College & Financial Aid Night
October 2026

SWHS COUNSELOR L-Z, TRACE PRAEL

FINANCIAL AID PROGRAM COORDINATOR FROM SKAGIT VALLEY COLLEGE, ESME MARQUEZ

Overview

FASFA & Financial Aid

Education Options

Resources

Testing

College Applications

Scholarships/Letters of Recommendation

Higher Education Options

Bachelors Degree
(4 Years)

- University/College
- Public & Private

Associates Degree
(2 years)

- Vocational/Technical Colleges
- Community College

Certification Programs
(Varies)

- Vocational/Technical College
- Community College

Planning Resources

College/University	Vocational/Technical & Community Colleges	Other Resources
https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges/college-101/types-of-colleges-the-basics	https://www.findmytradeschool.com/trade-schools/washington-state/	https://www.collegedata.com/resources/getting-in/what-do-colleges-look-for-in-students
More Information than you wanted to know Washington State:	https://www.niche.com/colleges/search/best-trade-schools/s/washington/	https://swhs.sw.wednet.edu/academics/student-services/paying-for-college
Independent and Private Colleges/Universities of Washington State	Unions (seek each by name) and Apprenticeships: https://secure.lni.wa.gov/arts-public/#/all-programs	
https://www.nacacattend.org/fairs/attend	www.sbctc.edu	
https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/		

COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

Apply directly through University or College Website

Common App

http://www.commonapp.org/search-colleges?f[0]=field_admissions_office%253Afield_address%253Administrative_area%3AWA

- Check to see if your school accepts the common app
- You must add your school counselor email – they upload transcript and school profile
- If your college requires a counselor letter of recommendation, you must supply the recommendation form to your counselor.

Official Transcript (end of the year)

- Bring in an envelop to Ms. Bitts with the desired school's admissions address and a stamp on it.
- Counselors upload final transcript to Common App

Washington Guaranteed Admissions Program (WAGAP)

The Washington Guaranteed Admissions Program is an initiative that guarantees high school seniors admission to participating public four-year universities in Washington State if they meet specific academic standards.

Student Eligibility

- Cumulative GPA of **3.0 or higher**.
- Completion of 17 required **College Academic Distribution Requirements (CADR)** credits across core subjects.
- Attending a participating high school or school district partner.

Participating Universities

- Central Washington University
- Eastern Washington University
- The Evergreen State College
- University of Washington - Tacoma
- Washington State University (including Pullman, Tri-Cities, and Vancouver campuses)
- Western Washington University

How it Works

- Eligible students are identified by their high schools.
- Students still need to submit a standard admissions application (via the Common App or university portal) to the colleges they wish to attend.
- Standardized tests like the SAT or ACT are not required.

If interested email Leigha Patton at: lpatton@sw.wednet.edu stating your permission to send the included information to the Guaranteed Admissions Program.

Include the following information:

- Student's legal first and last name
- Date of birth
- Mailing address
- Student's personal email address
- Student's school email address
- Parent/Guardian email address
- Any additional parent/guardian email addresses

Western Guaranteed Admissions Program (WEGAP)

an initiative created by Western Washington University (WWU) to simplify the college admissions process and expand access for high school students in Washington state

Student Eligibility

- **Attendance:** You must attend a public or private Washington state high school.
- **GPA:** You must have a cumulative high school **GPA of 2.75 or higher**.
- **Graduation Track:** You must be on track to fulfill standard Washington state high school graduation requirements.

How it Works

- Students from any Washington high school will automatically be evaluated for guaranteed admission as soon as they submit an application. You can apply directly through the Western Application Portal or by using the Common App.

Testing

There are around 1800 Colleges/Universities that are test blind or test-optional!

https://fairtest.org/test-optional-list/

SAT

SWHS SAT Day (Fall Seniors, Spring Juniors)

Offsite Testing Locations - https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register/dates-deadlines

Understanding Scores- https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/about/scores/structure

ACT

Test Dates: http://www.act.org/

SAT vs ACT

https://www.princetonreview.com/college/sat-act

ASVAB

Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery
https://www.todaysmilitary.com/joining-eligibility/asvab-test

Recommendation Letters

Note:
Local Scholarship providers have been informed that South Whidbey teachers & counselors will not be providing recommendation letters

When

- Earlier the better
- minimum of 2 weeks from when you need it.
- Required by college application or scholarship application

WHO – *Someone that knows your well*

- A teacher you have had more than once, or one you have a strong relationship with.
- A coach that has seen the student grow in that sport/ as a musician/ as an actor/artist/dancer.
- A mentor that has been helpful in the students personal and/or academic life.
- A employer/manager, youth group leader, or a supervisor in places a student has volunteered.

Financial Aid Considerations

Types of Aid	
Scholarships	Money that is not paid back
Grants	Typically Needs based
Loans	• Parent Plus • Federal • Private

Compare apples to apples.

- Once you have offers in hand, scour them carefully.
- Though the bottom lines may be equivalent, one package may be more heavily tilted toward loans
- Note: colleges often are more generous in giving outright grants to students they really want.
- Take the cost of each school and subtract the grants and scholarships. What's left is the amount you'll pay out of pocket, which may or may not include loans.
- It's also important to consider how your burden will change in subsequent years. Some scholarships and grants will automatically renew, while others may be one-time awards or require that the student maintain a certain GPA. If those details are not in the offer letter, be sure to ask the financial aid office to clarify.

Scholarship Types

Academic

Mostly given directly through the college/university

Athletic

Given out directly by a college/university

Community Service/ Leadership

Local and National Scholarships that will require essays or documentation of skills.

CollegeBound

https://wsac.wa.gov/college-bound

Needs Based

FASFA/Grants

Aid based on family income

Scholarship Resources

- Where to find
  - **Scholarships Platform:** https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/finding-scholarships-for-college-students/
  - **TheWashboard.org** (State of Washington Site): https://washboard.wsac.wa.gov/login.aspx
  - **GoingMerry:** https://www.goingmerry.com/
  - **Fastweb:** https://www.fastweb.com/
  - South Whidbey High School Student Services Page
  - **South Whidbey Seniors Google Classroom: Senior Information Page**
- Local Schools for SWHS
  - Will be available early February 2027 and the **deadline will be April 3rd** unless a specific scholarships posts a different deadline.
  - Will be posted to the Senior Google Classroom and District Website.

FAFSA
Free Application for Federal Student Aid

FAFSA Deadlines: Class of 2027

- **Federal Deadline:** The FAFSA form must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. Central time (CT) on June 30, 2028.
- **State Deadline:** Washington College Grant https://wsac.wa.gov/wcg - As soon as possible.
- **College Deadline:** Check the website of the college(s) you are interested in attending. You may also want to ask your college about its definition of an application deadline - whether it is the date the college receives your FAFSA, or the date your FAFSA is processed.

FAFSA APP

- **FAFSA ID Information:** https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2023-24_12thYear.FSAID_.WASFA_.Worksheet.pdf
- **Create your FASFA Account:** https://studentaid.gov/fsa-id/create-account/launch
- **The FAFSA application opened on September 23, 2026** https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa

WASFA
Washington Application for State Financial Aid

The WASFA is only for those that do not qualify for the FASFA!

There are limited circumstances, beyond the applicant's immigration status, in which a person may choose to complete a WASFA instead of a FAFSA, including:

- ❑ Your parents are undocumented, or your family members do not wish to file a FAFSA.
- ❑ You or your parent(s) do not and will not file federal income taxes.
- ❑ You have federal loans that are in default.
- ❑ You owe a repayment on federal grants.

Students' ineligible for federal aid but who meet State financial aid program and residency requirements should complete the: https://wsac.wa.gov/wasfa