



**STEM SCHOOL**

**HIGHLANDS RANCH**

*Never Stop Innovating*

**STEM SCHOOL HIGHLANDS RANCH**

**College Application Handbook**

**2022 - 2023**

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**To parents and students:** Please read this packet in its entirety!! Send me any questions you have with you about this information - I am happy to help in whatever way I can!

### **How Colleges Assess Students**

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Every college wants to fill their freshman class with interesting and creative young people to positively impact the atmosphere of the college. They are also attempting to match the student with the school's academic standards and workload, an important factor in seeking to create a good match. College representatives are eager to match students with the college only if they will enjoy and succeed in their institution. A mismatch between a college and a student, while sometimes unavoidable, can be costly to both. A strong match represents a high retention rate for the school.

Colleges are not only looking for academic excellence, but also for the multi-dimensional student that will bring something to the campus. This is seen in students who demonstrate curiosity, make "intelligent" mistakes, and have experiences of "depth", not just breadth. In a very general sense, the more academically selective a school is, the more closely the admissions team examines data other than GPA and test scores.

### **Top Factors Used to Predict a Positive College Match**

#### **Types of Courses Taken**

Students can demonstrate academic strength through their course history. Students who take challenging courses show that they are serious about facing academic challenges. Schools would prefer a "B" grade in an advanced course rather than an "A" grade in an easier course. Not only does the advanced course look better to schools, but it will also prepare the student better for the challenge of college courses. While schools are normally only evaluating grades through the end of junior year, some enrollment decisions will be contingent upon courses completed during senior year. If a student's grades have fallen during senior year, the college has the right to revoke his/her admission. Students should also continue to take rigorous coursework as a senior; their schedule will be uploaded as part of their application by Mrs. Myrick.

#### **Grades in Core, College Prep, Honors, and AP Courses**

Good grades throughout high school and in all subjects suggest a willingness to work and an interest in a variety of topics. Significant improvement in your record, no matter how late in your high school career, will not go unnoticed by the majority of colleges. Colleges prefer a steadily improving record over the first three and a half years. *And yes, senior year grades are important!*

### **Standardized Test Scores (ACT or SAT)**

Test scores should be sent directly to colleges and universities from the testing agency. Various college guides and admissions materials list the middle 50% range obtained by students at a particular college on standardized tests.

### **Key Factors Influence Positive and Negative Decisions (*vary in importance*)**

#### **Essay or Writing Sample**

This is where a student can “come to life”. The essay can identify special talents, describe a difficult personal situation, amplify special activities, or discuss growth experiences. For some schools the essays are a critical factor. At selective schools where applicants tend to have similar grade point averages, course selection, and test scores, the essays help to distinguish one student from the next. A great deal of attention should be paid in writing them.

#### **Recommendation Letters**

The secondary school report or counselor’s recommendation describe not only achievements and skills but also character and integrity. A teacher’s recommendation is important, particularly when the teacher knows the student well and is willing to detail potential in their academic area.

### **Other Factors that May Be Considered**

#### **Alumni Child**

Children of alumni may receive careful consideration at most colleges. A legacy or family tie does not guarantee admission, but it may provide an extra look. With two equal candidates, the legacy may have the edge.

#### **Interview (*typically only required at selective colleges*)**

This is another opportunity for students to stand out and show the university the type of person they are. Remember to be professional, but genuine in your interview!

#### **Special Talents, Interests, Skills, Experiences, Volunteer Work**

Extracurricular activities at school and in the community play a role in the admissions process. Colleges frequently state they look for students who will make a significant contribution to the college community. **Quality of participation is valued over quantity of organizations/experiences.** Between 70% and 80% of all applicants can handle the academics, so colleges often look for that extra dimension – artists, athletes, volunteers, and writers. Leadership roles also stand out on an application.

## How to Choose a College

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Students primarily choose colleges based on their major of choice and whether or not they fit the admission criteria. Other factors include **cost, location, size, level of prestige, and extracurricular activities.**

It is important for students to set realistic goals for themselves and apply to schools that are within their reach and a little above their reach. Students should sort and classify the schools they apply to in order to ensure they are setting realistic, possible college goals. Read the criteria below to determine if you are choosing colleges that are within a reasonable set of expectations.

**Safety:** A safety school is one where your academic credentials are above the school's range for the average freshman. You should be reasonably certain that you will be admitted to your safety schools. Like the rest of your list, these should also be colleges you would be happy to attend. In addition to an admissions safety school, it is a good idea to include a financial safety school on your list, one that you and your family can afford even if you received no aid at all.

**Match:** A match school is one where your academic credentials (GPA, SAT or ACT scores, advanced coursework like AP/CE classes, and extracurricular involvement) fall well within (or even exceed) the school's range for the average freshman. There are no guarantees, but it is not unreasonable to be accepted to several of your match schools.

**Reach:** A reach school is one where your academic credentials are below the school's range for the average freshman or a school that is incredibly competitive (private universities, Ivy Leagues, military academies). Reach schools are long-shots, but they should still be possible based on your academic career.

**I highly recommend that all students apply to 2 Safety, 3-4 Match, and 1-2 Reach universities.**

## College Research Tools

The number one recommendation is for students and parents to research options and ask questions early. **Naviance is an excellent resource when it comes to choosing a college.** If students are undecided about their majors, they can re-visit the results of their Strengths Explorer tests and read about their personality. One of the best research features in Naviance is the Super Match College Search. **Students can use this feature to search for colleges based on interest, size, location, cost and test scores. Students can view admission information in order to determine if the college is a realistic option.**

To access the SuperMatch search tool in Naviance, click on Colleges Find Your Fit SuperMatch College Search:

The screenshot shows the Naviance Student SuperMatch College Search interface. The top navigation bar includes the Naviance logo, the word "Student", and links for Home, Courses, Colleges (which is highlighted), Careers, About Me, and My Planner. Below the navigation bar, the "SuperMatch College Search" section is active, with a sub-header "About SuperMatch". A horizontal menu allows users to "Choose Fit Criteria" from various categories: Location, Academics, Admission, Diversity, Institution Characteristics, Cost, Student Life, Athletics, and Resources. The main content area is titled "Your Fit Criteria" and shows "0 selected criteria" with a "Select Criteria To Start" button. It includes instructions on how to refine results using arrows. There are two dashed boxes for "Must Have" and "Nice to Have" criteria, each with a brief definition. A "Saved Searches" section with a dropdown menu and "Save Search" and "Start Over" buttons is also visible. At the bottom, there are filters for "Fit Score", "Academic Match", and "Pick what to show". A search bar at the very bottom prompts the user to "Search by College Name".

**Naviance College Comparison:** In addition, students can use NAVIANCE College Compare to compare institutions side by side.

**Big Future:** Another fantastic resource is Big Future, created by College Board. There is also a College Search function for students on the website.

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/>

## The College Application Process - The Basics

**APPLICATION:** State, private and prestigious universities utilize the Common Application. Applications become available online for students on August 1, 2022. Some students may choose to apply directly to the university through the university portal, but students should be aware that they will not be able to copy an application this way. By using the Common Application, students can easily copy their application information for multiple schools. The only advantage students have in applying directly through the university is that sometimes a fee waiver is offered. An application typically includes student demographic information, course history, residency questions, extracurricular and volunteerism, talents awards & honors, employment information, and essays. Other portals students may use are SendEdu and Coalition.

### Different types of Applications | Early Action vs. Early Decision

Non-Restrictive Application Plans			Restrictive Application Plans	
<b>Regular Decision</b>	<b>Rolling Admission</b>	<b>Early Action(EA)</b>	<b>Restrictive Early</b>	<b>Early Decision</b>
Submit an application by a specified deadline and receive a decision by a designated date	Submit when ready. Schools review application as they "roll-in". They make admission decisions throughout the admissions cycle	Apply early and receive a decision well in advance of the school's regular response date	Apply to a school and receive a decision early. You may be a restricted from applying ED, EA, or REA to other schools. If offered, you have until May 1 to confirm	Make a commitment to a first-choice school where, if admitted, you will definitely enroll. The application decision deadline occur early.
<b>Non-Binding!</b>	<b>Non-Binding!</b>	<b>Non-Binding!</b>	<b>Non-Binding!</b>	<b>Binding!</b>
You are not restricted from applying to other institutions and have until May 1 to consider your options and confirm enrollment.			You are responsible for following all restrictions	

- Early Action means that you really like this school and it is one of your top choices.
- Early Decision means “D” for “Done” – Early Decision is a **legally binding agreement**, which means you and your family must be okay with the finances associated with attending the university (whether or not you are offered grants or

scholarship) because it is highly unlikely that if you are accepted Early Decision you will get out of it! **You are only able to submit one Early Decision application.**

- Both Early Action & Early Decision have a higher admissions rate than Regular Decision
- **It is HIGHLY RECOMMENDED that if a university offers Early Action, students apply Early Action**
- Not all universities have Early Action or Early Decision

**FEES:** You will pay the application fee or submit a fee waiver (if you qualify - see the information about Application fee waivers below) at the end of your application. Fees per application can range from \$45.00- \$120.00.

The Colorado Department of Higher Education has teamed up with colleges and universities all across the state of Colorado to waive college application fees for all Colorado students on Free Colorado College Application Day which is hosted in mid-October of 2022 (date TBD).

**SEND SCORES:** Send SAT or ACT official scores to the four-year colleges you are applying to that are *not* test optional. If the university is test blind, your scores will not be looked at for admissions decisions. If a school is test optional and your score falls towards the high end of the 50% freshman profile for scores, submitting your test scores will help your application look stronger. If you have not taken one of the exams yet, the college you are applying to cannot consider your application until you have at least one set of scores from one of the tests.

**TRANSCRIPT:** There are multiple methods for submitting transcripts. If a student applies using Common Application, they will add Mrs. Myrick as their counselor and she will upload their transcript. If a student applies via a university website, they may send an electronic transcript request using sendedu.org to Mrs. Myrick. If the university does not utilize sendedu.org, students may fill out a transcript request form online (posted on the College & Career website and the newsletter).

### **Financial Assistance for Free & Reduced Lunch Families:**

**Fee Waivers:** To be eligible for fee waivers, students must be on free and reduced lunch. If you think you might be eligible, please check this link for information:

<http://www.dcsdnutritionservices.org/letter-to-household> Students on Free & Reduced lunch are able to take their SAT and ACT exams for free. After taking the SAT, students

are given 4 fee waivers in their College Board account to apply to college. Some universities offer other services for students on Free & Reduced Lunch.

**Applying for Free & Reduced Lunch:**

To apply for these benefits, please complete the online application at:

<https://www.myschoolapps.com/>

**Families will need the following information available when completing the online application:**

- Student's legal name (first and last), birth date, and assigned student ID number (if known)
- Student's school name
- All household gross income and/or SNAP (formerly food stamps) or TANF eligibility determination group number (EDG # - this is not the Case #)
- Last four digits of the parent's/guardian's social security number

## Transcript Requests

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### **Official Transcript Requests:**

#### *Official Transcripts for College Admission:*

If a student applies using Common Application, the counselor they list as a recommender will upload their transcript. If a student applies via a university website, they may send an electronic transcript request using [sendedu.org](https://sendedu.org) to Mrs. Myrick. If the university does not utilize [sendedu.org](https://sendedu.org), students may fill out a transcript request form online (posted on the College & Career website).

#### *Official transcripts for Scholarships:*

All official transcript requests for scholarships are made by filling out a transcript request form online . The student needs to be sure to include the address where the transcript needs to be mailed.

#### *Official Transcripts for mid-year and final requests:*

Students should let their counselor know if they need a mid-year report. Note, most students using the Common Application will need to have a mid-year report and mid-year transcript sent. ALL students applying to college will need to send a final transcript. Students will follow the directions posted at the end of May to request their final transcript.

**Transcripts are only sent on days the school is open Monday-Friday.** Students should check their college and scholarship deadlines carefully. If a deadline is after a long break, students should not make transcript requests over the break with the expectation that the office will be sending transcripts. For official transcript requests for scholarships, students should ensure they submit a transcript request form to the office at least one week before the scholarship deadline.

## Recommendation Letter Instructions

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Not every school requires letters of recommendation by a teacher or counselor. Research the school you are applying to before you request a letter. If you know you need a letter/ form, you should speak with and email your counselor/ and or teacher at least **three weeks before the deadline.**

**When you request a letter of recommendation, it is HIGHLY ENCOURAGED that you provide the following information:**

**The After Graduation Packet Packet** will be given to the Class of 2023 in the spring. Juniors must complete before their college planning conference with Mrs. Myrick. Students must complete this in order to receive a letter of recommendation.

**For Counselors:** A completed After Graduation Packet.

**For Teachers or other LOR Writers:**

- A resume or After Grad Packet that includes course work, GPA, community and extracurricular involvement
- Submission deadlines for EACH institution you are applying to
- All schools you are applying to **(If this changes, and you choose to add a school or not apply to a school, contact the teacher and/ or counselor immediately)**
  - The type of submission your letter requires (Which schools require this sent electronically? Which schools are you using the Common Application with? Which schools require the letter to be mailed?)

## The College Resume

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Resumes should be given to teachers and/or counselors for letters of recommendation, and, sometimes, students will send a resume as an additional supplement to their college application. This is your chance to elaborate on some of the criteria you were not able to elaborate on in the application, but do not simply repeat the information found in your college application.

### *Information to include in your resume:*

While there is no standard format for resumes of this type, they are typically one or two pages long and generally include much of the following information:

- **Heading:** Identifying information such as: name, address, phone number, email, date of birth, and high school.
- **Objective or Overview (optional):** Can be used for a specific purpose such as consideration for a scholarship or intended major
- **Key Stats:** You can include a high GPA (above a 3.5), SAT/ACT scores, SAT Subject Test scores
- **Education:** High schools attended. (Optional: Senior year classes & AP or impressive courses taken prior to senior year)
- **School Activities:** List activities and grade (e.g. 9, 10,11) including clubs, class activities, sports, performing groups, etc. Note leadership roles and special recognition. Be descriptive: Instead of “High School Newspaper”, consider (if accurate) “Feature Editor (11) Reporter (9, 10) School Newspaper Recognized as Best in County in 2019”.
- **Honors and Awards:** List along with grade (e.g. Debate Finalist – 9, 10)
- **Community Activities:** List activities, leadership roles and grades during which you participated.
- **Enrichment Activities:** Include relevant programs, special projects, travel experiences, hobbies, musical accomplishments,
- **Work Experience:** Starting with the most recent, list each work experience (paid, unpaid or your own business) including job title; business name and location,

dates of your employment. Include anything else that would be impressive (e.g. specific duties, recognition).

- Other: (optional) Special circumstances and situations; additional details about “hook” or “wow factor”
- References (optional): Name and relationship

## The College Essay

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**Reminder: Not EVERY college requires an essay. And, certain colleges require different essays than others. Make sure you check on the website of the college you are applying to before you start writing your essay.**

When writing any college essay, remember:

1. **Be genuine.** Colleges want to know the *real* you, not the person you think they want on their campus.
2. **Proofread.** Have several people proofread your essay before you submit it to colleges.
3. **Read outloud.** Admissions representatives will sometimes read the essay out loud to themselves, or out loud to an admissions committee. Make sure you read your essay out loud and fix any awkward sentences or language.

### The Common Application Essay Topics | 2022-2023

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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, then 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 has 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.

### **Supplemental & Optional Writing Samples**

Some colleges have “optional” essays and/or short answer questions. **If a college has an optional essay section, it is highly recommended that you write it.** Completing the optional essay gives you a chance to indicate your interest and share something completely dynamic that the admissions readers do not already know about you. It is your chance to be creative and show your genuine interest in the college, as well as let the admissions readers in on a little-known fact or two about you. The more information you can give a college about yourself, the better!

## College Visits:

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There are many ways to find out about a college, from online sites, to brochures, to college fairs, but there is no substitute for seeing the campus yourself. Check on college websites for Junior or Senior Visit Days and Open Houses. Individual visits can also be arranged.

### **Before you go:**

- Contact the Admission Office in advance, tell them the date you would like to visit, and the time of day you expect to arrive. Many colleges also offer online campus registration for visit days.
- Inquire about scheduling an interview, attending an information session, visiting classes, meeting with current students, and talking with faculty.
- If you want to stay overnight in a residence hall, ask if they can make arrangements.
- Make a list of questions that you want answered (examples below)

### **Questions to Ask on a College Visit**

#### ***Admissions:***

- What are the application deadlines for admission?
- Do you offer Early Decision or Early Action?
- What is the average high school GPA of the entering freshman class?
- Do you accept AP credit? Is there a limit?
- When do I have to declare a major?
- What if I do not meet admission requirements?
- Do you accept transfer credits? Is there a limit?

#### ***Academics:***

- What is the average class size of introductory classes?
- What is the average class size of upper-level classes?
- What are the most popular majors?
- What types of internships are available?
- Are there study abroad opportunities available?

- What is the student to faculty ratio?
- What opportunities are there for undergraduate research and funding?
- How many students participate in undergraduate research?
- Do you have an Honors College? Is there a separate application for it?
- Do you have a learning community, learning dorm, or other freshman experiences that I should be aware of?
- What additional academic services are offered to students (career counseling, mock interviews, study skills workshops, writing center, tutoring, etc.)?
- What is your four-year graduation rate?
- What percentage of your freshmen return their sophomore year?

### ***Financial Aid & Scholarships:***

- When is the priority deadline for financial aid applications?
- What kind of financial aid is available?
- What percentage of your students receive financial aid from the university?
- What types of scholarships are available to freshmen?
- What work-study opportunities are there?

### ***Campus Life:***

- What percentage of your students live on campus?
- What kind of dorm choices are there?
- What percentage of the study body belongs to a sorority or fraternity?
- What organizations and extracurricular activities do you have on campus?
- What events are popular on campus?
- Is there transportation on and off campus? Is it easy to get to town and/or home?
- What do students do in their free time?
- How are roommates selected?

### ***Questions to Ask Current Students:***

- Why did you decide to attend this college?
- What was your freshman experience like?
- What is your favorite thing about this college? Least favorite?
- Where is your favorite study place on campus?
- Where is your favorite place to eat on campus? Off campus?
- What are you studying here? How did you choose your major?
- If you could change one thing about this college, what would it be?
- What sort of campus events does the college host?
- Do you have advice for an incoming freshman?

- How approachable are the staff/faculty/administration?
- How would you describe the community and atmosphere?
- What clubs or extracurricular activities do you recommend?
- What is your favorite class you have taken? Why?

### **Colleges Visiting STEM Highlands Ranch:**

There is a calendar posted in Naviance/the College & Career Newsletter that displays the day colleges are coming to our campus during lunch or virtually. In addition, Mrs. Myrick emails all high school students the morning that a college is visiting STEM. Students should take this opportunity to meet their admissions counselor, get their contact information & establish a relationship. This person can advocate on the students behalf for admission & scholarships.

### **STEM Highlands Ranch Policy for College Visits**

Students turn in an **excuse note** from parent to the attendance office within **2 days of the absence**. Consider making college visits in the summer, before second semester begins, or on a day STEM does not have classes. It is very important to visit your top college campuses when the semester has started so you get a feel for what the atmosphere is like when classes are in session.

## How Much Does College Cost with Aid?

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Many students will receive financial aid and loans from the government in order to attend college. In order to plan for the future, you can estimate how much you will be expected to pay using the resources below.

### **FAFSA Forecaster**

If you know you will be applying for financial aid, and you want to get an estimate of how much you will be paying, you can fill out the FAFSA forecaster. It will show you how much the government expects your family to pay for college. This will help plan for the future.

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/paying-your-share/expected-family-contribution-calculator>

### **Net Price Calculator**

Most schools also have a net price calculator on their website. **The net price calculator will show you:**

- The average grant and scholarship aid the school awards to students like you
- The school's "net price" - the difference between the total cost of attendance and the average aid awarded. This is the amount you will have to come up with for your freshman year; you can do this through a combination of cash, loans, and scholarships/grants.

### **How Much Does College Cost Without Aid?**

Cost of college is broken up in many parts. Tuition alone is not the total cost of college. Students must factor in housing, meals, additional fees, cost of books etc. The university websites should help with an estimate of what college costs. Remember that loans and grants are available if you qualify, and you have to fill out the FAFSA to apply.

## Colorado Opportunity Fund – COF

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<https://highered.colorado.gov/Finance/COF/>

### Overview

The College Opportunity Fund program provides a stipend for new and continuing in-state students going to college in Colorado. To receive the stipend, a student must apply for and authorize the use of the stipend at their respective institution. The stipend replaces traditional direct legislative appropriations to the state's colleges and universities. Without the stipend, a student is responsible for the full amount of tuition which equals in-state tuition plus the stipend amount.

The goal of the COF program is to bring awareness to Colorado resident students that state funds exist to help finance their college education and improve access with a particular emphasis on higher education/K-12 linkages and strengthening accountability.

### Public Institutions

Undergraduate students at participating public institutions may receive a stipend from the College Opportunity Fund if they meet the following requirements:

- Enrolled at a state institution of higher education
- Classified as an in-state student for tuition purposes
- Have applied for and been accepted into the COF program
- Have requested a payment from the COF on their behalf to their attending institution
- Are receiving undergraduate instruction
- Have not exceed their lifetime credit-hour limitation (145 credit hours) or have already completed their baccalaureate degree and are eligible to receive stipend payments for an additional 30 undergraduate credit hours

### Private Institutions

Undergraduate students at participating private institutions may receive a stipend from the College Opportunity Fund if they meet the following requirements:

- Classification as an in-state student for tuition purposes (CRS 23-18-102 (5)(a)(II)(A))
- A graduate of a Colorado high school or has successfully completed a nonpublic home-based educational program (CRS 22-33-104.5) Private institutions may

choose to accept the GED test as equivalency for the high school diploma based on Commission policy.

- Demonstrate a financial need through the student's eligibility for the Federal Pell need based program. (CRS 23-18-102(5)(a)(II)(C))
- Receive undergraduate instruction and have not exceeded the 145 credit hour limit or have completed a baccalaureate degree and are eligible to receive stipend payments for an additional 30 credit hours. (CRS 23-18-202-(5)(c)(I))

### **ASSET – Undocumented Students**

In March 2013, the Colorado General Assembly passed Senate Bill 13-033, often referred to as the Colorado ASSET legislation. This legislation modifies several procedures concerning the classification of students for tuition purposes. The Colorado Department of Higher Education is in receipt of many questions from campus and school administrators regarding the ways in which Senate Bill 13-033 will be implemented, the changes it makes to current state law, and the ways in it affects existing administrative procedures. This document is intended to serve as a general reference for commonly asked questions concerning SB 13-033. This guidance will be revised as new, unique questions are received by the Department of Higher Education.

## FAFSA

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**What is FAFSA?** The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (known as the FAFSA) is a FREE online form prepared annually by current and prospective college students (undergraduate and graduate) in the United States to determine their eligibility for student financial aid (including the Pell Grant, Federal student loans and Federal Work-Study). This free form can be found at [fafsa.ed.gov](http://fafsa.ed.gov), and it becomes **available for Seniors to fill out beginning on October 1, 2022**. You cannot get loans or grants without this form. Even if you plan to pay for college on your own or think your income level will be too high, you may be able to receive free money.

### **What do I need to fill this form out?**

1. Get a PIN. Get a U.S. Department of Education personal identification number (PIN) by filling out the short application at [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov). Write this down somewhere you will remember.
2. Your Social Security Number
3. Your Alien Registration Number (if you are not a U.S. citizen)
4. Your most recent federal income tax returns, W-2s, and other records of money earned. (Note: You may be able to transfer your federal tax return information into your FAFSA using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool.)
5. Bank statements and records of investments (if applicable)
6. Records of untaxed income (if applicable)
7. A Federal Student Aid PIN to sign electronically. (If you do not already have one, visit [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov) to obtain one.)

For an amazing step-by-step guide visit: <http://www.understandingfafsa.org/>

## Scholarships

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Finding scholarship money isn't as hard as we might think, but it takes time, effort, and resources. You will need to research and read the eligibility of a scholarship to see if you fit the criteria.

### *Scholarships through Universities*

Most universities offer a scholarship application or it may be part of the admission application. Check with the university you are applying to in order to find out the scholarship deadlines, what you may be eligible for, and how to apply for their scholarships. Do not wait to do this as scholarship deadlines for universities tend to be early fall.

### *Scholarship search engines*

[niche.com](http://niche.com)

[naviance.com](http://naviance.com)

[scholarships.com](http://scholarships.com)

[chegg.com](http://chegg.com)

[cappex.com](http://cappex.com)

[scholarshippoints.com](http://scholarshippoints.com)

[fastweb.com](http://fastweb.com)

[collegenet.com](http://collegenet.com)

[finaid.com](http://finaid.com)

[collegeboard.com](http://collegeboard.com)

[scholarshipmonkey.com](http://scholarshipmonkey.com)

[raise.me](http://raise.me)

[meritaid.com](http://meritaid.com)

[fastaid.com](http://fastaid.com)

[wiredscholar.com](http://wiredscholar.com)

## College Interviews

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For schools that require an interview, it is an opportunity for you and the interviewer to find out if the college is a good match. Use the interview to show off your personality in ways that aren't possible on the application.

Here are some typical questions and some suggestions for answering them:

1. Tell me about yourself.

*This question seems easier than it is. How do you reduce your whole life to a few sentences? It's hard to avoid commonplace answers like "I'm friendly" or "I'm a good student". Of course you want to demonstrate that you're friendly and studious, but try also to say something memorable here that really makes you different from other college applicants.*

2. Why are you interested in our college?

*Be specific when answering this, and show that you've done your research. Also, avoid answers like "I want to make a lot of money" or "Graduates of your college get good job placement". You want to highlight your intellectual interests, not your materialistic desires. What specifically about the college distinguishes it from other schools you're considering?*

3. What can I tell you about our college?

*You can almost guarantee that your interviewer will provide an opportunity to ask questions. Make sure you have some, and make sure your questions are thoughtful and specific to the particular school. Avoid questions like "when is the application deadline?" or "how many majors do you have?" That information is both uninteresting and readily available on their website. Come up with some probing and focused questions: "what would graduates of your college say was the most valuable thing about their four years here??"*

4. Who in your life has most influenced you?

*There are other variations of this question: Who's your hero? What historical or fictional character would you most like to be? This can be an awkward question if you haven't thought about it, so spend a few minutes considering how you would answer.*

5. Why do you want to major in \_\_\_\_\_?

*Realize that you don't need to have decided upon a major when you apply to college, and your interviewer will not be disappointed if you say you have many interests and you*

*are still undecided. However, if you have identified a potential major be prepared to explain why.*

6. What will you contribute to our campus community?

*You'll want to be specific – an answer like "I'm hard working" is rather bland and generic. Think about what it is that makes you uniquely you. What exactly will you bring to diversify the college's community?*

7. Tell me about a challenge you overcame.

*This question is designed to see what kind of problem solver you are. When confronted with a challenge, how do you handle the situation? College will be full of challenges, so the college wants to make sure they enroll students who can handle them.*

8. What do you do for fun in your free time?

*College life obviously isn't all work, so the admissions folks want students who will do interesting and productive things even when they aren't studying.*

9. What do you see yourself doing 10 years from now?

*You don't need to pretend that you have your life figured out if you are asked this question. Very few students entering college can accurately predict their future professions. However, your interviewer does want to see that you think ahead. If you can see yourself doing three different things, say so – honesty and open-mindedness will play in your favor.*

10. Does your high school record accurately reflect your effort and ability?

*In your interview or on your application, you often have an opportunity to explain a bad grade or a bad semester. Be careful – you don't want to come across as a whiner or as someone who blames others for a low grade. However, if you really did have extenuating circumstances, let the college know.*

11. Recommend a good book to me.

*The interviewer is trying to accomplish a few things with this question. First, the question asks whether or not you've actually read much. Second, it asks you to apply some critical skills as you articulate why a book is worth reading.*

12. If you could do one thing in high school differently, what would it be?

*A question like this can turn sour if you make the mistake of dwelling on things you regret. Try to put a positive spin on it. Perhaps you've always wondered if you would have enjoyed acting or music. Maybe you would have liked to give yearbook a try. A good answer shows that you didn't have the time in high school to explore everything that is of interest to you.*

## Waitlisted/Deferred Applicants

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If a student is interested in attending a college where they are waitlisted, it is important to stay in contact with that university. Send the Admissions Counselor assigned to Colorado updated materials such as:

- Improved GPA/Grades or a Midyear Report
- Awards or Achievements since sending the original application
- An updated resume if you have several updates
- Additional Letters of Recommendation - particularly from teachers or individuals in your field that can speak to why that University should admit you/why you are an excellent candidate
- Any other information that might be helpful for the Admissions Officer when reconsidering you for admission

### Letter of Continued Interest

It is imperative that waitlisted or deferred students contact their Admissions Counselor with a letter of continued interest, if the university they are applying to allows these letters. Here are some helpful templates and links regarding this process:

<https://blog.collegevine.com/deferred-or-waitlisted-tips-for-writing-a-letter-of-continued-interest/>

<https://ingeniusprep.com/blog/letter-of-continued-interest/>

<https://blog.prepscholar.com/letter-of-continued-interest-sample>

## Choosing a Career/Major

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Selecting a career path is a really difficult decision. It is one of the first major decisions that an individual faces during the transition into adulthood.

Many people hope that some test of a person will magically direct them toward a future full of success and happiness. Unfortunately, no such thing exists. However you can create a list of possibilities by talking with people, creating opportunities to observe jobs, taking advantage of our career discovery programming like internships and mentorships.

### Ideas to consider:

#### 1. Analyze Yourself

Think about your interests.

- What do you enjoy?
- What interests you most in the activities you have done?
- Do you tend to focus on things, people, data, or ideas?

Analyze your strengths.

- What comes easy to you?
- Determine the physical, social, and mental requirements of a job and evaluate whether you believe you possess those qualities.
- Do you have the necessary size and physical stamina?
- Do you have the skills for dealing with people that the occupation requires?
- Do you have the necessary or desirable personality traits? Can they be acquired?
- What have inventories such as your I-CAP quizzes indicated you would do well?

What are your personal preferences?

- Working with people *or* working alone?
- Being indoors *or* working outdoors?
- Having a routine *or* having variety?
- Leading *or* following?
- Having freedom *or* having set directions?
- Working with your hands *or* working with your mind?
- Physically active *or* physically comfortable?
- Producing a product *or* providing a service?
- Technical problems *or* social activities?
- More money *or* more free time?

Identify your commitment.

- What appeals to you about the career? What doesn't appeal to you?
- Some careers demand 4-9 years of education. Are you willing and able to study that long?
- What is the employment outlook for the career?
- What is the salary range? Will it be enough to fulfill your needs?

2. Explore a Variety of Career Options

- Attend a Career Fair.
- Shadow, observe, or interview a professional in their selected career.
- Read and research different vocations.
- Volunteer or get a job in a related field.

**Avoid these pitfalls in the career process**

- Not bothering to find out all the facts.
- Confusing interest with ability. Interest is important, but ability is an obvious factor that needs equal attention.
- Avoid over-playing a single aspect of the career. The common inclination is to focus on only one part of a job – either positively or negatively.
- Choosing a job based on your aspirations to be like someone else, not necessarily the job.
- Avoid the “white-collar” illusion. This is a generally held misconception that some occupations are more respectable than others.
- The urging of well-meaning friends and parents without any evidence to support it.
- Thinking only of money. If money is the only motivation, the career will be a poor choice.

## College Terms Glossary

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**Accreditation** – Recognition of a college or university by any of the regional or national accrediting bodies, indicating that the institution as a whole has been judged to be meeting its objectives.

**ACT (American College Test)** – A group of achievement tests required or recommended by most colleges as part of the admission process. The tests measure educational development in English, mathematics, reading, and science. The writing section of the ACT is optional.

**Advanced Placement (AP)** – Granting of credit and/or assignment to an advanced course on the basis of evidence that the student has mastered the equivalent of an introductory course. STEM offers preparation for AP exams through AP classes, however, the AP class is not mandatory to sit for the AP examination.

**Aid Package** – A combination of aid (possibly including a scholarship, grant, loan, and work) determined by a college financial aid office.

**Application Deadlines** – Every school decides for itself the cutoff date for candidate application. It is important to check the application deadline at each of the schools to which the student intends to apply.

**ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery)** – This test is designed primarily for those students planning to enter a branch of the Armed Services. The test provides scores in vocational areas that can help students find careers that fit their talents/interests.

**CEEB Code or School Code** – This code is needed on many forms such as: SAT, ACT, FAFSA, and applications. The STEM School Highlands Ranch CEEB Code is 060741.

**Coalition** – A college application portal

**COF (College Opportunity Fund)** - The College Opportunity Fund program provides a stipend for new and continuing in-state students going to college in Colorado. To receive the stipend, a student must apply for and authorize the use of the stipend at their respective institution. The stipend replaces traditional direct legislative appropriations to the state's colleges and universities. Without the stipend, a student is responsible for the full amount of tuition which equals in-state tuition plus the stipend amount.

**Colleges that Change Lives (CTCL)** - Our Mission: Colleges That Change Lives, Inc. (CTCL) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement and support of a student-centered college search process. We support the goal of every student finding a college that develops a lifelong love of learning and provides the foundation for a successful and fulfilling life beyond college.

**Common Application** – This standardized college admissions application is accepted at over 450 colleges. This website simplifies the college application process by saving time and eliminating unnecessary duplications.

**Credit Hour** – A unit of academic credit that often represents one hour of class time per week for a period of study (semester, quarter, etc.).

**CSS Profile** – Financial profile often required by private institutions along with the FAFSA. Some universities and scholarship programs use the profile to help them award non federal student aid funds.

**Deferred Admission** – The practice of allowing an accepted student to postpone enrollment for one year.

**Early Action (EA)** – The application process in which students apply to an institution of preference and receive a decision well in advance of the institution’s regular response date. Students who are admitted under Early Action are not obligated to accept the institution’s offer of admission or to submit a deposit until the regular reply date (normally May 1st). This allows the student to apply to more than one college.

**Early Admission** – Admitting students of superior ability into college courses and programs before they have completed the standard high school program.

**Early Decision (ED)** – The application process in which students make a commitment to a first-choice, often selective institution where, if admitted, they definitely will enroll. Many schools have an agreement deadline of November 15th with a decision made by mid-December. Declined students may have the opportunity to be reconsidered later in the year. Should a student who applies for financial aid not be offered an award that makes attendance possible, the student may decline the offer of admission and be released from the Early Decision commitment.

**Expected Family Contribution (EFC)** – An amount you and your family are expected to contribute toward your education and living expenses. It is used in determining your eligibility for federal student aid.

**Federal Direct PLUS (Parent Loans for Undergraduate Students) Program** – Low-interest loans made by the federal government to credit-approved parents of eligible undergraduate students. Repayment begins 60 days after loan funds are disbursed.

**Federal Direct Subsidized Loan Program** – Low-interest loans made by the federal government to qualifying students through participating colleges. Repayment begins once the student stops attending school at least half time.

**Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan Program** – Low-interest loans made by the federal government to students not based on need. The student is responsible for the interest while in school, although principal repayment begins once the student stops attending school at least half time.

**Federal Pell Grant** – Financial assistance awarded by the federal government on the basis of need and designed to provide the “floor” of an aid package for postsecondary education. The grant may be used toward tuition, room and board, books, or other educational costs, and requires no repayment.

**Federal Perkins Loan Program** – Loans funded by the federal government and awarded by the institution. The loans feature low interest rates and are repayable over an extended period of time.

**Federal Work-Study** – A government-supported financial aid program coordinated through financial aid offices whereby an eligible student (based on need) may work part time while attending class, generally in career-related jobs.

**Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** – The application required for students to be considered for federal student financial aid. Go to [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) to fill out the form online. The FAFSA is processed free of charge and it is used by most state agencies and colleges. The FAFSA opens on October 1 each year.

**Grants** – Awards based on financial need that do not require repayment. Grants are available through the federal government, state agencies, and educational institutions and are normally need-based rather than rewarding excellence.

**Highly Selective** – Schools where the majority of its freshman class rank in the top 5% of their graduating class.

**Junior/Community College** – A college offering a two-year program rather than a four-year program where students earn an Associate’s degree. A junior college usually offers vocational programs as well as the first two years of a four-year college program.

**Major** – The subject of study in which the student chooses to specialize; a series of related courses, taken primarily in the junior and senior years.

**Matriculation** – The process whereby a student is accepted, pays the fees, and enrolls for his/her first classes. The student thus has officially become a freshman student at the college.

**NCAA Clearinghouse** – The clearinghouse processes academic qualifications of all prospective college athletes and determines whether or not they are eligible to compete. This should be completed by September of a student athlete's senior year.

**Open Admission** – The policy of some colleges of admitting virtually all high school graduates, regardless of academic qualifications such as high school grades and admission test scores.

**Provisional Acceptance** – Acceptances to all colleges are provisional based on the satisfactory completion of high school and maintenance of accepted standards of behavior.

**Provisional Admission** – A conditional admission generally granted to students who do not meet all admission criteria. For example, a student may be provisionally admitted on the condition that he maintains a "C" average his first semester at the college.

**Regular Decision** – The application process in which a student submits an application to an institution by a specified date and receives a decision within a reasonable and clearly stated period of time, but not later than April 15.

**Remedial Course** – A non-credit course taken to help the student with a weak background in a particular area; it is taken to prepare the student for a credit course in that area.

**Rolling Admission** – The application process in which an institution reviews applications as they are completed and renders admission decisions to students throughout the admission cycle. Usually, it is wise to apply early to colleges using this procedure, since further applications are usually not accepted after the admissions quota has been reached.

**Scholarships** – Non-repayable awards to students based on a variety of qualifications and merit.

**Selective Admissions** – This type of policy usually has ground rules for admission, but the school works with these policies in mind, rather than letting the policies make the final decision. Such schools can accept a student below the level or reject a student above the level indicated in the policy.

**SendEdu** – A college application document sender. Students can create an account for counselors and teachers to send documents directly to colleges on-line.

**Spring Notification** – This process represents the minority of colleges and is typically only found at the most selective institutions. Application deadlines vary from January 1st to February 1st. Decisions are mailed to applicants from early to mid-April and the accepted applicants are required to notify the college of acceptance no later than May 1st. There are several variations to this process with some schools using a variety of dates and deadlines.

**Student Aid Report (SAR)** – The information you will receive approximately 2-10 days after your FAFSA has been submitted. It will report the information from your application and, if there are no questions or problems with your application, your SAR will report your Expected Family Contribution (EFC).

**Wait List** – An admission decision option utilized by institutions to protect against shortfalls in enrollment. Wait lists are sometimes made necessary because of the uncertainty of the admission process, as students submit applications for admission to multiple institutions and may receive several offers of admission. By placing a student on the waitlist, an institution does not initially offer or deny admission, but extends the possibility of admission in the future, before its admission cycle is concluded