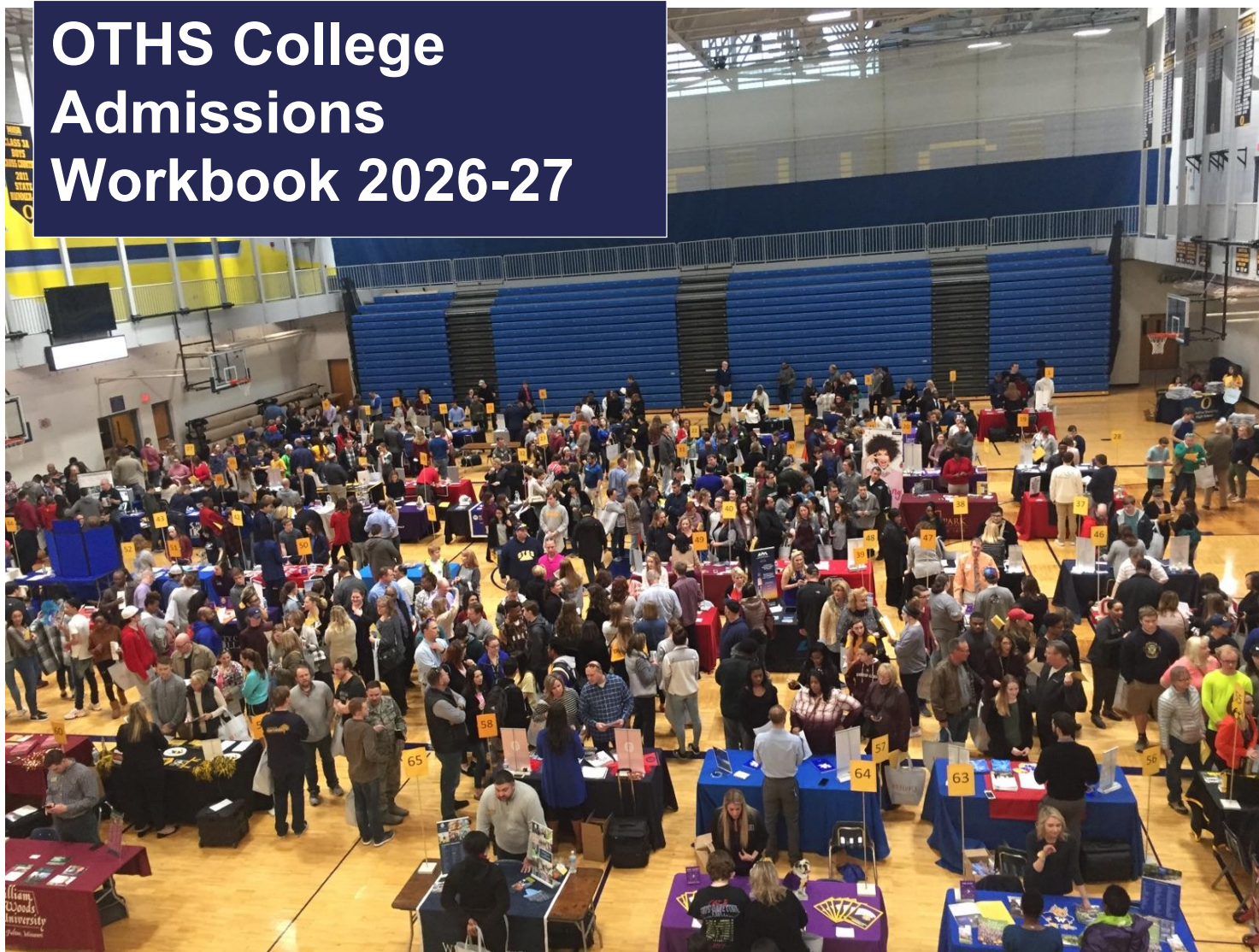


OTHS College Admissions Workbook 2026-27



O'Fallon Township High School
School Counseling Department
600 S. Smiley Street
O'Fallon, IL 62269

DIRECTORY

O'FALLON TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL
600 S SMILEY ST
O'FALLON, IL 62269

Mr. Dan Howe, Principal
Mr. Ryan Cozad, Assistant Principal Senior Class

School Counseling Department

O'Fallon Township High School, Smiley Campus

Hours of Operation: 7:15 am - 3:15 pm

General Questions? Email schoolcounseling@oths.us

Mrs. Denise Dismukes, Director of School Counseling, dismukesd@oths.us
618-632-3507 X5539 – Last Names A - B

Smiley Campus School Counselors

Mr. Tradale Hayes – Last Names C - G 618-632-3507 X5210
hayest@oths.us

Mrs. Shannon Lickenbrock- Last Names H - L 618-632-3507 X5270
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Freshman Campus School Counselors

Mr. Travis Hattan- Last Names A – Q 618-622-9647 X5287
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Post-High School Planning at OTHS: Look at the Big Picture

This guide is intended to introduce students to the post-high school process at OTHS. This handbook concentrates on the details of that search, application, and decision-making process. If you are considering delaying college or pursuing a vocation or the military, you will find additional information in the School Counseling Department Office.

Students have been assigned a school counselor with whom they will work closely to make sure the process results in a choice that is a good fit for each student's special talents, interests, and goals. Your counselor hopes to be deeply involved in the process with you. Your counselor may help you form a list of prospective colleges, acquire, and complete the applications, and assist you with required essays, recommendations and making the final decision. He or she can also help you through the maze of financial aid and scholarships and will generally help you structure the process so that it is not overwhelming.

The OTHS counseling staff will present guidelines and information, provide facilities and materials for you to use, and offer professional insights into college and career issues.

Taking advantage of the resources OTHS has to offer will help you prepare for your life beyond high school and will turn the steps to your future into steps toward your happiness and success.

The Importance of the High School Curriculum

Your high school curriculum is crucial as you focus on finding the best match in a college. It is also key to college admission departments when they evaluate candidates. Criteria for college admission vary greatly; however, all colleges focus on the rigor and quality of your high school curriculum. Admission personnel judge "rigor" and "quality" by evaluating the importance of the academic subject matter in your courses, the grades you earn in those courses, the level of difficulty of your courses and the results from the grades you have achieved and the program you have taken.

Generally, colleges prefer a traditional and classical college preparatory curriculum that includes the following areas:

- English (literature and composition courses)
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social Studies
- Foreign Language

AUGUST

- ☐ Create a list of potential colleges, universities, or career paths.
- ☐ Visit campuses, if possible, and attend virtual college tours or career seminars.
- ☐ Look into application requirements, deadlines, and potential financial aid opportunities.
- ☐ Register for any standardized tests (SAT/ACT) needed for college admissions. Consider retaking if you want to improve your scores.
- ☐ Update your resume, including all extracurricular activities, volunteer work, and any work experience.
- ☐ Create your [Parchment](#) account for transcripts.
- ☐ Use the [Senior Fact Sheet](#) to request Letters of Recommendation from your School Counselor.

SEPTEMBER

- ☐ Finalize College List: Narrow down your list of colleges and note the application deadlines for each.
- ☐ Letters of Recommendation: Request LOR from teachers, or employers. Provide them with [Senior Fact Sheet](#). Counselors will use [Collegevine](#)
- ☐ Begin Applications: Start drafting your college applications and essays. Set deadlines for completing each section.
- ☐ Visit college fairs and talk to college representatives to gather more information.
- ☐ FAFSA Preparation: Gather the necessary documents to complete the 2027-2028 FAFSA.

OCTOBER

- ☐ Submit FAFSA - Complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as soon as possible after October 1 to maximize financial aid opportunities. [studentaid.gov](#)
- ☐ Early Decision/Action Applications: Submit early decision and early action applications by their respective deadlines.
- ☐ Confirm and pay for AP exams by November 1st.
**** AP Testing Occurs in May ****
- ☐ Attend **SIUE COLLEGE FAIR**- OCT 27TH 6pm-7:30pm

OCTOBER (Cont.)

- ☐ Interested in enlisting in the armed services? Sign up for the **ASVAB** October 22nd administration.
- ☐ Search private, local, and school specific scholarships on the OTHS website.
- ☐ Check out these additional scholarship resources!
 - [College Greenlight](#)
 - [Fastweb](#)

NOVEMBER

- ☐ Finalize Essays – Revise and finalize college application essays.
- ☐ Standardized Test Scores: Ensure that all SAT/ACT scores are sent to the colleges on your list.
- ☐ Be mindful of Early Action Decision Deadlines (**University of Illinois – November 1**)
- ☐ Regular Decision Applications: Continue working on regular decision applications. Aim to complete them before winter break.

DECEMBER

- ☐ Application Submission: Submit all regular decision applications and make sure all necessary documents have been sent.
- ☐ Scholarship Applications: Continue to search and apply for scholarship. Many have Dec. deadlines.
- ☐ Mid-Year Reports: Request your school to send MYR to colleges, if required.

JANUARY

- ☐ Financial Aid: Complete any additional financial aid forms required by the colleges you've applied to (e.g., CSS Profile).
- ☐ Scholarship Follow-Up: Follow-Up on pending scholarship applications and continue to search and apply for scholarships.

February – March

- ☐ Attend St. Louis Metro East Illinois Regional College Fair (SWIC)
- ☐ College Interviews: Schedule and attend college interviews, if applicable.
- ☐ Decision Letters: Watch for admissions decisions and financial aid offers from colleges and universities (check your email).
- ☐ Compare Financial Aid Offers: Use a spreadsheet to compare financial aid offers from different colleges and universities.
- ☐ Confirm and pay for AP exams by March 1st.
****Spring AP courses only****

APRIL

- ☐ Apply to community colleges.
- ☐ Final College Decision: Make your final decision on which college to attend. Consider factors like financial aid, campus culture, and academic programs.
- ☐ Notify the college of your choice and submit any required deposit by the National College Decision Day on May 1.
- ☐ Waitlist Updates: If you are waitlisted, inform the college of your continued interest and update them on any new achievements or grades.
- ☐ **Honors Night & Awards Ceremony – April 26th**

MAY

- ☐ Take AP exams if applicable.
- ☐ **National College Decision Day – May 1st**
- ☐ Submit Final Transcripts: Request your high school to send your final transcripts to the college you will be attending.
- ☐ Plan for Orientation: Register for college orientation sessions and make travel plans.
- ☐ Celebrate! Celebrate your achievements and look forward to the next chapter of your life!
- ☐ Request your FINAL OTHS transcript to be sent through parchment (Request before July 1st)
- ☐ Interested in entering the workforce after graduation? Explore different occupations and learn about careers and technical education programs.
[Illinois Work Net](#)
[Education Planner](#)

Helpful Advice:

- ☐ **Stay organized by using a calendar to track all deadlines and requirements.**
- ☐ **Regularly communicate with your school counselor for guidance and support.**
- ☐ **Don't forget to enjoy your senior year and create lasting memories!**

If you are still finishing up your college search and finalizing your list; it is time to prioritize your To Do List.

HAVE YOU STARTED THE COLLEGE SEARCH?

If you haven't started your COLLEGE Search, it's not too late.

If you are struggling getting everything together before deadlines pass, see your counselor for help.

1. **Gather info**- about requirements, applications, deadlines, course description books, view books, athletics, activities, financial aid, housing, etc.

2. **Organize your college info**- use file folders for each college that interests you. Include a section for your information: your transcript, your resume, your college essay, etc. Take a

3. **Road Trip**- go on those last-minute tours, attend open houses, and go to local college

Alternatives to 4-Year College

Some individuals are not interested in or immediately ready for a four-year college setting after graduation. Alternatives include community colleges, art schools, vocational and technical schools, armed services options, direct employment in business, and taking a year off, which is also known as having a gap year experience. Your high school counselor will help you investigate all options in which you are interested.

Community Colleges

Enrolling in a local community college provides you the opportunity either to begin your college work commuting from home or the chance to complete a one-year certificate or two-year associate degree program to enter a specific career field or to transfer to a four-year college. Many students find that the community college option is more affordable and practical than moving to a residential college immediately after graduation. Community college courses completed successfully transfer to four-year colleges, and the state of Illinois maintains a website, www.itransfer.org, where you can determine how courses taken at a community college transfer to Illinois four-year schools.

Armed Services Opportunities

Opportunities in education and training are available for men and women in all branches of the Armed Forces. All branches of the services now prefer to take high school graduates for specialized training. Training in the armed services can range from a few weeks to a year, depending upon the field of specialization. The training is applicable to jobs in civilian life. Your options include the Air Force, Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, National Guard and U.S. Merchant Marine.

On-the-Job Training by Business and Industry

The amount of money spent by business and industry in training and educating employees exceeds that spent by all formal schools and colleges combined. At times the training lasts only a few days or a few weeks, while some occupations might take a year with frequent retraining as the employee advances in the company.

Art, Vocational and Technical Schools

Several privately-owned institutions provide specialized training in art, fashion, cosmetology, and technical fields.

If you choose a specialty school, make sure that it is licensed and accredited. You may wish to contact graduates of the school and their employers, the Better Business Bureau and/or the Illinois Department of Education.

Gap Year—Taking Time Out

“Why? A growing number of high school seniors are balking at riding the academic conveyor belt from preschool all the way to a university. They’re burnt out. Or not quite ready. Or they want to explore a few interests before deciding what to study in college. So instead of packing their bags in anticipation of freshman year, they’re volunteering in New Orleans or teaching in Thailand. They’re starting the great American novel or interning to help figure out what they want to do with their lives. Understandably, that makes a lot of parents nervous. But before you drive your kid to college in an armored truck and deliver him to the dorm yourself, it’s important to understand the facts, including what a gap year is, and what it is not. For one, a gap year does not mean that a student is doomed to remain degree-less forever. Taking a gap year can make kids more focused and ready for the rigors of academic life. In fact, Harvard, arguably the most competitive university in the country, believes so much in the gap year that they encourage every student they admit to consider a year off before matriculation.”

Assess Your Strengths

“What do you want to do with your life? Why are you going to college?” If you have not been asked these questions lately, you probably soon will be. You may have been asking yourself and wondering how you can go about finding the answers.

To choose a college or to find a career path, you must know yourself: your interests, goals, dreams, weaknesses and strengths.

You need to:

- identify your goals for your education
- take stock of your priorities
- list your practical concerns.

This self-assessment will help you determine what to consider as you investigate colleges.

Identify Personal Priorities

The worksheet below will help you and your parents identify priorities for the college search. Complete the Student Worksheet and ask your parents to complete the Parent Worksheet. Compare your ratings, discuss major issues and resolve differences before you begin your plan.

Student's College Selection Worksheet

“Going where they do not fit” is the number one mistake most college-bound students say they make. Over 50 percent of all college students graduate from a school different from the one in which they started. Consider what is important to you now and try to anticipate the type of campus where you will stay to graduate.

What is important to you?

Essential	Relatively Important	Not Important
Cost (stipulate range)	☐	☐
College selectivity	☐	☐
Distance from home	☐	☐
Location	☐	☐
Four-year college	☐	☐
Two-year college	☐	☐
Public	☐	☐
Private	☐	☐
Living arrangements	☐	☐
Size of enrollment	☐	☐
Athletics	☐	☐
SAT or ACT scores	☐	☐
Area of studies	☐	☐
Activities	☐	☐
Fraternity/Sorority Life	☐	☐
Co-op programs	☐	☐
Foreign study	☐	☐
Reputation	☐	☐
Campus life	☐	☐
ROTC	☐	☐
Safety	☐	☐

Parents' College Selection Worksheet

However well-intentioned, some parents make the mistake of pushing their student to follow the parents' career, attend the parents' school or attend a college primarily for its high prestige value. Please avoid this costly error and consider objectively what is best for your son or daughter. Use this section to show what considerations are important to you.

What is important to you?

Essential	Relatively Important	Not Important
Cost (stipulate range)	☐	☐
College selectivity	☐	☐
Distance from home	☐	☐
Location	☐	☐
Four-year college	☐	☐
Two-year college	☐	☐
Public	☐	☐
Private	☐	☐
Living arrangements	☐	☐
Size of enrollment	☐	☐
Athletics	☐	☐
SAT or ACT scores	☐	☐
Area of studies	☐	☐
Activities	☐	☐
Fraternity/Sorority Life	☐	☐
Co-op programs	☐	☐
Foreign study	☐	☐
Reputation	☐	☐
Campus life	☐	☐
ROTC	☐	☐
Safety	☐	☐

The College Application Process

BE SURE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO AND WHEN. KEEP ON TOP OF IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES.

Congratulations! By this time, you have made it past one of the biggest hurdles in the college application process. You have decided where to apply to school. Hold on; now the real work begins. It is time to get hold of those college applications, write your essay, send test scores, and work on your organizational skills. It is your responsibility to know when each application is due, what items you must send with each packet, and what type of application you will use. Now is not the time to rely on what you heard from your friends. Check and double check college websites, call admissions offices or email admissions reps to be certain of the proper forms and deadlines. It will be very helpful to keep a folder for each school you are applying to. You should keep together all the information you receive on that school. If organization has been one of your weaknesses in the past, this is a good chance to work on those skills that you will need to use repeatedly once you go to college.

A helpful checklist of what you will need for college applications...

- ☐ Application
- ☐ Essay
- ☐ Resume
- ☐ List of Recommendations
- ☐ Tests Needed and Dates due to Admission Office
- ☐ Financial Aid Forms

Application Deadlines

Early Decision (ED)

A binding agreement between one student and one college. If admitted, the student must attend unless there are serious issues with the financial aid package. Students should always discuss with parents and counselor before choosing this option.

Why apply Early Decision? In most cases, it gives the student a slight edge because colleges know they can count on the student to attend, which increases their yield.

Early Action (EA)

Students can apply EA to more than one college. No obligation to attend any. Why apply Early Action? In some cases, it may provide the student with a slight edge though not as significant as with ED.

Additionally, the student knows the decision in December, allowing for less stress during senior year.

Restrictive Early Action (REA)

A non-binding application where student can apply to any college that offers EA, but not to any college that offers ED.

Examples: Boston College and Georgetown.

Single-Choice Early Action (SCEA)

Non-binding application to one college but cannot apply EA or ED to any other college. Examples: Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, Tulane, and Yale.

Priority

Deadline period offered earlier than Regular deadline. Example: The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign offers a Nov. 1 Priority deadline ahead of its Regular deadline of Jan. 1. We strongly encourage students to apply during the Priority deadline.

Early Decision

- Binding
- Mid-December/ Mid-February Decision
- Cannot Apply Early Decision Elsewhere
- CAN Apply Early Action elsewhere

Single Choice Early Action

- Non-Binding
- Mid-December Decision
- Cannot Apply Early Decision Elsewhere
- Cannot Apply Early Action elsewhere

Restrictive Early Action

- Non-Binding
- Mid-December Decision
- Cannot Apply Early Decision Elsewhere
- CAN Apply Early Action elsewhere

Early Action

- Non-Binding
- Mid-December Decision
- Cannot Apply Early Decision Elsewhere
- CAN Apply Early Action elsewhere

Regular

- Non-Binding
- Late March Decision
- CAN Apply Early Decision Elsewhere
- CAN Apply Early Action elsewhere

Rolling

- Non-Binding
- 4-6 Week Decision
- CAN Apply Early Decision Elsewhere
- CAN Apply Early Action elsewhere

Application Essay

For many students, the most intimidating part of the college admission application is the application essay. Most selective colleges and universities require that you answer one or more questions during the application process. Understanding the purpose of the college application essay should help to reduce anxiety associated with it.

Application essays provide you the chance to distinguish yourself from the candidate pool. It allows you to relate a story of your life.

Application essay questions have no “right or wrong” answers. Two students who answer a question with completely opposite answers could both be admitted. Rather, it is the content of the essay and how you organize and support your thoughts that are most important. Your essay should be a clear indication of your ability to think analytically and creatively and to communicate your thoughts in writing.

Generally, you will serve yourself best by:

- Specifying clearly and accurately on the application the nature and level of your activities
- Seizing an opportunity in an application essay to give insight into the quality of your contribution in a particular area
- Judiciously selecting adults who will write letters of recommendation for you.

Tips for Writing an Application Essay

The Topic Is You

Answer the question as you think it should be answered, not as you think the admission counselor might want you to answer it.

Follow Directions

If you are to answer one of three questions, answer only one. Keep your essay within the page or word limits described. Resist the temptation to use today’s computer technology to produce a “one-page essay” with one-tenth-inch margins and tiny type.

Respect the Admission Officer

Be careful to use proper wording and not text abbreviations. Keep your writing relatively formal. Carefully check spelling and grammar.

Have Fun

If you approach the essay as an opportunity to distinguish yourself from other applicants, you will learn about yourself, produce a high-quality essay and enhance your chances of admission.

Prepare Before You Write

You may have a sample essay assigned in early fall in your senior English class. Talk about the essay with your counselor, parent(s) or teachers. Treat the essay as you would a short paper. Think about the topic, make notes, write a rough draft, and revise the draft until you are pleased. Ask another person to read your essay, check your grammar and style, and provide a general impression.

Your college application essay is about YOU. Much of your writing in English class is more about the narrative, or story, than about your interpretation of it. In addition, short essays do not allow space for showing — you simply must tell your reader direct information as you respond to the essay prompt. There is also not typically room for dialogue.

Creating a Résumé

A résumé is a summary of your educational experience and should highlight your scholastic honors, grade point average, standardized test scores, leadership positions and personal achievements. A résumé also provides you with the means to assess your strengths and weaknesses. All extra-curricular activities, community service and relevant work experience should be included on your one-page résumé.

The objective of this résumé is to give admission representatives a quick overview of your abilities, interests, and values. Developing an academic résumé is an important first step in making educated college and career choices. Your résumé will help you review your accomplishments and determine your personal, athletic, spiritual, or recreational goals for your remaining time in high school. It may also help you decide which activities in which you might wish to participate.

Organize your résumé by listing all your contact information at the top of the page. This may include your name, address, telephone number, and email address. Make sure your email address is appropriate for business use; cute nicknames or college athletic names are not encouraged. The high school's name, address and phone number should follow your personal information under an "Education" heading. Add your graduation year, GPA, and test scores to this category. If you have received any academic honors, be sure to include these awards. Next, you will want to emphasize any leadership positions with your extracurricular activities affiliated with school or other organizations. Use action verbs to describe your responsibilities as a leader. Include the number of years you have participated in these activities. List activities in chronological order.

If you don't know where to start when creating a résumé, your Senior Fact sheet is a great place to start. This tool is designed to help provide a framework with the résumé process.

Tips to make your Résumé Easier to Read

- Use white or off-white paper
- Use 8-1/2" x 11" paper
- Use a font size of 11-14 points
- Use non-decorative typefaces
- Do not use vertical lines, graphics or shading
- Do not fold your résumé

General Résumé Example

Christopher Doe

123 Maplewood Road

O’Fallon, IL 62269

(618) 549-5326

chrisdoe@gmail.com

D.O.B. M/D/Y

Education:

O’Fallon Township High School

600 South Smiley Street

O’Fallon, IL 62269

2020

GPA: 3.97 weighted, 3.44 unweighted

PSAT: Critical Reading 70, Math 60, Writing 61, SI 191

ACT: English 28, Math 22, Reading 27, SR 28, Composite 26

SAT: Critical Reading 680, Math 540, Writing 650

Academic Honors:

National Council Teachers of English Writing Competition

- Winner, Junior Year

Extra-Curricular Activities:

Varsity Wrestling

- Co-Captain, led team to CIC conference championship

Concert Orchestra

- Violin

Peer Mediation

- Facilitated mediations for peers in conflict

Boy Scouts of America

- Eagle Scout

Grades 9, 10, 11, 12

Grades 10, 11, 12

Grades 9, 10

Grades 9, 10, 11, 12

Volunteer Experience:

O’Fallon Community Park District

- Lifeguard and swimming instructor

- Taught Red Cross swimming lessons to first graders

Special Olympics

- Parking attendant

Grade 11

Grade 10, 11

Community Involvement:

O’Fallon Congregational Church

- Member of high school youth group

- Participation on mission trip to Mexico-Sophomore year

Grades 9, 10, 11, 12

Potential College Athletes and Sample Résumé

The NCAA has three membership divisions — Division I, Division II and Division III. If you plan to enroll as a freshman and you wish to participate in Division I or Division II athletics, you must be certified by the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse.

In August after your junior year, complete the NCAA clearinghouse form at www.eligibilitycenter.org.

You will also want to create an athletic résumé to present to college coaches and other athletic recruiters.

Send all test scores to NCAA or NAIA

Helpful Websites

<https://play.mynaia.org>

<https://www.ncaa.org>

Baseball and Softball

Batting Average
Fielding Average
Earned Run Average
Win-Loss Record (Pitchers)
Runs Batted In (RBI)
Stolen Bases

Basketball

Assists (Per Game)
Rebounds
Free-Throw Percentage
Field-Goal Percentage
(2 Point And 3 Point)

Cross-Country, Track And Field

Distance In Field Events: Shot
Put, Discus, Long Jump
Height In Field Events: High Jump
Pole Vault
Time and Distance
Conference, Invitational, or State
Places

Field Hockey

Goals
Assists
Blocked Shots

Football

Tackles (Defensive Player)
Assists (Defensive Player)
Sacks (Defensive Player)
Interceptions (Defensive/Back/
Linebacker)
Fumbles Recovered
Yards Rushing (Running Back)
Receptions — Yards, Average,
Touchdowns
Attempts, Completions, Total Yards,
Passing/Rushing (Quarterback)
Punts — Attempts, Longest, Average
Kickoff Returns — Attempts, Longest,
Average
Points Scored — Touchdowns, Extra
Points
Field Goals — Attempts, Longest,
Average Total Points Scored

Gymnastics

Events and Scores
Conference, Invitational or State
Places

Golf

Scores
Handicap

Soccer

Goals
Assists and Blocked Shots
Swimming
Event And Times
Dives, Difficulty, Scores
Major Conference, Invitational or
Places

Tennis

Record and Ranking
Major Conference, Invitational or
State Ranking
Volleyball
Blocks
Assists
Kills
Aces

Wrestling

Individual Record and At What
Weight
Season Takedowns
Season Reversals
Season Escapes
Season 2-Point and 3-Point near Fall
Points
Falls
Conference, Invitational or State
Places

Résumé Example for Athletes

Christopher Doe

123 Maplewood Road
O'Fallon, IL 62269
(618) 549-5326

chrisdoe@gmail.com
D.O.B. M/D/Y

Education:

O'Fallon Township High School
600 South Smiley Street
O'Fallon, IL 62269

Expected Graduation Year: 2020

GPA: 3.97 weighted, 3.44 unweighted

PSAT: Critical Reading 70, Math 60, Writing 61, SI 191

ACT: English 28, Math 22, Reading 27, SR 28, Composite 26

SAT: Critical Reading 680, Math 540, Writing 650

Personal statistics:

Date of Birth: July 4, 2001
Height: 5'9"
Weight: 164 lbs.
40-yard time: 4.95 secs.
100-yard time: 10.9 secs
Mile Time: 5.12 mins.

Athletic History:

Soccer, Freshman Year: left wing, junior varsity; 11 goals, 21 assists. Team finished 2nd on league, 12-4.

Soccer, Sophomore Year: right wing, varsity; 9 goals, 24 assists. Team finished first in league; named Honorable Mention All-County.

Soccer, Junior Year: right wing, varsity; 23 goals, 19 assists. Team reached state quarter finals; made All-State Team. Named team captain for Senior Year.

References:

M. Scott
Varsity Soccer Coach
O'Fallon township High School

P. Sherman
Director
All-American soccer Camp

What to Look for in a Recommender?

The best recommendation writer will be someone who...

1. Likes you
2. Knows you well enough to provide a credible opinion
3. Writes well

Recommendations

Competitive colleges put a good deal of weight on teacher recommendations. You should choose your recommendation writers carefully. Your counselor recommendation is a letter that summarizes your academic performance within the context of your peers and will include a commentary about your role in the community. The counselor letter might also state any circumstances that have affected your academic performance and a rationale of why you want to attend that institution. You should try to spend some time with your counselor to discuss your college plans and academic goals.

The ideal approach in choosing recommendation writers is to provide the college application reader a balance between math/science and English/social studies. These will probably present different sides of your experiences as a student and provide valuable insight to your strengths academically.

Tips When Asking for Recommendations

- Know in advance whom you want to ask.
- Allow the recommenders at least one month before the deadline for your application to get ready. Many recommenders are writing for more than just you, so they will need time to write a good evaluation of you.
- Keep track of whom you are asking to write for you for each application you submit.
- Give your recommenders a copy of your Senior Fact Sheet and transcript. If you will be asking your recommenders to write to more than one college, ask them for all of the recommendations together.

You should discuss with your parents the option to “waive your right” to see your recommendation letters. Waiving this right means you won’t be able to view the letter once it’s sent to the school. While this might sound risky, it’s generally recommended.

Here’s why waiving your right is often the better choice:

1. Trust and Respect: Not waiving your right can imply that you don’t trust the writer to provide a strong recommendation. This could potentially offend the person you’re asking to recommend you, which isn’t ideal.

2. Honesty in the Letter: Writers who know you might see the letter are often less candid. They might use vague praise that doesn’t help you stand out. For example:

- **Less Helpful:** “William has shown consistent effort and is both diligent and determined.”
- **More Helpful:** “William is never going to be a chemist. But despite struggling, he remains cheerful and keeps trying his best.”

The second example, even with its criticisms, is more honest and provides a clearer picture to admissions officers.

3. Perception by Colleges: If you don’t waive your right, colleges might question why you’re uncomfortable with the recommendation. This could raise concerns about what you’re worried about in the letter.

If you’re unsure about waiving your rights, consider asking someone else who is very positive about you to write the letter. Remember, teachers and counselors want to help you succeed and will usually write a supportive letter.

(Source: Kevin McMullin, College Wise)

Register For

SAT or ACT

Test Dates 2025-2026

ACT Test Date Registration Deadline

September 19	August 14
October 17	September 11
December 12	November 6
February 27	January 22
April 10	March 5
June 12	May 7
July 10	June 4

Click [HERE](#) to register for the ACT.

SAT Test Date Registration Deadline

August 22	August 7
September 12	August 28
October 3	September 18
November 7	October 23
December 5	November 20
March 6	February 19
May 1	April 16
June 5	May 21

Click [HERE](#) to register for the SAT.

Information you will need for application:

School Phone: 618-632-3507

School Fax: 618-632-6484

School Address: 600 South Smiley
O'Fallon, IL 62269

ACT

The ACT is a college admissions test accepted by nearly all U.S. colleges and universities. It currently includes three required multiple-choice sections—English, Mathematics, and Reading—with Science and Writing offered as optional sections. Scores on the required sections range from 1 to 36, and their mathematical average produces the ACT composite score. Beginning in 2025, the composite will be based only on English, Math, and Reading, while Science will be reported separately. Each section also has sub scores ranging from 1 to 18, providing more detail about performance in specific skill areas. There is no penalty for guessing. The optional Writing test, scored on a 2–12 scale, does not factor into the composite score but may be required by some colleges. Students should check each college's admissions website to determine whether the Writing section is necessary.

SAT

The SAT was redesigned in 2016 to focus on achievement aligned with high school curriculum rather than aptitude. The redesign eliminated analogies and obscure vocabulary, removed the penalty for guessing, and updated math content to reflect typical high school coursework. As of 2024, the SAT is now fully digital and consists of two main sections: Reading & Writing and Math. Each section is scored on a 200–800 scale, and the combined total score ranges from 400 to 1600. The digital SAT takes approximately 2 hours and 14 minutes to complete. Subscores are also reported to highlight performance in areas such as Algebra or Craft & Structure. The optional essay was discontinued in 2021, except in a few state-mandated cases.

Which Test Should I Take?

Both the ACT and SAT are widely accepted by colleges, and neither is inherently better. The best choice depends on your strengths and testing style. The ACT may suit students who prefer faster pacing and science-based reasoning, while the SAT allows more time per question and emphasizes evidence-based reading and math. Try a practice test for each to see which feels more natural, then focus your preparation on that exam.

Additional Helpful Info

The Common Application

The Common Application is an undergraduate college admission application that applicants may use to apply to any of the 1,000 member colleges and universities that are members of the Common App.

What is the web address?

www.commonapp.org

When can I open an account?

The Common Application site will be open for 2026-27 on August 1, 2026. Students can register and begin to enter information at that time.

What information will I need to get started?

School information:

O'Fallon Township High School

600 South Smiley Street

O'Fallon, IL 62269

Phone: 618-632-3507

Fax: 618-206-2477



OTHS CEEB code: 143270

Should I apply through the Common Application site or through the application on the college's website, if offered?

There is no advantage to applying through the Common Application or through a specific college's website. However, by using The Common Application, your required recommendations from teachers and school report from your school counselor will be sent electronically, avoiding delays and errors. The Common App is a great tool to save you time during your senior year of high school. However, you should always keep in mind that research is your most important tool. Double check that the schools you want to apply to accept the application, track the deadlines for supplemental materials like essays and letters of recommendation, and only apply to schools that align with your goals. If you can keep on top of everything that needs to be done, the Common Application is definitely worth the time.

Should I waive my "right to access" my recommendations?

You will be asked whether you want to waive your right to access our recommendations on each application. College Admission officers encourage students to check "yes" for this reason: By waiving your right to access, your recommender may write a more honest and candid letter by knowing that their writing will be kept confidential by the college. The objectivity of the recommendation may be questioned if admission officers know that the student may view the letter later. If you feel unsure about this issue and have more questions, see your school counselor early in the semester.

Coalition for College

The Coalition for College is a diverse group of more than 150 distinguished colleges and universities across the U.S. that is committed to making college a reality for all high school students through its set of free, online college planning tools that helps them learn about, prepare for, and apply to college.

What is the web address?

www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org

What information will I need to get started?

School information:

O'Fallon Township High School

600 South Smiley Street

O'Fallon, IL 62269

Phone: 618-632-3507

Fax: 618-206-2477



OTHS CEEB code: 143270

Do Coalition colleges prefer one application over another? Are my chances of getting in better if I use MyCoalition to apply?

No. Coalition member schools do not have a preference for how students submit applications. Whether applicants use the Coalition application, the school's own application form, or another application system entirely, member colleges believe that students should use the application that fits their needs best. And admissions officers at Coalition schools do not give preferential treatment to students based on how they submit their applications.

Why do some colleges and universities offer more than one application?

The reasons vary: For some schools, offering multiple applications ensures that a technology failure does not impact their application process. For others, doing so may set them apart from peer schools (that don't offer multiple applications), while also allowing students to use the application that best fits their needs.

Can a student view contents of letters of recommendations or official transcripts in MyCoalition?

No. It is not possible for a student to preview, download, or view any locked document, such as a confidential letter of recommendation or official transcript in MyCoalition.

FAFSA

Free Application for Federal Student Aid

File Your 2027-2028

FAFSA

FAFSA opens October 1

Some states and colleges use information from the FAFSA form to determine your eligibility for grants, scholarships, and loans. Every student is encouraged to complete the FAFSA.

How To Prepare for the 2027–28 FAFSA® Form

Prepare now so you can complete the FAFSA as soon as it's available:

- [Create a StudentAid.gov account](#) (if you don't already have one).
- Review the [documents](#) you'll need (Social Security number, tax info, etc.).
- Determine your [dependency status](#) (whether the FAFSA requires parent/guardian information).
- If you're a dependent student, use the [Who's My FAFSA Parent? wizard](#) tool to confirm which parent(s) should be listed.

Financial Aid Resources:

- Federal Student Aid (US Dept. of Education): www.studentaid.gov
- Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC): [Helpful Tips for Completing the FAFSA](#)
- OTHS School Counseling Department:
[OTHS Financial Aid Resources](#)

Top Reasons to File Early:

- **Receive Early Award Notifications** – Some aid is limited and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.
- **Make Early Decisions** – Compare financial aid packages sooner.
- **Use Prior-Prior Year Taxes** – For the 2027–28 FAFSA, you'll use your 2025 tax information (filed in 2026).

Financial Aid

Financial aid is money that helps students and families pay for college when their own resources are not enough. The financial aid system is based on the expectation that families will contribute as much as they can toward educational costs. Federal and state programs are designed to expand access and choice for students who might otherwise be limited in their opportunities.

Financial need is determined by comparing the total cost of attendance (tuition, fees, housing, books, etc.) with the **Expected Family Contribution (EFC)** calculated from your FAFSA.

Financial aid comes in four basic forms, often combined into a single package:

- **Grants** – Need-based aid that does not need to be repaid.
- **Scholarships** – Merit-based aid (academic, athletic, talent, or other criteria) that does not need to be repaid.
- **Work-Study** – A federal program that allows students to earn money through part-time campus or community jobs arranged by the Financial Aid Office.
- **Loans** – Borrowed money from federal, state, or private sources that must be repaid, usually with low interest rates.

Application Process for Need-Based Financial Aid

To qualify for need-based financial aid, students must complete one or both of the following applications online. Always check with your colleges to see which forms they require:

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

This is the primary application for federal, state, and many institutional aid programs, including the Illinois Monetary Award Program (MAP). Every student seeking need-based aid should complete the FAFSA.

- The FAFSA typically becomes available in October of senior year (though federal rollout changes may cause delays).
- It uses the “prior-prior year” tax information (for example, the 2026–27 FAFSA will use 2024 tax data).
- Some aid programs—like the Illinois MAP Grant—are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, so filing early is strongly encouraged.
- Complete the FAFSA at studentaid.gov.

CSS Profile (College Scholarship Service Profile)

Some private colleges and universities require this additional form to award their own institutional aid.

- Registration opens in mid-September of senior year.
- Complete the Profile at cssprofile.collegeboard.org

Other Notes

- Some colleges also require their own institutional aid applications—always follow each school’s instructions carefully.
- Aid decisions are made by each individual college.
- Apply on time: The earlier you file, the more likely you are to be considered for all available funds.
- Remember to **reapply every year**. Financial aid is not automatically renewed, and renewal requirements may vary for each award.

Types of Aid

- **Grants** – Need-based aid that does not have to be repaid. Pell Grants are awarded only to undergraduates who have not yet earned a bachelor's or professional degree. Many states (such as Illinois' MAP Grant) also provide grants to students attending in-state colleges.
- **Scholarships** – Merit-based awards that may come from colleges, employers, community groups, or private organizations. Scholarships vary in amount and do not require repayment.
- **Work-Study** – A federal program that provides part-time jobs for students with financial need, typically on campus. Students are paid directly for the hours they work, which helps with personal expenses.
- **Federal Direct Loans (Subsidized and Unsubsidized)** – Loans must be repaid with interest.
- **Subsidized Loans** are need-based; the federal government pays the interest while you are in school at least half-time.
- **Unsubsidized Loans** are not need-based; interest accrues while you are in school and is added to your loan balance.
- **PLUS Loans** – Federal loans available to parents of dependent undergraduates (Parent PLUS) or to graduate students (Grad PLUS). The yearly borrowing limit equals the cost of attendance minus other financial aid. Interest rates are fixed and set annually by Congress.

Additional Sources of Financial Aid

- Religious Organizations
- Club Memberships
- Civic Organizations
- College-Sponsored Aid Programs
- National Merit Scholarship Programs
- Parent/Student Employers
- Veteran Organizations
- Insurance Companies

Cost-Saving Alternatives

Whether or not you apply for financial aid, you and your family may want to discuss alternative strategies for paying for college. As with each decision involved in planning for your future, be sure to choose one that matches your abilities, goals and personality.

Choose Wisely

About one in four students transfer from their starting college, which can add extra time and costs. If you are unsure about your major, consider colleges that offer a wide range of options.

Cooperative Education Program

Alternate semesters of study with paid work in a related field. While this may extend college to five years, it can reduce overall costs and strengthen career opportunities.

Advanced Placement (AP) and Dual Credit

Many colleges grant credit for Advanced Placement exams or dual-credit high school courses. These can shorten the time needed to graduate and save tuition costs (check each college's policy).

Two-Year College, then Transfer

Community colleges often provide the same general education courses as four-year schools at a fraction of the cost. Be sure your credits transfer to your chosen four-year institution.

ROTC — Army, Navy, Marines or Air Force

ROTC scholarships can cover full tuition and fees, plus provide stipends for books and living expenses, in exchange for a service commitment after graduation.

Type of Application and Decisions

ROLLING DECISION	Students can apply anytime during the application process and will get a decision back from the school quickly.
PRIORITY DECISION	Priority Decision is like Early Action. Schools with Rolling Admissions use Priority Decision. A student's application gets priority for admission if it is completed within the application window specified by the school.
EARLY DECISION	A student can only apply to one school for Early Decision. Early Decision is binding; if you apply ED and are accepted, you must attend this school and pull all applications submitted to other schools.
EARLY ACTION	Under Early Action a student can apply early and get a decision quickly, usually by the second week of December, with no requirement to attend. You can apply early action to more than one school.
RESTRICTIVE EARLY ACTION	This option is a hybrid between Early Decision and Early Action. You are not required to attend the college if accepted but cannot ED elsewhere (you can apply EA to other schools).
SINGLE CHOICE EARLY ACTION	Applying Single Choice Early Action means that you may not apply anywhere else through ED or EA. Be sure this is your first-choice school, so you do not miss out on applying early anywhere else.
EARLY DECISION 2	This is a second round of ED that some schools offer that is binding. The deadline is usually January 1 with the decision coming in February. If you don't get into your first ED school, this is a good option to apply to your 2nd choice ED
REGULAR DECISION	Students apply during the regular application period. This is non-binding, you can choose whether or not to attend. Deadlines vary by school.

College Admissions 101

Common Application <https://commonapp.org>

The Common Application (or Common App) is an undergraduate college admissions application that applicants may use to apply to any of more than 900 colleges and universities all over the world. Instead of filling out the same general information (name, address, GPA, extracurricular activities, etc.) over and over, you only have to do it once. The Common App also has seven essay prompts (must choose 1) for a 250-650 personal essay.

Common Black College Application <https://commonblackapplication.org>

The Common Black College Application allows students to submit a single application to all Participating Institutions for \$20.00, interact with school counselors, and learn about HBCUs, as well as further the college preparation experience.

Universal Application <https://www.universalcollegeapp.com/>

Not as extensive as the Common Application and not as well-known. If you use the Universal Application be sure to mention it to your LOR Writers and your School Counselor. It has a different entry point. In the First Year Application, applicants complete basic information such as contact details, academic information, extracurricular activities, and coursework, among other important pieces of information. Many colleges also require a Personal Statement (essay) as part of the First Year Application.

Coalition Application <https://www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org>

The Coalition App is a free platform, similar to the Common App, which schools can join to offer their applications on. The Coalition App covers many [top college and universities](#), but not as many schools as the Common App covers. Only 132 schools are Coalition members, as opposed to the almost 900 schools that are covered by the Common App. All eight of the Ivy League colleges – Brown University, Columbia University, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Harvard University, The University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University and Yale University – are included in this application. Other prominent universities, including Stanford University, the University of Chicago, Duke University, and Johns Hopkins University, are also included in the Coalition Application, and more schools join the Coalition each year.

SENDEDu <http://sendEDU.org>

SENDEDu is a free, secure electronic document transfer service for counselors, teachers, student references and other officials involved in the application completion process. This service allows you to upload supporting application documents to colleges and universities safely and quickly, with no paperwork or hassle.

Note: O'Fallon Township High School does not transfer transcripts through SENDEDu. Students must still request transcripts through Parchment™.

Frequently Used Terms & Questions

Waitlisted

What does it mean to be waitlisted at a college/university? Being waitlisted means the college has reviewed your application but has not offered you admission at this time. If space opens up, the school may admit students from the waitlist. You can accept or decline the waitlist offer—it is not binding.

Deferred

A deferral means the college has delayed making a decision on your application.

- If you applied **Early Decision (ED)** or **Early Action (EA)**, your application may be moved into the **Regular Decision** pool.
- If you applied **Regular Decision** or **Rolling Admission**, the college may want more information (such as mid-year grades or new test scores) before making a decision.

Student Aid Index (SAI) [formerly EFC]

The Student Aid Index (SAI), formerly called the Expected Family Contribution (EFC), is a number calculated from the FAFSA. Colleges use it to determine your eligibility for financial aid. It is not the exact amount you will pay; each college's financial aid package may vary.

Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loans

Federal student loans help cover college, trade, or technical school costs.

- **Subsidized Loans** – For undergraduates with financial need. The U.S. Department of Education pays the interest while you are in school (at least half-time), for 6 months after you leave, and during deferment.
- **Unsubsidized Loans** – For undergraduates and graduate students. Financial need is not required. You are responsible for all interest during all periods.

Regular Decision v. Early Decision/Early Action

- **Regular Decision (RD)** – Standard application deadline (usually January–February). Decisions are released in the spring.
- **Early Action (EA)** – Apply early (typically October/November deadlines) and receive a decision in December. EA is **not binding**.
- **Early Decision (ED)** – Apply early to your top-choice school. If admitted, you are **committed to attend**. ED is **binding**.

Your High School Transcript

A transcript is the official record of your academic accomplishments in high school. It lists every class you took, the grades you earned, and when you took them. If you attended more than one high school, each school will have its own transcript for you.

Why Do You Need a Transcript?

1. **College Applications** – Most colleges require an official transcript.
2. **Graduation/Transfers** – Schools use transcripts to confirm graduation requirements and class placement.
3. **Jobs/Programs** – Some employers or scholarships may ask to see your transcript.

Official vs. Unofficial Transcripts

- **Official Transcript** – Has the school seal or security features. Sent electronically through Parchment or given in a sealed envelope. Cannot be sent directly to students or parents through Parchment.
- **Unofficial Transcript** – Looks the same but does not have security marks. Available for student use through Parchment or by requesting a paper copy from the Main Office or School Counseling Office.

How to Request Your Official OTHS Transcript

1. **Create a Parchment™ Account**
 - Click here: [Create Parchment Account](#).
 - Use your personal information.
 - We recommend using a **non-OTHS email** so you can log in after graduation.
 - Step-by-step instructions and a video tutorial are available on the OTHS website.
2. **Complete the Student Records Release Form**
 - Required by Illinois law.
 - If you are under 18, a parent must sign. If you are 18 or older, you must sign.
 - Submit the form once; it will stay on file for future requests.
3. **Request Your Transcript via Parchment™**
 - Select the college, employer, or scholarship provider as the recipient.
 - **Note:** Transcripts cannot be sent to students or parents via Parchment.
 - If you need a hand-carried paper copy, request it from the School Counseling Office. You will receive a sealed, tamper-evident envelope that must remain unopened until delivered to the recipient.

Other Post High School Options

Local Community Colleges:

Southwestern Illinois College, Belleville IL www.swic.edu

St. Louis Community College, St. Louis, MO <https://stlcc.edu>

Lewis & Clark Community College, Godfrey, IL <https://www.lc.edu/>

Kaskaskia College, Centralia, IL <https://www.kaskaskia.edu/>

Vocational, Technical or Trade Schools:

Ranken Technical College, St. Louis, MO <https://ranken.edu/>

State Technical College, Osage County, MO <https://www.statetechmo.edu/>

Paul Mitchell The School St. Louis, St. Louis, MO <https://paulmitchell.edu/stlouis>

TRAINING FOR A CAREER

Military

Joining the military after high school can provide valuable benefits and opportunities. All branches of the U.S. military offer education programs such as the GI Bill and Tuition Assistance, which can help cover the cost of tuition, books, and other expenses for college or career training. While serving, members also receive housing, food allowances, healthcare, dental coverage, and basic pay—while gaining discipline, leadership skills, and work experience. Service does require a multi-year commitment, but for many students, the military can be a pathway to both career training and future education.

Vocational, Trade, and Technical Schools

These schools focus on preparing students for specific careers in less time than a traditional four-year degree.

- **Vocational and Trade Schools** – Emphasize hands-on training for careers such as auto mechanics, electricians, carpenters, cosmetologists, and medical assistants. Programs may take months to two years to complete and often require certifications or apprenticeships.
- **Technical Schools** – Offer associate degrees and certifications in fields such as information technology, healthcare, or engineering support. Programs usually take 1–2 years, cost less than a four-year degree, and may lead directly to employment or serve as a steppingstone to further education.

Both vocational and technical schools often provide access to **scholarships, grants, and loans**, making them affordable options for career-focused students.

MAJOR-TO-CAREER LINKS

Need Help Picking a Major?

Start Here by discovering your Holland Type → [MY NEXT MOVE](#) O*NET Interest Profiler

"What can I do with my major?" is a question we hear from many students. Listed below are some resources to help you find out! At the same time, remember that your career does not have to be decided by your major. In fact, the experience you gain outside of the classroom from, for example, internships and student organizations can influence your career direction as much as or more than your major studies.

[Connecting Majors to Careers](#)

[What Can I Do With A Major In...?](#)

Curious about typical careers for a given major? Use the information below to explore.

Please note:

- **Majors: Your major may not be represented in this list which was created by an outside vendor and does not include all majors offered by UC Berkeley. Try looking at majors that are closely related to the one you are targeting.**
- **Career Areas: The Career Areas listed are typical for the major but not a comprehensive list. For more career ideas, explore other, related majors. And remember -- people find and create unique career paths that have nothing to do with their major.**

NOT EVERY CAREER REQUIRES A COLLEGE DEGREE!

Occupation	Median Salary	Unemployment Rate
Medical Records Technician	46,660	1.5%
Wind Turbine Technician	56,260	n/a
Community Health Worker	46, 590	2.5%
Landscaper & Groundskeeper	34,430	1.7%
Home Health Aide	29,430	8%
Personal Care Aide	29,430	6.7%
Delivery Truck Driver	38,280	4.8%
Medical Assistant	37,190	5.9%
Licensed Practical Nurse	48,070	2.4%
Electrician	60,040	5.1%

* *According to US NEWS and WORLD REPORT 2023; training or certification may be required for some jobs*

LINK to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: [Fast-Growing occupations that pay well and don't require a college degree.](#)

Common App Essay Prompts

The Common App essay prompts will remain the same for the 2025–2026 application cycle. Students must respond to one of the following prompts (maximum 650 words):

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, please share your story.
2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
4. Reflect on something that someone has done for you that made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

Updates to the “Additional Information” Section (Effective August 1, 2026)

- The **“Community Disruption”** question will be replaced with a broader **“Challenges and Circumstances”** question (250-word max for first-year applicants).
- The **“Additional Information”** question word limit will be reduced:
 - First-year applicants: **300 words max** (previously 650)
 - Transfer applicants: **1,500 characters max** (previously 3,500)

 **Tip:** If you begin your application before August 1, be sure to review and adjust your responses to fit the new word limits once the updated application goes live.

2026-2027 Essay Prompts

Common Black College Application

- **No required essay prompts.**
- While the CBCA itself doesn't include essay questions, individual historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) may require essays or additional materials. Always **check with each institution** you're applying to.

Universal Application

This is similar to the Common App but used by a small number of schools. While it lacks detailed prompts, here's what's included:

Personal Statement (First-Year Applicants)—650 words max. Suggested topics include:

- A person you admire
- A life-changing experience
- Your viewpoint on a current event

Coalition Application

Select one of these prompts for a ~500–650 word essay:

1. **Tell a story from your life** that demonstrates or helped shape your character.
2. **What interests or excites you?** How does it influence your identity or future?
3. **Describe a time when you had a positive impact on others**—what were the challenges and rewards?
4. **When was an idea or belief of yours questioned?** How did you respond, and what did you learn?
5. **Submit an essay on a topic of your choice.**

At-a-Glance Comparison

Application Platform	Essay Requirements 2025–2026
CBCA (Common Black College App)	No generic prompts; institutions may have their own requirements.
UCA (Universal College App)	650-word personal statement (first-year or transfer)—open-ended topic suggestions only.
Coalition Application	Choose one prompt (500–650 words): life story, passion, impact, challenged belief, or your own.