which all colleges require an admitted student to commit to attending their school. This commitment usually requires an enrollment deposit. Students can commit to only one school.

Fast Applications/Priority Applications/Pre-Applications*: In an effort to increase the number of applications received (which helps colleges reduce their admission rate, which makes them appear more selective), many colleges are offering “Fast Apps.” These alternative applications often waive the application fee and/or an essay requirement.

**These applications often create more of a logistical headache for you. We encourage you to avoid these fast-track offers—an EA (or RD) application submitted through the Common Application will actually be easier for you in the long run.*

Applying to International Universities

The United Kingdom and Europe have become popular destinations for college-bound Americans. You will probably find that most colleges require a high school diploma and a minimum score of 600 on each of the two sections of the SAT.

Oxford, Cambridge, and the London School of Economics are not very realistic choices for American students, as their programs are not chronologically in synchrony with ours. Better choices are the Scottish universities. The University of St Andrews has the longest history of recruiting Americans and has by far the highest proportion of them in its undergraduate population. The Universities of Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Stirling are other prominent names, as well as Trinity in Dublin. Many schools in the UK, including the Universities of St Andrews, Aberdeen, Stirling, and Strathclyde, now accept the Common Application, which makes it easier for students from the U.S. to apply for admission. Prices are about \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year, including tuition, room, and board, with little financial aid available. The following websites are helpful for students applying to schools in the UK: **ucas.com**, the application portal for most universities in the UK; **thestudentroom.co.uk**, a chat room forum about UK universities answered by current students; and **studyacrossthepond.com**, a website dedicated to Americans looking to study in the UK.

- UPrep partners with Gary Coulter, who runs a website that provides information about UK admissions for international students: **ukcollegeadmissions.com**. Reach out to a college counselor for access to the password-protected website.
- UPrep is an official UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) Centre. This means students applying to college in the UK will receive a buzzword from their college counselor in the fall. This allows students to access the UCAS application portal and submit all their documents to UCAS institutions.

On the Continent, the primary option is the network of American-style institutions such as the American Universities in Paris and Rome. There is a newer one in Bremen, Germany, with ties to Rice University in the U.S., and several places in Switzerland. Webster University in St. Louis has a number of campuses abroad. Most of these institutions are small, with about 1,000 students.

Applying to the University of Washington

The University of Washington (UW) accepts the Common Application, but the application process is unique because students self-report classes and grades and the UW doesn’t want to see transcripts or letters of recommendations.

Additionally, students are asked to select which major(s) they wish to apply for. Even undecided students need to select at least one area of interest when applying to UW.

There are three types of majors at the UW: open, minimum requirements, and capacity-constrained. The major you request on your application may be used as a factor in your admission decision, and some majors are much more competitive than others. Because of that, we recommend that if you select one of the capacity-constrained majors (like business, engineering, or computer science), that you also select at least one major that is in the “open” or “minimum requirements” category. Visit **admit.washington.edu/academics/majors**.

Applying to Canadian Universities

More UPrep students are singing “O Canada.” A recent newspaper article noted: “Today, our quiet neighbor to the north shines as a sanctuary from sky-high college bills.” Most importantly, many Canadian universities are referred to as “ivies amid the maples.” The educational quality of Canadian universities is strong. Visit **universitystudy.ca**.

Teacher Recommendations

Recommendations from teachers help the admissions committee learn information about you that test scores and grades do not reflect. Give careful thought to which teachers you would like to write your teacher recommendations, as they provide insight and perspective about your classroom learning style and experience.

- Ask two teachers for a recommendation. You should select teachers from two different disciplines (e.g., one from English, foreign language, or history, and one from math or science). Ask late in your junior year if they would be interested in writing a recommendation for you.
- Always ask the teacher in person, never in passing or via email, to write your recommendation. Teachers are asked by numerous students for recommendations, and many limit the number of recommendations they agree to write. By doing so, they do not overcommit themselves. They want to give your recommendation the same effort and consideration as others.

- Once a teacher has agreed to write your recommendation, please add their name to Scoir. This allows them to see your application deadlines and your college list. Some teachers may request additional information from you prior to completing your recommendation; the College Counseling Office suggests giving your teacher a copy of your resume detailing any outside school activities. This information is essential to teachers, as it helps them evaluate you in the context of their class and your outside pursuits. Please provide any requested additional information in a timely manner.
- At the end of the process, write thank-you notes to all the teachers who wrote recommendations for you.

Make a list of teachers you can ask:

Applying to the University of California System

Nine campuses: one application. The University of California (UC) system includes more than 200,000 students attending one of nine undergraduate campuses at:

- | | | |
|------------|---------------|-----------------|
| • Berkeley | • Los Angeles | • San Diego |
| • Davis | • Merced | • Santa Barbara |
| • Irvine | • Riverside | • Santa Cruz |

While each campus is unique, students submit one application to the UC system as a whole, indicating which specific campus(es) they are applying to. Applications are open on November 1 and students must submit their applications by November 30.

Eligibility Requirements

Before a student applies for admission to any of the campuses within the University of California system, they must first determine if the minimum eligibility requirements for admission in four areas have been met:

- 1. Scholarship requirement:** Non-California residents **MUST HAVE** A 3.4 CUMULATIVE GPA in classes taken in 10th and 11th grade, and no grade lower than a C in the courses listed below in section 2.
- 2. Subject requirement:** Students must complete a minimum of 15 college preparatory courses, with at least 11 finished prior to the beginning of the senior year. These courses are the traditional courses required for graduation from UPREP, including our history, English, math, lab science, and world language requirements.

HOWEVER, the UC system also requires one full year of visual and performing arts, which is different from UPREP's graduation requirement. Some UPREP students aren't eligible to apply to the UC system because they have two semesters of visual or performing arts from different disciplines (for example, Photography I in one semester, and Stagecraft in another), instead of two consecutive semesters in one discipline (Photography I in the fall, and Photography II in the spring). Please talk to your college counselor if you suspect that you have not satisfied the visual and performing arts requirement.

3. Examination requirement: The University of California system has made the decision to remove standardized testing from their admissions criteria. However, for many of our students we believe that having standardized testing will help their applications. We encourage students to speak with their counselor about whether or not they should submit their test scores.

4. Recommendation and transcript requirement: The University of California does not require letters of recommendation or official copies of your high school transcript. All grades are self-reported.

Nonresidents

The UC system has seen a significant increase in applications from out of state, even as the overall admission rate has decreased. It is important to remember that the California State Legislature, like many state legislatures, caps out-of-state enrollment. This means that it is more difficult to gain admission to the UC system as an out-of-state applicant. Furthermore, the four-year graduation rate for all UC campuses is 63 percent and the six-year graduation rate is 83 percent. If admitted, you may want to anticipate paying out-of-state tuition, which is significantly higher than in-state tuition, for more than four years; it is very difficult to gain residency. After recruiting out-of-state students heavily after the 2008 recession to compensate for budget shortfalls, the UC system has dramatically decreased the number of spaces available for non-California residents. In 2022, the legislature approved a \$98.8 million budget to prioritize in-state students, compensating for money lost from out-of-state enrollment. This includes \$31 million specifically targeted to reduce out-of-state enrollment at Berkeley, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Because of this, admission rates for non-California residents in the UC system dropped 19 percent between 2021 and 2022. For more information on applying to the UC system, visit admission.universityofcalifornia.edu.

Myth:
Grades are the most important factor in college admissions.



Reality:
The quality of the curriculum, not grades, is the most important factor in admission decisions. Most colleges like to see four years of all five academic subjects on an applicant's transcript: math, science, English, history, and a foreign language.



The College Essay

Most college applications require at least one main essay, and many include additional shorter questions as well. The purpose of this is twofold: Colleges want to assess your writing skills, but they also want to learn more about you.

Writing Your Essay

- **Be as honest and introspective as possible.** Take this opportunity to tell the admissions counselor things about yourself that cannot be learned from any other part of the application you submit. If there are any inconsistencies in your academic, athletic, or creative record, you can use this space to explain them.
- **Application essay topics.** Try to discover what makes you unique, and show what you care about and the kind of person you are. Essay topics to consider: family history, events, or people that have been important to you and why; a challenging or interesting experience and what you learned from it; an obstacle you've faced and how you dealt with or overcame it; your goals, ambitions, or dreams; what you hope to learn or gain in college, or what other college students can learn or gain from you; issues of personal, local, or national concern.
- Creating a theme for your essay such as risk taking, intellectual independence, or love of the outdoors often brings up interesting examples of your life to support your chosen theme. Specific incidents to illustrate general observations are considered essential.

- The typical length of an essay is about 500 words, or no more than two double-spaced pages, which means that you will have to choose your words very carefully. The essay process should encourage good writing, and good writing, by definition, is succinct.

Practical Considerations

Write more than one draft, edit, and revise—this process takes time and you should not expect to finish it in one sitting.

- Do not try to be too unusual or too creative. Make sure to use your own voice!
- Check for misspellings and have it proofread by actual human beings (do not rely on spell-check).

Grammar and mechanics

- Keep it to 650 words or less. Concise is nice.
- It's economical to send the same essay to more than one school (as long as you answer the essay prompt).

Potential topics

- Avoid overused, trendy, or hot topics, such as politics, privilege, or sex.
- Write about what you know. Be yourself!
- Keep the topic simple—choose one idea or situation (this is one page in your life, not the entire book).

- Your choice of topic does not matter nearly as much as your approach.
- Make sure it reflects who you are and what you know.
- Write about what you have learned, what you have observed, and how you have changed.
- Highlight an accomplishment.

Other Words of Advice

- Focus small; think big. Don't try to tackle too much in the essay. Stick to one experience, event, or activity. You'll be surprised at how much you can reveal.
- Have fun! Sit down and start writing; your opening sentence doesn't have to be perfect yet (that's why we call it a rough draft).
- Have a good opening line that will capture the reader's (bleary-eyed admissions counselor's) attention.
- Ask for advice from the people who know you the best, but write it yourself.
- You are different from anyone else. Make admissions counselors see that!
- Humor can help, but don't force it.
- Show, don't tell (i.e., use the senses—smell, touch, taste, hearing, sight). Add details, details, details.
- Enliven your language with descriptive verbs.

Actual Questions from Colleges and Universities

- Describe an event in your life that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.
- Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what lessons did you learn? Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?
- Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?
- Discuss an accomplishment or event that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

Supplemental Essays

Many colleges and universities require a supplement in addition to the Common Application. Supplements usually contain institution-specific questions. Most supplements are available for download on the institution's website or from commonapp.org.

Supplements vary, but the following items are likely to appear on a supplement:

- Biographical information
- Areas of academic, extracurricular, and/or athletic interest
- Contact with and continued interest in the school through visits, interviews, etc.
- Legacy or other connections to the institution
- Additional essay questions, the most common of which is "Why do you want to attend college X?" (More on that below.)
- Request for a graded paper or assignment with teacher comments
- Invitation to submit supporting materials in the arts or documentation of other special talents
- Early Decision (ED) intent form
- Financial aid supplement
- Disciplinary inquiry
- Parent/guardian or peer recommendation
- Residency form
- Honor code commitment

When completing a college's supplement, please take the time to answer every question. Supplements provide a wonderful opportunity for you to showcase your individuality and creativity, and are reviewed just as carefully as the main essay; please be honest and genuine in your responses.

Sample Supplement Questions

What word best describes you?

(All of the answers are from recent college applicants.)

I sat down at my desk and plopped the Webster's Unabridged Dictionary on my lap. I was eager to discover the perfect word that I could use to describe myself. I flipped open the dictionary and landed on page 456, the "D" section. I saw the word *dachshund*, but I didn't think my favorite dog was very descriptive of me as a person. Next, I turned to *dangerous*, but I had already talked about my trip to Israel this past summer. *Demented* was the next word on the list, which would perfectly describe my kitten, Lofa, but I hoped it wasn't an accurate representation of me. My eyes landed on the word *dermatologist*, but that's my mom. *Ducks* was the next word that caught my eye, and while it is the name of the soccer team I have played on, I wanted a word that described me and not the team. As my eyes scanned the pages from left to right like a seesaw, I eagerly searched for the perfect word. I didn't want to talk about my favorite dog, my trip to Israel, my annoying little kitten, my mom, or my soccer team. I wanted to talk about myself. I wanted to find a word that would encompass my personality. Just as I was beginning to despair and doubted I would find the right word, I discovered the word *dynamic* on page 567: the perfect word to describe and define me.



Would you please tell us about a few of your favorite books, poems, authors, films, plays, pieces of music, musicians, performers, paintings, artists, magazines, or newspapers? Feel free to touch on one, some, or all of the categories listed, or add a category of your own.

Excerpts of one response to that question: I'm surprised you left out food. I'm going to have to add the "fruit" subcategory: I'm a pretty adventurous eater, a guilty gourmand, and I'm willing to bet that I've eaten more exotic fruit than any other applicant in this wide, wide pool (if that counts for anything). Mangosteen is a personal favorite.

Look at the clutter on, underneath, and around my bedstand, and you'll find a somewhat eclectic potpourri: Kafka and *Popular Science*, ESPN and e.e. cummings, Thomas Hobbes and *Calvin and Hobbes*, Faulkner and *FoxTrot*. I eat a lot of words, some online, some in print, but it's always a nice balance of gravity and levity.

I'm a sucker for lyricism, for verbal ingenuity. That's what draws me to the prose of writers like Thomas Pynchon (furious fits of wordplay) and the late David Foster Wallace (footnoter extraordinaire). There's so much to marvel at, so much rich textual texture. Both of these guys also happen to creatively weave concepts of math and science into their literature, which really appeals to me as someone who always loved working both sides of the brain. Recent pleasant surprise—learning that *Cat's Cradle*, a personal fave of mine, qualified as Vonnegut's anthropology thesis at Chicago. Ridiculously cool.

Name your favorite books, authors, films, and/or musical artists.

Kafka (*The Metamorphosis*, "The Judgment"), Yann Martel (*Life of Pi*, *Self*), and Patrick Suskind (*Perfume*, *Mr. Summer's Story*) have left indelible impressions on me. Fresh readings reveal new messages as these authors artfully layer their novels in construction and theme, challenging me to look deeper.

What is the most significant challenge that society faces today?

I recently dealt with the passing of my 81-year-old friend, Charlie Chong. Born in Hawaii, he inspired people to practice a tradition of *ho'oponopono* (to do what is right and just). He inspired me to rebuild grassroots politics, and to combat political apathy.

How did you spend your last two summers?

I worked as a youth tennis instructor. I also volunteered with the American Cancer Society, where my senior citizen co-workers imparted their hard-earned lessons. Summer allowed me to compare the splendors of my youth with the wisdom of age, allowing a simultaneous window into my past and future.

What were your favorite events (e.g., performances, exhibits, sporting events, etc.) this past year?

My clarinet teacher gave his first recital in over 25 years. He is my musical mentor and friend. I'd never heard him perform. He played a melancholy melody, representing regret and loss. I realized he sacrificed his musical career to teach the next generation.

What qualities do you admire in people?

I admire those who have the strength and honesty to stay true to themselves, but also the integrity and humility to stay open to change. I especially admire those who foster a strong work ethic and drive to remain curious, active, and live life in constant interaction, rather than in quiet anticipation.

What historic moment or event do you wish you could have witnessed or participated in?

In 1873, Susan B. Anthony declared, "I stand before you tonight under indictment for the alleged crime of having voted at the last presidential election." The birth of female equality gives me the right to pursue my dreams. Without Ms. Anthony's courage, my aspirations could never materialize.

Sample Essay #1

Finding Patterns in Many Places

“What,” the science teacher began, “do the strings of an acoustic guitar, the destruction of an earthquake, and the iridescent shine of a butterfly’s wing have in common?”

“Wavelengths,” I said without thinking. She stared at me. So did my math teacher.

She’d meant it rhetorically.

My mother speculates that I think in patterns. I love math and I’m good at languages—not least of all one close to my heart: Shakespearean English.

I’ve done theatre almost as long as I can remember, and I first discovered Shakespeare in fifth grade as a poodle-skirt-clad Hermia 2 in a ‘50s *Midsummer*.

Why theatre? Because before I knew who I was, I was an actor. Because I am bravest in front of an audience. Because I step on a stage and everything just makes sense to me. My brain clicks into this state of *oh-yeah-ness*; I know I’m in the right place.

That’s not to say theatre doesn’t challenge or frustrate me. I remember feeling sick to my stomach in the wings of the black box in sophomore year. It was opening night; the show was an assemblage of 10-minute pieces kicked off with a dystopian fantasy called *The Weed Dreams*. We’d beaten *The Weed Dreams* into the ground with repetition, rehearsed it obsessively for months. Frustratingly, it eluded us. Months of work had only soured the wound of its inaccessibility.

It wasn’t until opening night, my stomach doing slow flips, that the answer hit me. *My daughter died*. It had come to me at the last possible moment. But today I remember that show fondly. A willingness to experiment—even past the point where experimentation was appropriate—saved that show for me.

That realization has made me rethink who I am as an audience member—to try to see a piece as the creators did.

Not everyone has walked out of movie theatres thinking about the actors’ choices, but I have. Not everyone goes to museums and studies a single brushstroke, but I do.

I’m also trying to define myself as a performer. Sitting with my mom at a production by Seattle Shakespeare Company, in the minutes before the lights go down, I am consumed by a want to be on the stage myself so strong it nears painful. In those moments, there is nothing I want more in the world than to be an actor.

So, what will I pursue in college? Theatre, obviously. But not entirely.

I want to be a computer scientist.

Though I first discovered coding—then with Scratch—in fifth grade with after-school coding classes, my rediscovery of coding in high school came by coincidence. The elective I’d been set on taking my sophomore spring, Waves and Optics, was canceled. At the last minute, I switched into Computer Science I.

Why computer science? Because before I knew who I was, I was coding. Because my brain snaps into this state of *oh-yeah-ness*; I’m in the right place. Because I sit down in front of an IDE and everything just makes sense.

I find so many of theatre’s lessons in coding. When coding, I experiment with and rediscover my work as I would with a script. When coding, I know my finished work will often be a product whose process and production is secreted away behind a screen; I also know how to look for the process in others’ work.

It is daunting to foray into a field—particularly because it is so male-dominated—where I am outmatched in experience by both my betters and some of my peers. But I find my ground as always in faith in myself and dedication to the work; I am intimidated, *of course*, but I am undeterred. I will continue to explore my work, on a stage and a keyboard, and to find patterns every day—in Shakespeare and C++, the languages close to my heart.

—WRITTEN BY ALLIE ADAMS ‘21

Sample Essay #2

Reclaiming My Childhood Dream

If you had asked six-year-old me what I wanted to be when I grew up, you might have expected me to reply with something like an artist or an astronaut or maybe even a princess. You probably weren't expecting to look down at my bouncing pigtails as I jumped with excitement and yelled, "Marine biologist! I want to be a marine biologist!" Although I was an odd child regardless, adults used to laugh and widen their eyes in amused shock every time I would mention my dream job. Some would turn to my parents and say something along the lines of "That is quite the job, isn't it" with a laugh while I stood by, unfazed by whatever joke I was the punchline of.

As a kid growing up in Seattle, I would walk through the Seattle Aquarium like it was the Louvre. My family had a membership, and at every chance I got I would beg to go downtown to the aquarium. The plain salmon and the funny puffer fish and the graceful jellyfish all felt like my friends, and I'd like to think that they still are. I remember pressing my nose against the glass in the river otter enclosure as they put their tiny paws up against my reflection and playfully pushed off the glass, only to circle around and do it again. I'd proudly tell my grandma they did that every time I visited the aquarium because they remembered me. From what I remember of my childhood, my fondest memories are the countless weekends I spent at the aquarium.

Somewhere between the days I played with the river otters and the day I decided it was a bit undignified to put my nose on that dirty glass, I started to grow up. Maybe growing up wasn't entirely my choice, though. The day my parents told me they were getting divorced, I was weeks away from starting my first year of middle school. My mom asked me if there was anywhere I wanted to go to cheer me up, even though I wasn't crying. Somehow, we ended up at the Seattle Aquarium. The rockfish outside the gift shop watched me as I finally burst into tears. I didn't go back to the aquarium for a long time after that.

Five years quickly passed and now I needed to find a summer job to "get me ready for the real world." One of my friends mentioned that she was going to work at the aquarium. I hadn't thought about the aquarium in a very long time. I hadn't been ignoring it on purpose. I still loved the sea, I just fell out of touch, the way you'd fall out of touch with an old friend. The more I thought about the aquarium, the more my inner child jumped up and down and begged me to have a taste of my childhood dream. So, I applied. I anxiously waited two weeks for an email telling me if I had been accepted or not. When I finally got it, I read, "Congratulations! You have been selected to join us as a Youth Ocean Advocate at the Seattle Aquarium!"

I got that email one and a half years ago. In my time at the aquarium, I've talked to thousands of guests from all over the world about the ocean and its residents, and gained endless knowledge on marine life that I'm sure will help me as I continue to pursue my dream of becoming a marine biologist, but, most importantly, I am now completely sure that the world of research science is where my heart belongs. I'd like to think that the same rockfish that watched me burst into tears can still see me from the tank outside the gift shop, but I'm not crying anymore, I'm smiling wide and telling a crowd of tourists about the wonders of the sea.

—WRITTEN BY ALEX JOHNSON '21



Tip: Focus small; think big. Don't try to tackle too much in the essay. Stick to one experience, event, or activity. You'll be surprised at how much you can reveal.

Sample Essay #3

Discovering New Perspectives Through Female Pirates

Every essay needs a good hook, but this essay is about pirates, so fortunately for me, hooks are a given. Whenever I am asked which historical period I would like to visit, I struggle to provide an answer. Virtually all the past civilizations I have learned about in school and on my own would have shunned me for some aspect of my identity. As both a woman and a lesbian, I would not have had autonomy over my body or life and wouldn't have been able to express myself without fear of persecution or even death. This icebreaker question always irked me until I learned about the complexities of pirate society in the 1700s. The golden age of piracy has never failed to grab my attention, but it was only recently that I finally figured out why.

While pirate communities were far from perfect, I feel I would be able to live as myself most authentically in this time working as a surgeon on a pirate ship. One fact that appeals to me is that pirate ships were usually egalitarian democracies. I was especially excited to learn this because I like to have my ideas heard and utilized by any group I work with. Egalitarian democracies were extremely rare in this time period, considering much of the world was ruled by monarchies. I appreciate that members of the crew received equal shares of whatever they stole and voted people into positions of power, such as captains or quartermasters. This led those in positions of power to listen to the crew, because the crew had the power to vote them out at any time. Many pirates were people who had escaped slavery, or former navymen who had become disillusioned by their former employers. Pirates were demonized by the British and Spanish empires due to the fact that they challenged the societal norms and flow of commerce that the ruling class relied on to stay in power. I relate to the fact that people who became pirates often struggled to be accepted in society, not only because I am a lesbian, but also because I have struggled to connect with many of my peers for much of life. Whether it be that my interests have not matched those of my schoolmates or my anxiety has prevented

me from reaching out, I have also experienced a social isolation that led me to look for role models in rather eccentric places.

Despite what you see in movies, some of the most feared and successful pirates in recorded history were women. Learning about women in positions of immense power gave me people to look up to, like Anne Bonney and Mary Read. Another female pirate, Cheng I Sao, commanded thousands of ships in the Guangdong Pirate Confederation at the turn of the 19th century. She made rape of female prisoners punishable by death throughout her fleet, and in addition, she only surrendered and accepted a pardon in 1810 after it was agreed she was allowed to keep her riches. She went on to run a gambling hall, and is known as one of the most feared and successful pirates in known history. Stories like this, and seeing myself represented in history, gave me a new perspective on my life. While pirates, especially female ones, were looked down on by society for not conforming to its norms, they led extraordinary lives and made meaningful connections with people who shared their identity.

Luckily for me, I don't have to resort to piracy to find a group of people who share my interests and goals. Over time, I have developed bonds with people who understand my experiences and help me see the world in different ways. In college, I am excited to find new people who share my passion for medicine and sociology and a school that allows me to dive in and study topics that fascinate me.

—WRITTEN BY HANNAH WALSH '22

Brainstorm a few essay themes:

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Letter of Continued Interest

Students who have received deferred admission, have been offered a space on the waitlist, or have updated information to share with a college or university are encouraged to write a letter of continued interest. Sometimes, this is done via email to an admissions counselor. But, in most cases, it is an update that is posted directly into a student's admission portal. This typically happens in January or February, when applications for regular admission are being reviewed. That timing coincides nicely with UPrep's intensive schedule—students can write about what they did during their intensive or their LaunchPad project. Below is a sample letter of continued interest.

Dear (Admissions Counselor Name),

Greetings from Seattle. I want to thank you for considering my application to (College Name) and communicate my continued interest in enrollment. Additionally, I wish to update you on a new project I am working on.

Each year in January, students participate in a three-week academic term called intensives.

Use this space to describe your LaunchPad Project.

Example:

During this time period, I completed a graduation requirement called LaunchPad. This is an independent project that allows students to pursue an area of interest and present their findings to faculty, parents, and peers. For my project, I worked with our school's Mental Health Advisory Board and our school counselors on an initiative that connects to the mental health and well-being of our student body. Each year, students take an anonymous survey about their mental health, relationships, and experiences at school. However, this data is not shared or made accessible to students. I combed through the anonymized data to look for trends in mental health; interviewed faculty, staff, and students; and generated ideas for improvement within the community. My goal is to create a healthy space where students can thrive through open dialogue. I enjoyed the opportunity to work directly with our school counselors, and because I am hoping to major in psychology, it directly aligns with my academic and career goals.

Or you could talk about your intensive course.

Example:

For this time period, I took a civics course with a focus on politics and government. This course is a graduation requirement for UPrep students, and I particularly enjoyed the opportunity to really engage with the topic. We went on a field trip to the state capitol building, had guest speakers from the local city council, and learned about civic engagement at a local level.

Next, talk about how your academic experiences and interests align with this school's particular programs, majors, clubs, or activities, and why you think you would be a good fit. Example:

I am sharing this with you now because this work is incredibly important to me and my future career interests. Attending (college name) would offer me various opportunities when it comes to research. I have a special interest in children's psychology and recently noticed that (do some research on this college's particular offerings) your school has a Child Interviewing Lab at the School of Law and is looking for research assistants. I truly think opportunities like that are exactly what I need to kickstart my studies as an undergrad.

Wrap it all up at the end:

I hope to call (insert college name) home and pursue a degree in (insert academic interest area, if you have one). As I have navigated the college application process, I recognize that (insert college name) is my dream school. If offered the opportunity to enroll, I would be honored to attend (insert college name).

Sincerely,
(insert your name here)





The College Interview

Why an interview? Many schools use interviews as part of the application process. Rarely are interviews required for admission, but oftentimes they are recommended. The interview is a terrific opportunity for an admissions office to get to know you better, and it is also a great chance for you to get to know the school better, too.

Interviews often take place on a college campus or virtually, as part of the campus visit by either an admissions counselor or a current student (usually a senior). Many times, they take place in Seattle with either an admissions counselor or an alumna or alumnus of the college (either here at UPrep, in a hotel lobby, or at a coffee shop). Some interviews are informative, meaning that they are simply a chance to exchange information about you and the college; other times, they are evaluative, which means your responses and the information you provide will be used, along with your application, in the admission process. College Kickstart does a great job of listing which of a student's colleges offer interviews and even provides a hyperlink, so a student can register for an interview.

Preparing for the Interview

1. **Review** materials on the college—read through any brochures and websites, and talk to your friends/family/college counselor about the school.
2. **Schedule** your visit in advance. Not all schools offer interviews, but those that do tend to fill quickly.
3. **Ask** if the interview is informative or evaluative.
4. **Tour** before your interview, if possible. This helps generate more specific questions, but also helps you avoid basic questions that are covered during the tour.
5. **Plan** your clothes. Be you, but dress appropriately for the weather, the region, and the fact that you might be taking

a 60- to 90-minute tour outside right before your interview (so comfortable shoes are a must).

6. **If you are a senior**, then you have already completed the Senior Inventory in Scoir, where we have asked you a number of questions that an interviewer might be asking you. Review your Senior Inventory.

7. **To further prepare** for a personal interview, we suggest you consider the questions in the next section ahead of time around the family dinner table or with your friends. Not all of these questions may be asked, but thinking about them will help you feel more confident and comfortable during an interview.

Questions to Consider Before the Interview

- What are your best academic and personal qualities?
- What do you want in a college and why?
- What area in your life would you like to improve and why?
- What was your proudest moment?
- Do you like to read? What is your favorite book?
- If I gave you a ticket to anywhere in the world, where would you go?
- What three people, living or dead, would you like to invite to dinner?
- What courses are you in, and what is your favorite subject?

Interview Tips

An interview is part of the college process. It may be conducted by an admissions representative or an alumni representative. As you prepare for a college interview, use this sheet to think about how you want to present yourself to the person conducting the interview. It is important that your interview flow like a conversation, but it's also a good idea to gather your thoughts beforehand so you are prepared to highlight your academic interests and accomplishments.

Here are four areas that your interviewer may ask about:

ACADEMICS

You should be prepared to share and discuss information about your academic record throughout high school.

- Senior year course schedule
- GPA
- Standardized test results
- Academic highlights
- Academic weaknesses
- Learning style

EXTRACURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT

You should be prepared to discuss what you like to do outside of school. Take some time to think about why these activities are important to you and whether or not you plan to participate in these activities in college.

- Sports
- Arts/theatre/music
- Clubs/leadership roles
- Student government
- Family responsibilities
- Volunteering

QUESTIONS

It is important that you ask at least two or three thoughtful questions that go beyond what you have learned through a view book, online, or during a campus tour. Questions can range from academic (How easy is it for students to double-major? What if I'm undecided? Are there general education requirements?) to extracurricular (I love Ultimate Frisbee and would like to start a league—how would I do that? Is there good Thai food nearby?).

COLLEGE MAJORS

Your interviewer might ask you about potential college majors. Even if you are undecided, it's important that you can list a few different subject areas that interest you, even if they are very different from each other. It's OK to love both biology and theatre!





- Describe your ideal college.
- What do you find most meaningful in your life?
- Tell me about the strengths and weaknesses of your high school.
- What might you be doing 10 years from now?
- If you found \$100, how would you use it?
- What do you plan to study in college?
- What is your extracurricular passion?

The Interview Sheet

As you prepare for a college interview, use the tips on page 23 to think about how you want to present yourself to the person conducting the interview. Obviously, it's important that your interview flow like a conversation, but it's also a good idea to gather your thoughts beforehand so you are prepared to highlight your accomplishments.

The Interview

- Arrive on time or early to be sure you are in the right location and have time to park. You don't want to be out of breath!
- Greet the interviewer with a warm hello.
- Introduce your parents and siblings (if they are with you).
- Always deliver your lines with confidence, maintain good posture, and look the interviewer in the eye.
- Be prepared to speak about yourself. This is about you, after all.
- Remember that this should feel more like a dialogue than a monologue, though: Have questions ready for the interviewer (you can bring your notes).
- Use correct grammar and avoid "like," "you know," and "um."
- Think before you speak.

Parents and Guardians

It is unlikely that your family will join you for the interview, but your interviewer may ask them to join you for the last few minutes of your time together. Decide in advance what role you want your parents to play—will they be asking about financial aid, or will you?

After the Interview

- Write a short note or email to your interviewer thanking them.
- Include in the note a reference to something specific from the interview and ask any additional questions.

Podcast Recommendations

College Admissions Decoded: Created by the National Association for College Admission Counseling, every episode features insiders from the world of admissions who break down the facts, myths, and rules of engagement for today's college landscape. nacacnet.org/resources/newsroom/nacac-podcast-network



Future U Podcast: Education experts Jeff Selingo and Michael Horn discuss what's next for higher ed. futureupodcast.com

Inside College Admissions: Scoir, an online college counseling tool, presents conversations with thought leaders, industry experts, and team members in the field of education and college admissions. scoir.com/podcast-inside-college-admissions

Harlan Cohen Podcast: College readiness expert Harlan Cohen talks with experts and influencers who are focused on college readiness, career success, and personal growth. harlancohen.com/podcast





Standardized Testing

It's important to keep in mind that test scores are only one part of a student's application. But they are one part of the application that can be important, depending on where students are applying to college. We want to stress that the best way to prepare for standardized testing is to practice.

At UPrep, students are encouraged to take both the SAT and the ACT in order to present one or both sets of scores for admission. We offer School Day SAT and ACT testing in March for juniors and October for seniors. Other testing opportunities exist at national test centers on weekends. UPrep also hosts optional AP Exams in May. Many students will also take the SAT or ACT again in the fall of their senior year. Many colleges will examine these scores in conjunction with a student's cumulative grade point average to help determine admission.

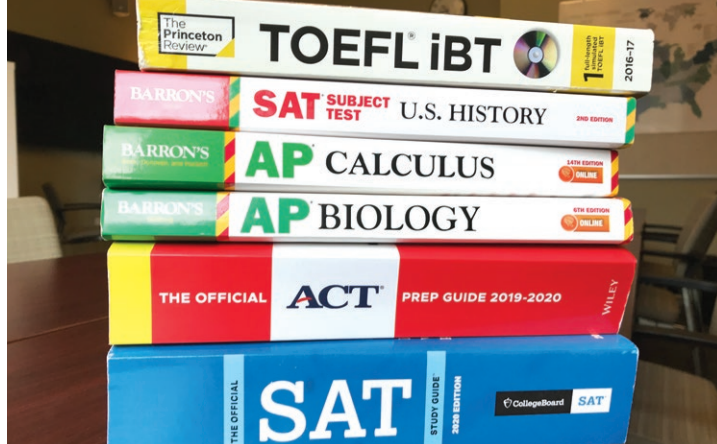
The PSAT

The Preliminary SAT is a standardized test that offers practice for the SAT. It also gives students a chance to qualify for the National Merit Scholarship Corporation's scholarship programs. The test measures verbal reasoning skills, critical reading skills, mathematical problem-solving skills, and writing skills. It is designed to be taken in the fall of the junior year. The PSAT is only offered in a digital format. Students bring their own devices with Bluebook software downloaded ahead of time to take the exam.

The SAT

The College Board offers the SAT reasoning test as a measurement of the verbal, mathematical, and writing abilities a student has acquired through their education. Most students take the SAT for the first time in the spring of their junior year. UPrep offers School Day SAT testing in March for juniors and in October for seniors. The SAT may be taken as many times as it is offered, although many colleges recommend limiting the number to three. Students have score choice; they can decide which scores they would like sent to colleges. The SAT is only offered in a digital format. Students bring their own devices with Bluebook software downloaded ahead of time to take the exam.





The ACT

The ACT is a test of educational development that measures how much the student has already learned. The test focuses on three subject areas: English, Math, and Reading, plus an optional Science section. We recommend the Science section for students considering majors in the STEM fields, and please be advised that there are still many schools that require the Science section. A writing test is offered as an option, but we no longer advise students to take it, as very few colleges require it. Students are encouraged to take the ACT in the spring of their junior year or in the fall of their senior year. UPrep offers School Day ACT testing in March for juniors and in October for seniors. Students select which scores they would like to send to colleges. The ACT is offered in either a digital format or a paper-and-pencil test.

The Advanced Placement (AP) Tests

These tests are for self-selected juniors and seniors. Administered by the College Board, the AP Exams give highly motivated students the opportunity to demonstrate college-level achievement while still in high school. If students achieve the requisite scores, they may obtain advanced placement or credit from most colleges and universities of their choice. University decisions on credit are frequently made department by department. The AP Exams are administered at UPrep. Students may take any number of AP Exams as long as dates and times do not conflict. Most AP Exams are offered in a paper format, but some are offered digitally.

Each year, UPrep typically offers the following exams (subject to change): Biology, Calculus AB, Calculus BC, Chemistry, Chinese Language and Culture, Computer Science A, English Language and Composition, English Literature and Composition, Environmental Studies, French Language and Culture, Physics C: Mechanics, Spanish Language and Culture, Statistics, Studio Art, U.S. Government and Politics, U.S. History, and World History: Modern.

Registration takes place in the fall for exams that take place in May. UPrep's registration window is between September 1 and November 1, and requires a \$150 nonrefundable deposit. To register, visit aptsusa.com/uprep.

Important Note Regarding Standardized Testing

Please take standardized testing in stride. Choices of classes and grades are far more important in the college application process. Always remember that there are alternatives to the testing

requirements for colleges. See the section below to learn about test-optional and test-blind colleges and universities. Many Canadian universities do not require test scores from stateside applicants. Other colleges will rely on portfolios of students' work, auditions, and interviews instead of tests. Remember that when you are 30, no one cares what your SAT scores were. Do your best, but keep these scores in perspective. Most importantly, a student's humanity or future contributions to society are not measured by their test scores.

Test-Optional Colleges

At fairtest.org, a nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to preventing the misuse of standardized tests, you will find a comprehensive list of all test-optional schools. Because so many standardized tests were canceled due to COVID-19, many colleges and universities were forced to adopt temporary test-optional policies, and many of those schools made those policies permanent. Students applying to test-optional schools have the choice to submit test scores if they wish. Additionally, many schools have adopted test-blind policies, which means they don't look at standardized testing at all.



Want to increase your score? Practice!

Research conducted by Khan Academy suggests that the three best practices associated with significant improvements in SAT scores are leveling up your skills, taking a full-length practice test, and following personalized practice recommendations. According to this research, students who used Khan Academy's Official SAT Practice for six or more hours and followed at least one best practice scored an average of 39 points higher than students who did not use Official SAT Practice.







Resources for Students

This section includes information for students who might fall into one or more of the following categories: students looking for specific types of collegiate experiences; students who might have special considerations while exploring colleges; students who could have additional application requirements due to their talents. We have done our best in this section to include as many resources for historically underrepresented students as possible. If you do not see a group that is important to you represented here, please let the college counseling team know.

Learning Services

Colleges and universities have substantially improved their services for, and evaluation of, students with learning needs. The college search by a student at UPrep who uses our learning services or has an individualized learning plan should follow the same path as all prospective college students; however, there are a few special considerations. First, these students need to ask additional questions. Second, students who need extended time testing for college entrance examinations will have additional paperwork to complete.

Questions to Ask Colleges If You Have Learning Needs or an Individualized Education Plan

- What kind of support services does the school have for students with learning needs or preferences for learning?
- Does the school have requirements (e.g., language, math) that may be difficult for a student to fulfill?
- Is there an active learning services program on campus? Special facilities? Can you make an appointment to speak with the director of the program?

- Are students encouraged to submit a recent educational testing evaluation as part of the admission process? If so, how is it used?
- Is peer tutoring available? Writing or math labs? A study skills center? What instructional strategies are available?
- If you have an individualized learning plan at UPrep and are accustomed to certain instructional strategies or accommodations, please note that not all colleges and universities offer similar levels of support.

Learning Support Students and Standardized Testing

Students with diagnoses for learning or health may be eligible to take the SAT and ACT with extended time or with other accommodations. Current documentation (within the last three years) will be required in the form of a current Individualized Education Program, 504 accommodation plan, and/or verification of a diagnosis that demonstrates the need for accommodations. Students who believe they may qualify for extended time should meet with UPrep's learning and testing specialist by spring of sophomore year or fall of junior year to complete the necessary paperwork, which will be in addition to the regular registration materials.



To be eligible for extended time on standardized tests, a student must:

- Have learning needs that necessitate testing accommodations
- Have current documentation on file (within three years)
- Complete an eligibility form for the SAT/ACT (see UPrep's learning and testing specialist)

Professional Evaluation

The evaluation from a qualified professional must:

- State the specific disability as diagnosed
- Provide complete educational, developmental, and medical history
- Describe tests/techniques used to arrive at diagnosis
- Establish the professional credentials of the evaluator
- Describe specific accommodations being requested

Students with Learning Needs and Additional Factors to Consider

We encourage students with learning needs to become comfortable telling their story. Specifically, colleges appreciate when students are able to do the following:

- Articulate details about their specific learning diagnosis and preferences for learning
- Explain how their learning needs and preferences have affected their academic performance
- Address what accommodations and instructional strategies they use
- Discuss what they have gained as a result of their learning style

Colleges and Universities with Strong Learning Support

The following colleges are known for providing exceptional support for students with learning needs. The colleges with an asterisk (*) next to their name also have special fee-based centers, which provide even more support.



American University (DC)	DePaul University (IL)	Marymount Manhattan University (NY)	University of Denver (CO)*
Augsburg College (MN)	Drew University (NJ)	McDaniel College (MD)	University of Michigan
Baylor University (TX)	Earlham College (IN)	Mitchell College (MA)*	University of Puget Sound (WA)
Beacon College (FL)*	Hofstra University (NY)	Muhlenberg College (PA)	University of Southern California
Brown University (RI)	Iona College (NY)	Northeastern University (MA)*	Wheaton College (MA)
Clark University (MA)	Landmark College (VT)*	Skidmore College (NY)	Xavier University (OH)
College of Charleston (SC)	Lynn University (FL)*	Southern Oregon University*	
College of Wooster (OH)	Manhattanville College (NY)	University of Arizona*	
Curry College (MA)*	Marshall University (WV)	University of Connecticut	

Students with Learning Needs

The Princeton Review's K&W Guide for Students with Learning Differences: 353 Schools with Programs or Services for Students with ADHD, ASD, or Learning Disabilities, 15th ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Review, 2021.

Reiff, Henry B., *Self-Advocacy Skills for Students with Learning Disabilities: Making It Happen in College and Beyond*. Port Chester, NY: Dude Publishing, 2007.

Roffman, Amy. *Guiding Teens with Learning Disabilities: Navigating the Transition from High School to Adulthood*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Review, 2007.

accommodations.collegeboard.org

Useful information about the kinds of documentation needed to consider an application for testing accommodations

act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/registration/accommodations.html

Testing accommodations for ACT

ldonline.org

LD OnLine: a guide to learning disabilities and ADHD

understood.org

An excellent website for parents about learning and attention issues

ldworldwide.org

Learning Disabilities Worldwide

ncld.org

National Center for Learning Disabilities



African American Students

Garrod, Andrew, Robert Kilkenny, and Christina Gomez. *Mixed: Multiracial College Students Tell Their Life Stories*, 1st ed. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013.

Talley, Dr. Braque, and The Princeton Review. *The Ultimate Guide to HBCUs: Profiles, Stats, and Insights for All 101 Historically Black Colleges and Universities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Review, 2022.

thehundred-seven.org

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

jbhe.com

Journal of Blacks in Higher Education

naacp.org

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

qem.org

Quality Education for Minorities

uncf.org

United Negro College Fund

APIDA Students*

*Asian, Pacific Islander, and Desi American Students

Adolph Akatsuka, Neal K., and Christine R. Yano. *Straight A's: Asian American College Students in Their Own Words*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2018.

collegeconsensus.com/resources/

asian-american-college-student-guide

Anti-Racism College Guide for Asian American/Pacific Islander Students and Allies

secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/professionals/asian-americans-and-pacific-islanders-facts-not-fiction.pdf

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders: Facts, Not Fiction: Setting the Record Straight

Christian Students

Morrow, Jonathan. *Welcome to College: A Christ-Follower's Guide for the Journey*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2017.

ajcunet.edu

Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities

cccu.org

Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

baptistschools.org

International Association of Baptist Colleges and Universities

umhef.org

United Methodist Higher Education Foundation

First-Generation College Students

Gable, Rachel. *The Hidden Curriculum: First Generation Students at Legacy Universities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021.

Housel, Teresa Heinz, ed. *First-Generation College Student Experiences of Intersecting Marginalities*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2019.

Nunn, Lisa M. *College Belonging: How First-Year and First-Generation Students Navigate Campus Life*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2021.

ustrive.org/im-first/

I'm First

firstgenforward.org

FirstGen Forward

forbes.com/advisor/education/student-resources/online-resources-for-first-generation-college-students/

Tips and Resources for First-Generation College Students

Artistic Students

(Adapted from Jennifer Gross's *Tips for the Art-Focused Student*, National Association for College Admission Counseling)

If you are interested in pursuing the visual, musical, or performing arts in college, your college application process might involve some additional pieces. Specifically, if you are applying to an art or music school, you will need to furnish a portfolio of your work. There is no standard protocol used at each institution. Therefore, students are advised to check each college's website for directions.

Even if you do not intend to major in the arts, submitting a portfolio of your work with your application is warranted. Most colleges ask students directly in their application portal, which is created after a student submits their application. Some colleges use a third-party vendor called Slideroom.

Prospective arts majors have three degree options: a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree with a major in the arts, a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) for artists/performers, or a Bachelor of Music (BM) for musicians. The BA degree is the typical liberal arts degree—students who major in English, history, and other humanities earn BA degrees. The BFA or BM degree is more focused and intense.

Which degree you choose depends on your college and career goals. If you have a high degree of commitment to your art and desire an intense, often competitive college experience, a BFA or BM might be right for you. If you would rather study a variety of subjects along with your arts major, a BA may be the way to go.

Visual and performing arts students have several types of colleges to consider. Conservatories and stand-alone arts schools offer an immersion-type experience for students earning BM or BFA degrees. All of the students you meet at this type of school will be artists, and the atmosphere is often highly competitive.

Some larger universities offer BFA/BM degrees as well as BA degrees in the arts. You may find somewhat self-contained music or arts schools within the larger university. In this atmosphere, you could pursue the more specialized degree while still keeping the door open to taking a few liberal arts courses (which would be unavailable at specialized music or arts schools). In addition, a university-based arts program might give you the option of pursuing a double degree, such as a BM in music and a BA in history. (A double degree would likely require more than four years, however.)

The Application Process

In addition to completing a typical college application, students in the visual or performing arts should prepare a portfolio or audition. Each arts program has different requirements, so you should contact the schools as early as possible to obtain their portfolio or audition requirements. While your portfolio or audition is an important part of the application, arts programs do consider your academic record and test scores.

National Portfolio Day

National Portfolio Day is an event specifically for visual artists and designers. It is an opportunity for those who wish to pursue an education in the visual and related arts to meet with representatives from accredited art and design colleges. Representatives will be available to review your artwork, discuss their programs, and answer questions about professional careers in art. High school students and their parents/guardians are encouraged to attend.

National Portfolio Day serves a variety of purposes. Most importantly, it is designed to help further the development of young artists by bringing together experienced college representatives to review artwork and offer feedback. The experience is a small taste of what a professional art program can be like.

Your portfolio should include your best and most recent work, but it can also include works in progress and sketchbooks. You'll hear many different opinions of your work. Explain how you develop your ideas and where you want to go with them. No admissions decisions or scholarship awards will be offered to you at National Portfolio Day. Some colleges represented may accept your portfolio as the visual portion of your application. Other colleges have restrictions that prohibit them from making a definite portfolio decision at the time of your review. Discuss your work with as many representatives as possible.

Seattle University usually hosts Seattle's National Portfolio Day. For information, visit nationalportfolioday.org.

Check Out

Loveland, Elaina. *Creative Colleges: A Guide for Student Actors, Artists, Dancers, Musicians and Writers*. Los Altos, CA: Supercollege, LLC, 2017.



Hispanic/Latinx Students

Demo, Byron. *The Experiences for Student's College: Help Promote Latinx Student Success in Colleges*. Independently published: 2022.

Minikel-Lacocque, Julie. *Getting College Ready: Latin@ Student Experiences of Race, Access, and Belonging at Predominantly White Universities*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2015.

hacu.net

Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities

hsf.net

Hispanic Scholarship Fund

qem.org

Quality Education for Minorities

Indigenous Students

Garrod, Andrew, and Robert Kilkenny. *I Am Where I Come From: Native American College Students and Graduates Tell Their Life Stories*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017.

collegefund.org

American Indian College Fund

nativeculturelinks.com/education.html

Tribal colleges, Native Studies programs, and Indian education

tribalcollegejournal.org/map-of-tribal-colleges

Journal of American Indian Higher Education

Jewish Students

Folb, Phyllis. *Find Your Right Direction: The Israel Gap Year Guide*. Orange County, CA, 2020.

hillel.org

Hillel Organization—The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life

**jewishinternetguide.com/JewishWebsiteCategories/
Israel-and-Students**

Information on experiences in Israel for students

oujlic.org/current-students

The Orthodox Union's Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus

LGBTQIA+ Students

Dawson, Juno. *This Book Is Gay*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2021.

Nicolazzo, Z. *Trans* in College: Transgender Students' Strategies for Navigating Campus Life and the Institutional Politics of Inclusion*. New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2016.

finaid.org/otheraid/lgbt

A comprehensive list of over 50 scholarships

pointfoundation.org

The Point Foundation

campusprideindex.org

A tool for prospective students and families to search a database of LGBTQ-friendly campuses

Muslim Students

Garrod, Andrew, Robert Kilkenny, and Christina Gomez. *Growing Up Muslim: Muslim College Students in America Tell Their Life Stories*, 1st ed. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014.

Zahoor, Idris. *The Muslim Student's Guide to University and Beyond*. London: Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd, 2011.

islamicscholarshipfund.org

Islamic Scholarship Fund

Service Academies

The U.S. service academies, also known as the U.S. military academies, are federal academies for the undergraduate education and training of commissioned officers for the U.S. armed forces. Tuition, room, and board are all paid for by the U.S. government, but students incur a commitment to serve a number of years of military service after graduation.

There are five U.S. service academies:

- U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, known as “Kings Point,” Kings Point, NY
- U.S. Military Academy, also known as “West Point” or “Army,” West Point, NY
- U.S. Naval Academy, also known as “USNA,” “Annapolis” or “Navy,” Annapolis, MD
- U.S. Coast Guard Academy, New London, CT
- U.S. Air Force Academy, also known as “USAFA,” Colorado Springs, CO

In general, candidates for admission are judged on their academic achievement, demonstrated leadership, athletics, and character. To gain admission, candidates must also pass a physical fitness test and undergo a thorough medical examination.

Applicants to all service academies (except the U.S. Coast Guard Academy) are required to obtain an official nomination. Nominations may be made by senators, House members, the president, and the vice president (the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy only accepts nominations from senators and House members); students are encouraged to contact their senator or congressperson in *fall* of their junior year.

The nomination process is extremely competitive. For example, each year, Washington’s senators receive 350 requests for academy nominations and nominate 10 applicants for each vacancy at each academy. Each year, around 40 applicants are nominated. The applicants all have a 3.85 GPA or better and a combined SAT score of 1350 or higher. Students interested in the service academies should plan on taking the SAT in the fall of their junior year, so that their scores can be included in their nomination form.

The academies offer one-week summer programs for high school juniors; the programs are scheduled during June each year and selection is highly competitive. We strongly encourage students to attend one of the summer programs, since it provides a taste of the culture of each academy. Online applications open in January and close mid-March. You must have taken either the SAT or the ACT prior to applying. The academies’ websites will provide more information. In recent years, UPrep students have applied to and been accepted at the Naval Academy and West Point.

Check Out

Washington State U.S. Senator Patty Murray
murray.senate.gov/military-service-academy-nominations

Washington State U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
cantwell.senate.gov/services/academy-nominations/instructions

U.S. Air Force Academy
academyadmissions.com

U.S. Coast Guard Academy
uscga.edu

U.S. Merchant Marine Academy
usmma.edu/admissions

U.S. Military Academy (West Point)
westpoint.edu/admissions

U.S. Naval Academy (Annapolis)
usna.edu/Admissions/Apply/index.php#fndtn-panel1-Steps-for



Athletics and College Admission

There is no doubt that athletics is a big part of many college communities and that a student who brings significant athletic talent to the college admission process will be of interest to college coaches. It is important for you to talk with your current coach to determine what kind of an impact you might make on a college team (NCAA Division I, II, or III) and whether you are interested in making the commitment to college athletics. If you plan to play an intercollegiate sport in college and want to communicate that to the college athletic department, we encourage you to do the following:

1. Check out the college website to see if there is an online athletic recruitment form and complete this to make an initial contact with the athletic department. This form may ask for athletic statistics or academic information comparable to an athletic resume (for example, see resume on page 25).
2. Speak with your UPrep coach about the different colleges' programs by the spring of your junior year.
3. Complete the prospective student athlete form on the websites for all the colleges where you plan to apply.
4. When you make plans to visit colleges, try to arrange a meeting with the coach or attend a practice.
5. Give your current coach and your college counselor a copy of your athletic resume and keep them informed of additional communication and correspondence.
6. Request a written recommendation from your UPrep coach, addressed to the college coach.

It is often hard to determine whether or not you may be eligible to compete on the college level and which division is the best match for your athletic abilities. The ncaa.org website has useful information about each division.

Any student who expects to be recruited for Division I or II college sports must register with the Eligibility Center by going to web3.ncaa.org/ecwr3. You can do this at the beginning of your junior year. Once you have registered, you must follow the directions carefully. You can register with the Eligibility Center as early as the end of your junior year (after the completion of at least six semesters of high school work). We recommend registering no later than December of your senior year.

A word of caution: College coaches sometimes apply a bit of pressure. An "early" application can make their jobs easier. We urge you to resist coaching pressure.

Talk with your family, with your UPrep coach, and with your college counselor before making any commitments. Remember that you, not the coach, are in charge of your future.

Remember: Meeting the NCAA academic rules does not guarantee your admission into a college. You must apply for admissions.

Myth:
Athletics is the golden ticket for a student to gain admission to college.



Reality:
Two percent of college students are in college on athletic scholarships. Athletics may be a plus factor, like being a legacy or a leader, but it never trumps a student's transcript in terms of importance.



Pumas Playing On: Class of 2026

Gap Years

Increasingly, students are choosing to take time off between high school and college, and colleges are also offering students the opportunity to enroll in the spring (instead of the fall) as a forced “gap semester.” Reasons why students choose a gap year are wide and varied. It is a very individual and personal decision for each student and their family. Many see the time before college as a natural break in a student’s progression along the academic path. Here are some reasons students take a gap semester or year.

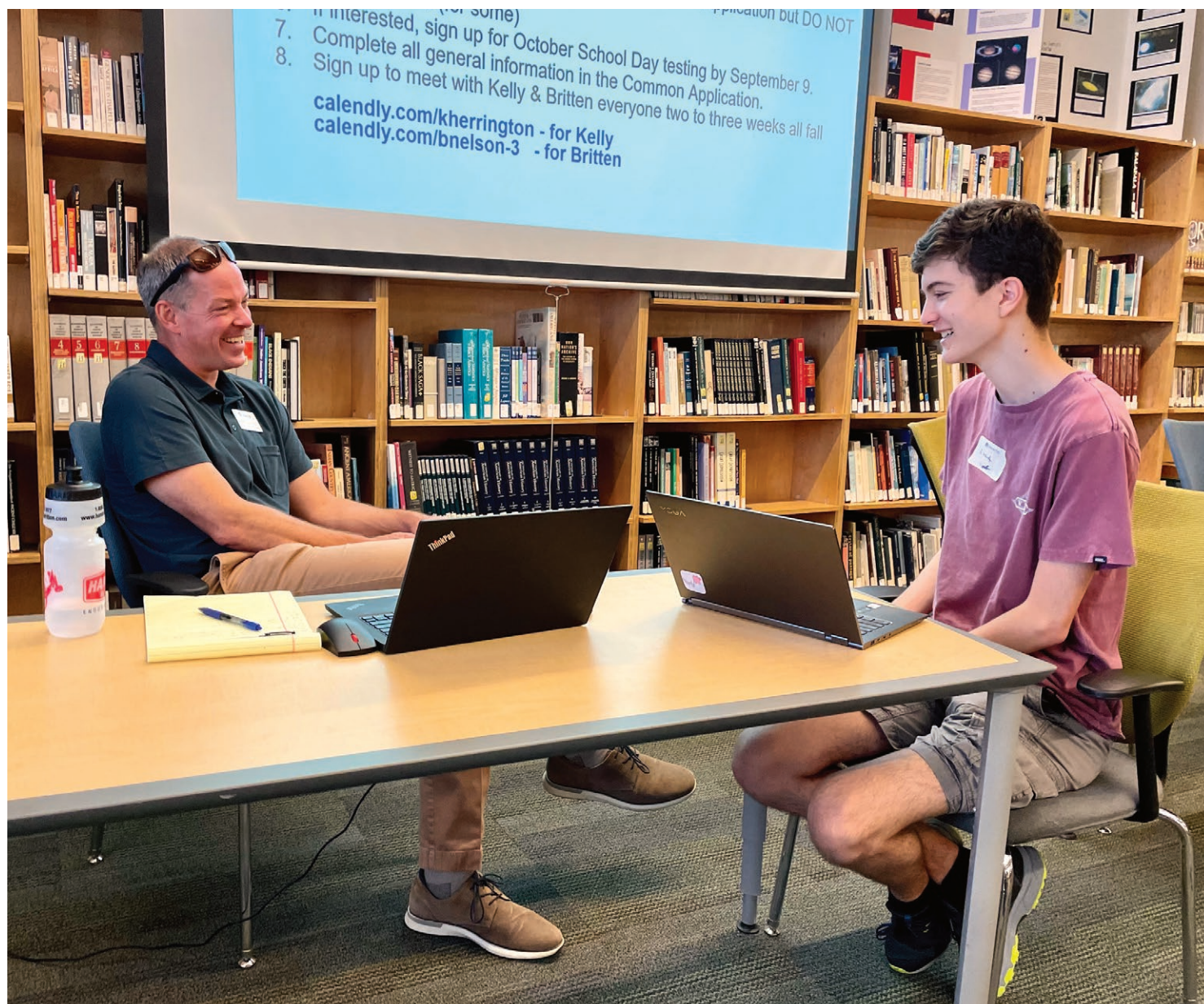
Maturity: They are old enough to travel on their own and it is often the first time that they experience and identify themselves as separate from family and friends, an important step in their maturation.

Autonomy: It is often the first time that they are exercising a substantive choice regarding what it is that they want to do with their lives, for at least a semester or a full calendar year. Since students view it as their time away from school, they take more responsibility for it and for themselves.

Independence: They get a chance to focus on their interests and decide what they want to do in college. They develop independence and the ability to work on their own. They create a network of contacts to use in their future and, most importantly, they have a sense of accomplishment and pride in themselves when their year is completed.

Preparation: They are not academically or emotionally prepared for the rigors of college. They need a respite from their studies and the time away from school provides a nontraditional educational experience for them. During this time off, students develop the necessary skills for a successful college experience.

If a student decides to take a gap year, it is best that they apply to college during their senior year of high school. After they receive an acceptance to the college, they can request to have the acceptance deferred for one year. Most colleges will allow a student to defer, but the student must file official paperwork requesting approval.





Financial Aid

For many students and their families, cost can be the most determining factor in selecting a college. This section should be used as a general reference as you navigate the financial aid process. We have also included a few tips and resources for families who know that the cost of a college education will be a hardship, yet, due to income and assets, will not qualify for financial aid.

Because each college or university has its own specific requirements for financial aid, you are advised to read all applicable material and carefully follow the procedures. It is imperative that you pay close attention to the details and deadlines of each school. Finally, please pay attention to the following three points:

FICTION: The financial aid process is a hunt for dollars hidden in secret places.

FACT: Ninety-five percent of aid comes from colleges, the federal government, and states.

FOCUS: Ask colleges directly. Call—they're good at this.



Steps in the Financial Aid Process

1. Caveats for Early Decision and International Financial Aid Applicants

Early Decision candidate: It is critical that you communicate directly with the financial aid office of your ED/EA college. In most cases, you will be required to complete the College Board's CSS Profile in November, and you may also need to complete other institutional forms. The college will give you an estimate of your financial aid package at the time of acceptance. Your aid award will not become official until after you have filed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

International applicants: Financial assistance programs for international students are highly competitive, with academic credentials and geographic diversity as primary considerations in the process. At most schools, to receive consideration for institutional aid, international students must complete the International Financial Aid Application and Declaration of Finances as soon as possible after January of senior year. This form is generally mailed to all international applicants as part of the admissions packet, and it should be returned directly to the college admissions office. Some schools follow a different process for awarding aid to international students, so be sure to pay close attention to the requirements and procedures at each of the schools to which you are applying.

2. Filling Out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

Every financial aid applicant must complete this form to apply for U.S. government grants and loans, federal work-study, many state grants, and, for some schools, institutional financial aid. The FAFSA is being overhauled this year. Please note that the language below is based on the forthcoming changes. There is some concern that the new FAFSA will not be ready and therefore the federal government will use the form from prior years.

- The FAFSA can be filed online at studentaid.gov starting on October 1. Complete the FAFSA as soon as you can; certain funds run out if the FAFSA isn't completed on time. We recommend completing it no later than November 1.



- You will need to reapply for financial aid every year while you're in college to continue to receive financial aid.
- The FAFSA asks a series of questions that determine whether you are a dependent or independent student; it is only under rare circumstances that a UPREP student is not a dependent student. Dependents must report custodial parent/guardian information, as well as their own information, on their FAFSA.
- To complete the FAFSA, you will need parent/guardian and student federal income tax forms; Social Security numbers (or alien registration numbers); driver's license numbers; information on any untaxed income (like child support or income from interest); information on cash, savings and checking account balances, and investments (including stocks and bonds and real estate, but not including the home in which you live); and information on business and farm assets. If you have all this information at hand, the FAFSA should take less than 25 minutes for you to complete.
- You can list up to 10 schools on the online FAFSA, and you can add more schools later. Schools you list on your FAFSA will automatically receive your results electronically.

After Submitting the FAFSA

- You can check the status of your FAFSA immediately after submitting it online.
- You will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR), which is a summary of the FAFSA data you submitted, within three days to three weeks after you submit your FAFSA. Be sure to look over your SAR to make sure you didn't make a mistake on your FAFSA, and keep copies of your SAR.
- No more than 10 schools may be listed on your FAFSA at one time. If you want to add additional schools beyond the original 10, select "Add or Delete a School Code" to add up to four more schools as a correction to your FAFSA information. If you make further corrections after adding the new schools, the schools you removed from this original list will not receive these corrections—you will need to contact FAFSA customer service by calling 1.800.433.3243.
- The SAR won't tell you how much financial aid you'll get. Once you have been admitted to a specific school, they will calculate your aid and will send an award letter. The timing of the award offer varies from school to school, but usually it's within a few weeks of being admitted.
- Some SARs include a request for verification, which is the process to confirm that the data reported on your FAFSA is accurate. If you're selected for verification, don't assume you're being accused of doing anything wrong. Some people are selected at random, and some schools verify all students' FAFSAs. Simply provide the documentation the school asks for by the deadline. To avoid being selected for verification, we recommend using the IRS DRT (see below).
- The IRS Data Retrieval Tool (IRS DRT) takes you to the IRS website, where you'll need to log in by providing your name and other information exactly as you provided it on your tax

return. At the IRS site, you can preview the information before transferring it to your FAFSA. When you return to the FAFSA website, you'll see that questions that are populated with IRS DRT will be marked with "Transferred from the IRS."

- If you haven't done your taxes by the time you fill out your FAFSA, it's OK to estimate the amounts. After you file your taxes, you'll need to log back in to the FAFSA and make necessary corrections.



3. Completing the College Scholarship Service (CSS) Financial Aid Profile

This form is used to apply for institutional aid, and should be completed only for schools that require it.

- Register online at collegeboard.com.
- At least one week before your earliest deadline, complete the customized application online (there is a fee). Note: You may use estimated income/expense/asset data; do not wait to submit the form until you have exact figures.
- Schools will receive your information electronically in about one week. You will receive a CSS Acknowledgment showing the information entered on your application, as well as the schools to which your data has been sent. Use the Data Confirmation section of the Acknowledgment if you need to make corrections/changes. Send the new information directly to the schools.
- After you register and receive your packet, you may still add other schools to the Profile on the website. You should contact each of those schools to find out if they require any information not included in your customized application.

4. Determining Eligibility for Need-Based Financial Aid

Need-based financial aid is used to make up the difference between what a family can pay and the total cost of a student's education. In determining what a family can afford, need-analysis systems work under the principle that students and their parents bear the primary responsibility for financing education costs to the full extent they are able; families are expected to make sacrifices in order to pay for college. Need-analysis formulas evaluate families' financial situations in an effort to establish horizontal equity—families with similar financial situations should contribute similar amounts of money to educational expenses—and vertical equity—families with differing situations should contribute differing amounts.

There are two primary systems used to determine a student's eligibility for need-based financial aid. Utilizing the FAFSA, the **federal methodology** determines eligibility for all federal grants and loans, most state aid, and some institutional aid. Other colleges and universities use some version of the **institutional methodology** to award their financial aid funds.

5. Learning About the Student Aid Index (SAI)

This amount is made up of the parent contribution and the student contribution. The parent contribution considers such factors as:

- Parental income: The single most important factor in determining aid eligibility for most families, it includes all taxable and nontaxable income.

Minus

- Nondiscretionary expenses, which include such items as taxes, medical expenses, basic living expenses, and an employment expense allowance for single-parent households and dual-income households

The parent contribution also considers:

- Available parental assets: real estate equity (excluding the primary residence); savings and other net worth investments, but not retirement funds except for education IRAs; a portion of business profits

Minus

- Asset protection allowance, which protects a portion of one's assets for retirement (this increases as parents get closer to retirement age)

Under the new federal guidelines, the SAI does not take into consideration the number of family members currently enrolled in college, which is one of the major changes to the FAFSA predicted to start this year.

6. Calculating the Student Aid Index (previously known as the Expected Family Contribution)

To determine the student's financial eligibility, the Student Aid Index (SAI) is subtracted from the total cost of education (tuition, room and board, and, in most cases, books, supplies, transportation, and living expenses) to determine the student's financial eligibility. The calculated financial eligibility and, therefore, the financial aid package will vary at colleges with varying costs. It may also vary due to colleges' differing calculations of the SAI. (Although the federal methodology uses well-defined formulas, there is some room for college financial aid administrators to exercise "professional judgment" and alter the calculations in response to unusual family circumstances.)

The institutional methodology, used by many colleges and universities to award their financial aid funds, varies from the federal methodology in several key aspects:

- The institutional calculation takes into consideration a family's equity in their primary residence, while the federal calculation does not. In other words, a family with home equity has a greater ability to afford the cost of a private education over time.

- When the applicant's parents are divorced or have never been married, the federal methodology requires financial information from, and bases its calculations on, only the custodial parent and their current spouse (the student's stepparent). In most cases, the institutional methodology requires information from the noncustodial parent as well, and, in some cases, their spouse.
- Because retirement funds are not included in the calculation of assets, the institutional methodology does not use the Asset Protection Allowance for retirement used in the federal methodology.
- The institutional methodology has added two new incentives for families to save for college: the Annual Education Savings Allowance and the Cumulative Education Savings Allowance, enabling parents to protect income and assets to be used for current and future education expenses.
- To reduce the contribution expected from middle-income families, the institutional methodology uses modified income assessment rates.

7. Figuring Out Student Need

Once the admissions office has decided to admit a student and the financial aid office has determined that the student qualifies for financial aid, the financial aid office will put together a financial aid package, a combination of several types of financial assistance.

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{Cost of Attendance (COA)} \\ - \text{Student Aid Index (SAI)} \\ \hline = \text{Student Need} \end{array}$$

8. The Financial Aid Award

Financial aid awards are made up from a combination of the following:

Grants: Federal, state, and institutional (college/university) grants are financial aid awards that do not have to be repaid.

Loans: Often interest-free during enrollment, student loans must be repaid, with interest, over a predetermined loan life post-graduation.

Work-study: The vast majority of financial aid recipients will be expected to hold part-time (usually around 10 hours per week) campus or community jobs. There is a federally subsidized work-study program as well as college-sponsored programs.

SPECIFIC COMPONENTS OF THE AWARD

Pell Grant: A grant that provides up to \$7,395 for the 2026–2027 school year based on a student's need.

Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunities Grant

(FSEOG): A grant for students with the highest levels of eligibility, FSEOG provides up to \$4,000 per year. To qualify, the student must also be a Pell Grant recipient.

Federal subsidized and unsubsidized loans: Available to full-time undergraduates, these programs allow first-year students to borrow a maximum of \$3,500, up to \$4,500 during the second year, and up to \$5,500 each subsequent year. The borrowing maximum for all undergraduate study is \$23,000. Repayment of the federal loan begins six months after the completion of schooling. Subsidized loans are need-based loans on which the federal government pays the interest while the student is in college, for six months after graduation, and during any deferments. Unsubsidized loans are available to students who do not meet financial eligibility and to those who qualify for only a portion of the maximum subsidized loan. Without the subsidy, the student is responsible for the interest while in school. Typically, the student will pay interest only while in school, deferring the principal repayment until after graduation. It is possible, however, to defer the interest and add it to the principal as it accumulates.

Perkins Loan: A need-based federal student loan designated for the students with the highest levels of demonstrated financial eligibility, the Perkins Loan Program provides up to \$5,500 per year at a 5 percent interest rate. The student must have applied for a \$3,000 Pell Grant to be eligible.

Parent Loan for Undergraduate Students (PLUS): Credit-worthy parents of dependent undergraduate students may borrow through the PLUS Loan Program to help finance educational costs. The maximum loan per year is limited to the cost of education minus other aid that the student has received. Repayment begins within 60 days of the loan funds being advanced, and the maximum repayment period is 10 years. Note: The figures for grant and loan amounts and interest rates are subject to change.

State grants: Many states offer grants to residents who demonstrate a specific level of financial eligibility. Often, these grants are available only if the student attends an in-state college. In some states, there are different programs for students attending public colleges, private colleges, in-state schools, and out-of-state schools. Determination of and application to state grant programs are usually done through the FAFSA.

9. Understanding Your Financial Aid Award

In comparing financial aid awards from different schools, it is important to look not only at the total family contribution, but also at the types of aid offered; the ratio of grants to self-help (loans and work) may vary significantly. Note: Many financial aid packages combine loans and work-study under the heading "Self-Help," and some schools allow students some discretion to determine the ratio of loan to work.

10. Unmet Financial Need

Schools that cannot meet the full financial need of every admitted applicant may employ one or more of the following practices:

Gapping: The practice of meeting less than the applicant's full need.

Financial aid waitlist: Some admitted applicants are not offered aid unless/until more funds become available.

Admit-deny: The practice of offering admission to students, but denying them financial aid despite their eligibility.



Deny-deny: The practice of denying admission to applicants who qualify for aid, but whose need the school is unable to meet.

11. The Appeals Process

The recent changes to federal guidelines regarding financial aid have produced larger variations in schools' determinations of financial eligibility and in their ability to meet that need. As a result, students may receive very different aid packages from different schools.

If the school you prefer to attend offers less money or a less attractive package (more in loans, less in grants) than another, bring the discrepancy to the attention of the financial aid office at your preferred school. If the school has an appeals process, follow the steps carefully. Otherwise, call the financial aid office and ask for an explanation. Even if your offers are similar, if the packages aren't large enough to enable you to attend, further investigation is worth the effort. Some schools will not negotiate, but many will increase awards when the change is warranted and the school has funds available. A family's financial situation cannot always be adequately explained on forms. A change in the family's financial situation (the loss of a job, an illness, secondary school tuition for younger siblings) will increase a family's eligibility. Many schools will take the new or clarified information into account and increase the award. Some schools set aside funds that they expect to offer during the appeals process. Please remember that most financial aid officers are more amenable to working with families who treat them with respect.

12. Renewal of Your Financial Aid Award

You must reapply for financial aid each year. Most colleges guarantee four years of financial aid to all students who initially enroll with financial aid, as long as they file the required application forms and continue to demonstrate financial need. Some schools may alter the package as the student gets older (for example, reducing grant aid and increasing self-help), and some schools have academic- and discipline-related standards attached to their financial aid awards. If a student's GPA falls below a certain level, for example, their financial aid would be reduced or eliminated. Make sure that you understand a college's policies on renewal of aid before accepting an initial award.

UPrep partners with Paul Martin from College Money Method, an organization to help provide information about applying for financial aid in college. Your college counselor can share the username and password for a specialized website with more information, as well as links to regular Zoom events.

College Money Method

All UPrep students and families have access to the password-protected College Money Method website, which has many great financial aid resources. The College Money Method hosts webinars for our students and families throughout the year, which are announced through the All-School Email. Please email Wendy Robbins at wrobbins@universityprep.org to gain access to the password for this valuable website.

Financing College

Scholarships

In addition to need-based financial aid, many students seek scholarships in an effort to offset the cost of a college education. Scholarships are often awarded to students based on strengths in academics, athletics, community service, leadership, artistic talent, or other special-interest groups; scholarships can be awarded based on merit and/or financial need. Keep in mind that deadlines for many scholarships vary and aren't necessarily in sync with the deadlines of the college application process—it is your responsibility to stay on top of all deadlines. Also, never, ever, ever pay a fee to an organization claiming to help you find scholarships. If the need-based financial aid package does not meet the full eligibility of the student, the scholarship can be used to fill the gap. The scholarship may replace self-help (loans and work-study) funds. The scholarship may also be used to reduce the institutional grant.

Types of Scholarships

Academic Scholarships

Many colleges award academic scholarships without requiring additional applications; they are simply a part of the admission process and students are notified of scholarship offers with their offers of admission. Some scholarships will require an additional application, essay, audition, portfolio, letters of support, and/or interview—check with the colleges directly. Many scholarships are renewable each year for four years as well.

Merit Scholarships

Overwhelmingly, scholarships are offered to students from the colleges and universities offering admission; these merit-based scholarships are often used as a tool by colleges to enroll more of their top applicants. College-sponsored merit scholarships are awarded to students based on academic achievement (in general or in a specific discipline); geographic, ethnic, or racial diversity; a particular talent (artistic, athletic, etc.); extracurricular involvement (community service, for example); scholarship examinations, etc. They are not based on demonstrated financial need, although in some cases financial need is a consideration. Schools differ widely in the number and size of scholarships offered. cappex.com/scholarships is a centralized website dedicated to matching students with merit-based scholarships from more than 3,000 colleges and universities.

If scholarships are important to you, first you need to find out which schools offer merit-based scholarships (many schools reserve all their funding for need-based financial aid, not merit-based scholarships),

and then find out the requirements and deadlines for the scholarships. For recipients of need-based financial aid, merit scholarships will be incorporated into the aid package. Each institution will adjust aid packages according to its own policies, but schools are unable to use the scholarship to reduce the federal SAI.

Athletic Scholarships

Many NCAA Division I and Division II schools also offer athletic scholarships. Keep in mind that athletic scholarships amount to a very small percentage of overall scholarships offered. NCAA institutions gave athletic scholarships to about 2 percent of the 6.4 million athletes playing those sports in high school four years earlier.

Scholarships from Local Organizations

Local organizations offer scholarships to students in their area. Common sources of local scholarships come from religious organizations (if you attend a church, temple, synagogue, etc., find out if they offer scholarships), fraternal organizations (you need not be a member of the Elks Lodge or local Rotary chapter), your parents' employers, national chapters of your school clubs (Key Club, for example), or other organizations. Information on many such scholarships is available in the College Counseling Office. You are also encouraged to explore other scholarship opportunities via the internet, the public library, etc.

If you receive notification of an outside scholarship after you have received your financial aid award, you must inform the financial aid office of your scholarship. The school will then prepare a revised financial aid award that takes into account the additional scholarship funds.

Western University Exchange (WUE)

WUE is a program of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). Through WUE, students in western states may enroll in many two-year and four-year college programs at a reduced tuition level. This program offers full or partial in-state tuition for students from Washington who enroll in certain coursework not usually offered in Washington state. Example: mining engineering in Montana. Visit wiche.edu/tuition-savings/wue for more information on this program.

Where to Find Scholarships

Three Websites

At UPrep, we have noticed that students applying for scholarships tend to have the most luck with scholarships awarded by colleges and universities. We are also big fans of the following websites: thewashboard.org, maxwell.org, and fastweb.com.

TheWashBoard.org is a great website that helps students find scholarships. Although it is run by the state, it lists scholarships locally and nationally. The Maxwell is a scholarship for western Washington residents who plan to leave the area for college. Fastweb is one of the largest and most complete sources of scholarships available. Although this site requires you to register with their site, it is the best way to search for scholarships that apply to you.

Individual Colleges and Universities

The overwhelming majority of scholarships earned by UPREP students come directly from the colleges or universities. While not all schools offer scholarships, many schools have academic merit or talent (athletic, musical, art, debate, etc.) scholarships available. Check the schools' websites for specific information on scholarships and financial aid.

Additional Financing Options

College-Sponsored Payment Plans

Many colleges offer individual payment plans allowing monthly payments of the annual fees. Check with individual schools to learn about their plans and policies.

Personal Loans

There are also a variety of loans available to assist in the financing of educational expenses. Individual financial aid offices are the best source of information about these programs. Many families who have equity in their homes find that a home equity loan offers the most favorable terms because of the tax advantages. Be assertive in exploring all possible financing options with your financial aid administrator.

529 College Savings Plan

The most popular way to save for college is through a 529 plan. (Information courtesy of get.wa.gov.) A state 529 plan is a college savings plan named for the section of the federal tax code that authorizes them. You put in after-tax money. Your money grows

tax-free and all withdrawals are tax-free as long as they are used for education. There are two types of 529 plans: the College Savings Plan and the Guaranteed Education Tuition (GET) Plan. With a College Savings Plan, you pick your investments and shoulder all of the investment risk. When it is time to pay for college, you have whatever money is left in your account. GET is a prepaid college tuition plan. With GET, families can prepay for a student's college tuition today. The state of Washington guarantees that the value of the "units of tuition" you purchase will keep pace with resident undergraduate tuition at the most expensive public university in Washington (either the University of Washington or Washington State University). GET is a qualified tuition program under section 529 of the Internal Revenue Code. For more information, please visit get.wa.gov.



Glossary of Financial Aid Terms

FAFSA: Free Application for Federal Student Aid, used to apply for U.S. government grants and loans, federal work-study, many state grants, and institutional financial aid. Every financial aid applicant must complete this form.

Federal methodology: The need-analysis system used by the U.S. government to determine an applicant's eligibility for federal financial aid. It is also used by some states and schools.

Financial aid: Money that is given, lent, or paid to you so you can pay for college.

Gapping: The practice of meeting less than a student's full aid eligibility.

Institutional methodology: The need-analysis system used by many colleges and universities to determine an applicant's eligibility for institutional financial aid.

Merit-based aid: Scholarships, grants, and other aid awarded based on academic strength, artistic ability, leadership, or other special talent.

Need-based aid: Financial aid that is awarded based on demonstrated financial need.

Need-blind: An admissions policy that does not use financial need as a factor in selecting applicants.

Need-conscious (or need-aware): An admissions policy that takes into account students' financial need before making admissions decisions. Note: A school may be need-blind for one group of applicants and need-conscious for another group.

Preferential packaging: The practice of awarding more-desirable (e.g., higher grants, lower loans) financial aid packages to highly favored students.

Profile (also known as the CSS Profile): The application required by many schools to apply for institutional aid. Complete this form only if the school to which you are applying requires it.

SAI (Student Aid Index): The amount of money the federal government expects a student and their family to pay toward college costs in a given year. The SAI was formerly known as the EFC, Expected Family Contribution.

SAR: The Student Aid Report, generated when the FAFSA is processed, includes all of the data entered on the FAFSA and indicates the amount of the SAI.

Work-study: A federally subsidized or college program in which students hold part-time campus jobs in areas such as the library, academic departments, food services, administrative offices, etc., as part of their financial aid packages.

Maximizing Financial Aid Eligibility

If your family is on the cusp of qualifying for need-based financial aid, or will qualify for financial aid, here are some additional tips to maximize your aid eligibility. Please discuss the recommendations below with a certified financial planner:

- Save in parents' name, not in custodial accounts (they're not exempt).
- Spend down student's assets.
- Shift assets to exempt vehicles: IRA, life insurance, GET plan, home equity.
- Accelerate necessary expenses to be cash poor: computer, car, home repairs, etc.
- Minimize capital gains.
- Maximize contributions to retirement plan. Do not withdraw from retirement fund to finance college (distributions = taxable income). If you must, borrow from yourself (via a home equity loan, for example).
- Ask grandparents to delay gifts until after graduation.
- Prepay mortgage.
- Put a 529 plan in the name of parents or grandparents for minimal/no impact on aid.

Things you can do today to start planning for financial decisions:

Taxpayer Relief Act

Education tax credits and interest deductions are available for some students. Families are advised to consult with a tax professional to determine whether they can benefit. For information, go to the Department of Education website, ed.gov.



Financial Aid Award Letter Worksheet

STEP 1

List the name of each school you want to consider attending, the award deadline date, and the total cost of attending. The award deadline date and total cost of attendance will probably be included in your award letter (though sometimes it might require a phone call or a search on a website). If you have not received an award letter, find the figures in the college catalog for estimating the cost of attendance, or call the school's financial aid office. Add the direct and indirect expenses, such as tuition, books and supplies, room and board, transportation, course and recreation-related fees, and personal expenses (clothes, laundry, recreation, telephone calls, and medical).

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
Name of College				
Award Deadline Date				
Total Cost of Attendance	\$	\$	\$	\$

STEP 2

List the financial aid awards each school is offering. Do not forget that gift aid and self-help such as grants, scholarship, and work-study do not have to be repaid, while all loans *must* be repaid.

Grants and Scholarships

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
College	\$	\$	\$	\$
Pell	\$	\$	\$	\$
FSEOG	\$	\$	\$	\$
State	\$	\$	\$	\$
Other	\$	\$	\$	\$
Other	\$	\$	\$	\$
Total Grants & Scholarships	\$	\$	\$	\$
Work-Study Programs*	\$	\$	\$	\$

Loans

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
Subsidized Federal Direct	\$	\$	\$	\$
Unsubsidized Federal Direct	\$	\$	\$	\$
Perkins	\$	\$	\$	\$
PLUS	\$	\$	\$	\$
Other	\$	\$	\$	\$
Other	\$	\$	\$	\$
Total Loans	\$	\$	\$	\$

Total Financial Aid Award

Grants and Scholarships +				
Work-Study + Loans =	\$	\$	\$	\$

STEP 3

Calculate what it will cost you to attend each college. List the name of the school and the total cost of attendance, then subtract the total financial aid award from the total cost of attendance. The figure you get is the net cost—what it will cost you to attend the school.

Total Cost of Attendance	\$	\$	\$	\$
Minus				
Total Financial Aid Award	\$	\$	\$	\$
Equals				
Net Cost to Attend	\$	\$	\$	\$

*Although work-study is a part of your financial aid package, it must be earned by working at a job while you are in school.



Making a Final Decision

Congratulations! You have great options, and now you must make a big decision. Because you spent time and effort applying to college, it can be hard to make a final decision; the important thing to remember is that you should be proud of the fact that you have so many great choices. The decision-making process should be one of celebration, not agony.

Waitlist

The Waiting Game: What If I'm Waitlisted?

(Adapted from Jennifer Gross's *"The Waiting Game: What If I'm Wait-Listed?"* National Association for College Admission Counseling)

It's finally arrived—the envelope or email from your first-choice college. Nervously, you open it. It's not a denial! But it's not an acceptance, either. You've been waitlisted. What do you do now?

- Colleges use waiting lists as insurance. Applicants who are qualified for a college but don't make the cut may be waitlisted. If enough accepted students enroll for freshman year, the college won't accept anyone from the waiting list. If the college ends up with open spaces in the freshman class, it may accept a few or many students from its waiting list.
- Unfortunately, colleges often can't predict whether they will go to the waiting list or how many students from the list they will need. And you may not receive a final acceptance or denial until as late as July.

Your Insurance Policy

Because the waiting list is so unpredictable, it's not wise to count on moving from the waiting list to acceptance. If you're waitlisted at your first choice, your first task is to look at the colleges that did accept you. Carefully compare your options and decide on a second-choice college. If you haven't heard anything from the waitlist college by the May 1 deposit deadline, make a deposit at your second-choice college to ensure your spot in its freshman class.

Getting the Scoop

Different colleges use waiting lists differently. To assess your chances of acceptance from the waiting list, call the admissions office. Ask what your position is on the list (if the list is ranked) and the likelihood that the college will use their waiting list this year.

Your high school counselor can also help you get a sense of the strength of your application compared to the statistics for accepted students. The goal in gathering this information is to determine your chances of eventually being accepted. At this point, if you'd be just as happy going to your second-choice college, you may want to forget about the waiting list and focus on preparing for college.

Improving Your Chances

If your waitlist school is clearly your first choice, you should communicate that information. Colleges like a sure thing. If they end up using the waiting list, they'd rather offer acceptance to the students who are most likely to enroll.

If a student has had any significant, positive changes since their application was submitted, they should send a letter and include any documentation that demonstrates these changes. Sending additional recommendations is an option, but third-party letters don't carry as much weight as stellar senior grades or a prize-winning performance in the regional spring forensics competition. It's best to keep communications short and sweet; there is no need to send more than one or two emails or letters.

The best strategy, then, is to work with your counselor to:

- Choose and make a deposit at one of the excellent colleges that has admitted you
- Get as much information from the waitlist college as you can
- Let the admissions office know that the college is your first choice
- Strengthen your application, if possible

Tips on Making a Final Decision

Here are some things to think about as you make your final decision:

IS THIS COLLEGE REALLY ME?

You chose to apply to these schools in the first place, and they all have positive attributes. As you narrow your options, try these methods:

- Apply the first adjective that comes to mind to each school that you’re considering. Is it safe? Risky? Exciting? Challenging? After assigning some adjectives to each school, which feels best to you?

.....

.....

.....

- Next, ask yourself, “Is this college really for me?” Imagine being in a place with people who positively reinforce who you are.

Is really for me?

Is really for me?

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

Unfortunately, sometimes these tough decisions come down to money. Carefully review all financial aid and scholarship offers to understand total costs.

Taking out some student loans to help pay for school is a good thing to help you establish credit and take ownership of your college experience.

The average college graduate has about \$30,000 worth of debt; any more than that is too much.

Even though you get to decide which college to attend, your parents know you well and want what is best for you. Listen to them—they are wise!

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

Make sure that you are making the right choice for you, not the choice that others expect you to make.

A name-brand college isn’t always best. Choose the college that fits you and where you will grow the most.

Don’t go to a school because your best friend is going there, too. Try something new and different.

Research shows that complex decisions are best made by staying informed and then not thinking about it. By distracting yourself with other thoughts, you allow your subconscious mind to get involved. Often, your subconscious mind does a better job making decisions than your conscious mind.

PROS AND CONS LISTS

Using the College Comparison Worksheet on the following page, quantify the positive and negative elements for each of the schools you are considering:

- Academics
- Size
- Location
- Cost
- Facilities
- Activities

Assign a maximum point value for each element, depending on how important it is to you.



Final College Decision Worksheet

College Name				
Location • Distance from home				
Size • Student enrollment • Physical size of campus				
Environment • Type of school • Location and size of nearest city • Coed, male, female				
Academics • Your major offered • Special requirements • Student–faculty ratio • Typical class size • Study abroad • Research opportunities				
College Cost • Tuition, room and board • Estimated total budget • Application fee, deposits				
Financial Aid/Scholarships • Merit money or grants • Percent of financial need met				
Housing • Residence hall requirements • Meal plan • Residential choices				
Facilities • Academic • Recreational • Other				
Activities • Clubs, organizations • Greek life • Athletics, intramurals • Other				
Personal Factors • Diversity • Nearby relatives • Other				
Total Points				

Instructions: Create a scale for each of the criteria above; rank each one of your colleges using this scale.



Resources for Transitioning from High School to College

Coburn, Karen Levin, and Madge Lawrence Treeger. *Letting Go: A Parents' Guide to Understanding the College Years*. 6th ed. New York, NY: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2016.

Cohen, Harlan. *The Naked Roommate: And 107 Other Issues You Might Run Into in College*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2017.

Heffernan, Lisa, and Mary Harrington. *Grown & Flown: How to Support Your Teen, Stay Close as a Family, and Raise Independent Adults*. New York, NY: Flatiron Books, 2020.

Johnson, Helen E., and Christine Schelhas-Miller. *Don't Tell Me What to Do, Just Send Money: The Essential Parenting Guide to the College Years*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2011.

Odom, Leslie, Jr. *Failing Up: How to Take Risks, Aim Higher, and Never Stop Learning*. New York, NY: Feiwei and Friends, 2018.

Shultz, Melissa. *From Mom to Me Again: How I Survived My First Empty-Nest Year and Reinvented the Rest of My Life*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2016.

College Parents of America
collegeparents.org

Jed Foundation
jedfoundation.org

Five Critical Conversations to Have Before College Move-in Day

What Is the Communication Plan?

Families should agree on both the method (cell phone, email, text, etc.) they will use to communicate during the school year and the frequency of this communication. Determining this in advance can help keep families informed and connected, while fostering the student's sense of independence—a critical step in the early days of a new college experience.

Who Sees the Grades?

College students' records are protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). It restricts institutions from releasing grades and other educational records without a student's written permission. Students and parents/guardians should discuss what level of disclosure is mutually expected and acceptable, as well as what campus policies address this matter and what releases may need to be signed.

What About Sex, Drugs, and Alcohol?

While some students may have experimented with these while in high school, these will be new temptations for other students. Fortunately, students tend to be open to advice and feedback from their parents/guardians about these critical issues. Success in the first year of college is often linked to a student's capacity to make good social choices.

How Do You Manage All of This Free Time?

Few high school seniors have had to be fully responsible for waking up, getting to meals, scheduling study and work, and creating their own curfew. Good habits for using tools like alarm clocks, day planners, and calendars don't always come naturally. Also, when the winter holiday break brings students back home for a few weeks, do the old high school years' rules still apply?

Whose Experience Is This, Really?

Families need to have a plan for taking advantage of campus information and resources. Then, parents/guardians are confident their children are enjoying a positive learning environment while allowing them to create their own college experiences and advocate for themselves.



Helpful Websites for the College Application Process

UPrep's Web-Based College Counseling Resources

uprep.us/college: College counseling website

Scoir, **scoir.com:** UPrep's online college counseling tool

College Kickstart, **collegekickstart.com:** Generate a balanced college list here



College Search Websites

YouVisit, **youvisit.com:** Online tours of colleges and universities

Common App, **commonapp.org:** A common application form used by more than 900 different colleges

UW Admissions, **admit.washington.edu:** Admissions information for the University of Washington

The Hundred-Seven, **thehundred-seven.org:** Link to Historically Black Colleges and Universities

UCOP, **admission.universityofcalifornia.edu:** Admission information about the University of California campuses

CSU Mentor, **calstate.edu:** Admission information for the California State University system

Colleges That Change Lives, **ctcl.org:** A nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement and support of a student-centered college search process

DayTripper University, **daytripperuniversity.com:** Your guide to college tours

Standardized Testing Websites

College Board, **collegeboard.org:** Provides information about the PSAT, SAT, and AP tests

ACT, **act.org:** Provides information about the ACT test

AP Test Service, **aptsusa.com/uprep:** Provides information and registration for School Day SAT/ACT and AP Exams

Financial Aid and Scholarships

College Money Method, **collegemoneymethod.com:** A password-protected resource for UPrep families

CSS, **cssprofile.collegeboard.org:** The CSS Profile is the form many private colleges and universities require

FAFSA and Student Aid, **studentaid.gov:** The form required by colleges for all students applying for financial aid and the U.S. Department of Education resources on financial aid

Finaid, **finaid.org:** A comprehensive website for the financial aid novice

Fastweb, **fastweb.com:** A database of more than 180,000 scholarships

Going Merry, **goingmerry.com:** A scholarship database

NASFAA, **nasfaa.org:** Great website to help you learn financial terms

The WashBoard, **washboard.wsac.wa.gov:** College scholarship database for Washington students

Helpful QR Codes for Frequently Used Resources



Kelly's
Calendly



Scoir Login



Cris's
Calendly



Puma College
Connection
Program Login



Britten's
Calendly



Register for
School-Day
SAT, ACT, and
AP Exams



College
Counseling
Website

Student Priority Survey for the College Process

I want to attend a college where students:

- ☐ grow socially and emotionally
- ☐ grow academically
- ☐ pick up skills that will be applicable to any profession
- ☐ will graduate with a specific college name on their diploma
- ☐ will graduate with the least amount of debt
- ☐ will be pushed outside their comfort zone
- ☐ find a major that will lead to a high-paying job

FILL IN YOUR OTHER PRIORITIES HERE:

☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____

Take some time to review this list and place numbers beside each criterion of importance. There is no right or wrong order of priorities. This is an opportunity for you to reflect on your preliminary thoughts.

I need the following from my family:



Something I will do that will probably annoy my family is:

Take a moment to look over your list of priorities. What is surprising to you? How do you think your responses might differ from your family's?

Family Priority Survey for the College Process

I want my child to attend a college where students:

- ☐ grow socially and emotionally
- ☐ grow academically
- ☐ pick up skills that will be applicable to any profession
- ☐ will graduate with a specific college name on their diploma
- ☐ will graduate with the least amount of debt
- ☐ will be pushed outside their comfort zone
- ☐ find a major that will lead to a high-paying job

FILL IN YOUR OTHER PRIORITIES HERE:

☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____

Take some time to review this list and place numbers beside each criterion of importance. There is no right or wrong order of priorities. This is an opportunity for you to reflect on your preliminary thoughts.

I need the following from my student:

Something I will do that will probably annoy my student is:



Take a moment to look over your list of priorities. What is surprising to you? How do you think your responses might differ from your student's?

Notes:

To Do:



STOP! Stay Calm and Remember You've Got This!



College acceptance, in itself, is not an intrinsic goal; rather, it is merely a momentary achievement.

A student's challenge during the college process is not about getting into the right college; it is about preparing to deal with the challenges of becoming a college student.

As you have heard us say before, and as we have certainly written in the past, the beauty of the college process is that it reveals the compassion, determination, and academic excellence that UPrep fosters in its students. Given this foundation, it also foreshadows who these students will become. It is remarkable to witness the work ethic, intelligence, and kindness of our students during the college process.

They will bring these traits to college and their lives afterward. These are not fleeting factors in our students' lives, although colleges' admission decisions and the public frenzy around these decisions are momentary.

~ Kelly, Cris, Britten, & Wendy

CELEBRATE
ALL OPTIONS
EMPOWER
EACH OTHER



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UPrep is committed to developing each student's potential to become an intellectually courageous, socially responsible citizen of the world.

EXPLORE
THE UNKNOWN
FIND OPPORTUNITIES FOR
GROWTH
PRACTICE
GRATITUDE
TRUST THE PROCESS
KNOW
THYSELF AND BE
YOURSELF