

LEADs

EXPERIENCE

College Admission Guidebooks



Enrichment

(noun): the act of improving or enhancing the quality or value of something; encouragement to pursue wider goals

by Timothy Fields, Senior Associate Dean of Admission





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EMORY UNIVERSITY OVERVIEW

Emory University is a nationally ranked, mid-sized, liberal arts and research university in the progressive and global city of Atlanta. At Emory, student success is the priority for us; this is why faculty at our four undergraduate colleges serve as academic advisers, classmates engage as peer mentors, and staff create tailored 1:1 or group programming.

Resources for First-Gen and Low-Income Students

Emory University has been recognized as an institution of higher education with a demonstrated commitment to improving experiences and advancing outcomes of first-gen college students. We uplift, support, and celebrate our first-gen students at Emory.

Flourish at Emory

Emory University offers a dynamic and inspiring community where students thrive in every aspect of their lives. From challenging academics and meaningful community involvement to prioritizing wellbeing, Emory speaks growth and discovery. With a strong focus on shaping future leaders, the university empowers students to find purpose and make a lasting impact in the world—creating an exciting journey of transformation and success.

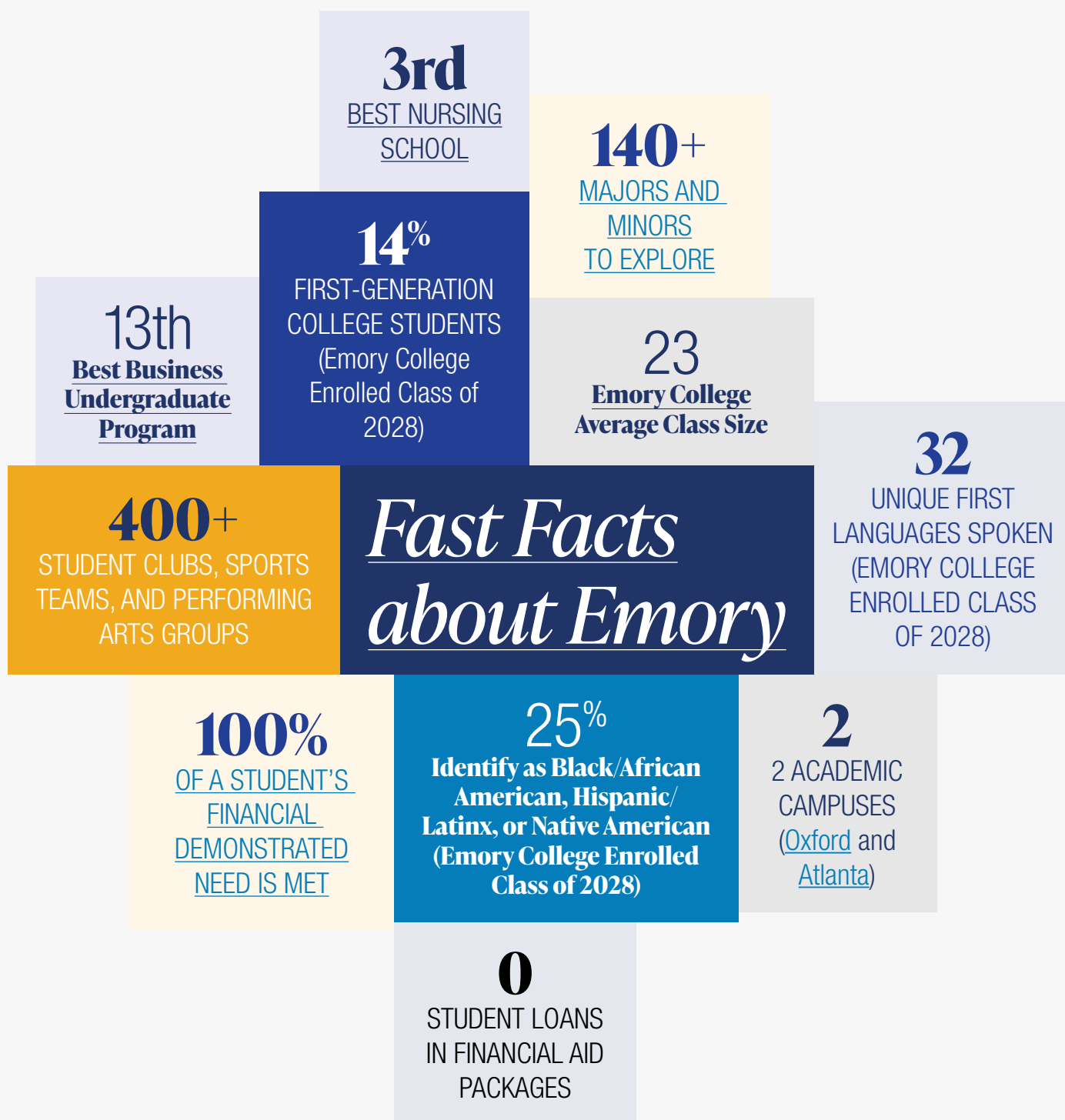
Atlanta

Atlanta is the business, technology, entertainment, and health care center of the Southeast, giving you many ways to gain experience and have fun. Atlanta's vitality comes from its varied neighborhoods—each with its own vibe and sensibilities. Atlanta is also home to the world's busiest airport—good for getting to break destinations or to that out-of-town internship. In addition, Atlanta is also top-ranked for internships, places to start a career, being dog-friendly, and having one of the largest populations of college students.

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EMORY UNIVERSITY OVERVIEW, CONTINUED



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ENRICHMENT OVERVIEW

Using this Guidebook

The purpose of our *College Admission Guidebooks* is to facilitate navigation of the college application process for all students. It is divided into four individual sections with the understanding that each of you arrive at the college admission process with different needs and concerns.

While created with the intention for students to begin with Leadership and end with Discovery, you can jump around and explore the sections that will best support your needs. We encourage you to familiarize yourself with the topics in every section by reviewing the table of contents. You can then search for keywords, jump between topics, or read each section from cover to cover. The journey is yours! [Please click here](#) to access the Leadership, Advocacy, and Discovery sections.



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The Enrichment section discusses topics that can help you affirm college as an option that is accessible to you. You will learn:



The purpose of pursuing and attending college



How highly selective institutions review applicants



How to make an informed financial decision when selecting a college



How to feel informed and knowledgeable when making decisions about money



How to ask for letters of recommendation



ENRICHMENT OVERVIEW, CONTINUED



From Tim

It can be easy for a student to fall into the trap of simply attending class and studying without having experienced all that college has to offer. We admit students who we believe will pursue opportunities—student organizations, research, study abroad—and thrive. Unfortunately, for some students, the fear of not belonging or not knowing enough can paralyze them from seeking these experiences.

We want you to believe in yourself, your talent, abilities, and skill sets; more importantly, your potential to reach your goals. Taking time for reflection isn't always easy but it will help you feel informed about your surroundings, your values, and your goals. It will help you feel encouraged to pursue wider goals. After all, you can't pursue opportunities and enrich your own life and the lives of those around you if you don't know what's available to achieve. It starts with getting informed.

Have the strength, bravery, and courage to take risks and try new things; make the most out of your time in college and beyond.

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WHY GO TO COLLEGE?

With the job market changing and many companies no longer requiring college degrees to work, many students are asking if college is still important. Yes, while there are some jobs that don't require a college degree, on average, college graduates tend to earn significantly more over their lifetimes compared to high school graduates.

Several studies have shown that higher education leads to increased earning potential and greater career opportunities. College graduates, on average, earn higher median salaries than those with only a high school diploma.

According to this data, if an individual's professional career lasts 40 years, for example, they could have the potential to earn:

\$320k+	associate
\$1 million+	bachelor
\$1.5 million+	master

Increase in potential earnings vs. no postsecondary education

College can particularly provide significant benefits to first-generation and low-income students, helping to level the playing field and create opportunities for social mobility.

Beyond just potential earnings, college graduates in many instances experience better health, lower unemployment rates, and greater overall life satisfaction. College also helps students develop in many ways that are essential for both a successful career and personal growth, such as:

Promoting critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and research skills

Exposing students to diverse environments with people from various backgrounds and cultures

Helping students gain independence, self-reliance, and personal responsibility

Building a network of peers, professors, and professionals in various industries

It is important to note that while college can be a valuable experience, it is not the only path to success. Some students may pursue alternative routes. The decision to attend college should be based on individual goals, interests, and circumstances.

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WHY GO TO COLLEGE?, CONTINUED

Emory University-Specific Links

There are many reasons why students apply to college and a lot of great schools throughout the country and world. Let's be clear, you can get an education anywhere, but what will your experience be, how will you grow in those years, and how will that school prepare you for life? Emory University will offer you an education in a world-class city and provide a rich, diverse experience that will extend beyond the classroom.

Emory University offers ample resources to establish, maintain, and enhance all students' well-being and overall flourishing during their time in college and beyond including:

[Cultural well-being](#)

[Emotional well-being](#)

[Financial well-being](#)

[Intellectual well-being](#)

[Career well-being](#)

[Physical well-being](#)

[Sexual well-being](#)

[Social well-being](#)

[Spiritual well-being](#)



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FINANCIAL AID

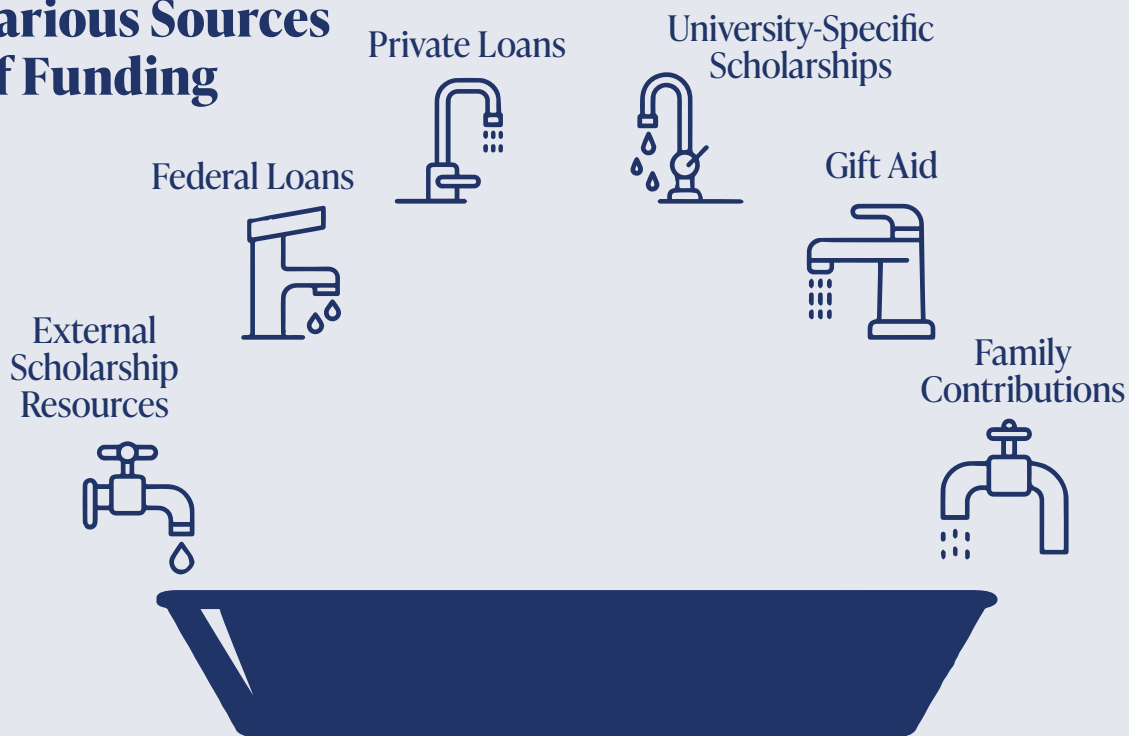
Paying for College

Money is essential for college. While some students can pay outright for college, most need some form of aid. Your financial aid package is critical as the school you'll attend.

Prior to applying for financial aid, students and families can use online tools like a [Net Price Calculator \(NPC\)](#), to estimate the cost of attending a particular institution. It provides an estimate of the net price (tuition, fees, room and board, books, and other expenses) minus any grants, scholarships, or need-based aid for which the student may be eligible.

Some schools also have additional tools like [MyInTuition](#), a type of Net Price Calculator offered by some colleges and universities. It is often a simplified version of the traditional NPC, designed to quickly provide a ballpark estimate of a student's net price without requiring as much detailed financial information. The goal of My Intuition is to offer a user-friendly and easy-to-understand tool for students and families to get a preliminary sense of the cost of attending a particular institution.

Various Sources of Funding



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FINANCIAL AID, CONTINUED

Components of a Financial Aid Package

A financial aid package is a combination of various types of assistance to help cover the attendance costs. Financial aid packages are typically provided after reviewing the student's need and eligibility. The components of a package can vary from student to student and institution to institution, but they may include the following types of aid:

Federal Work-Study (FWS) provides part-time employment opportunities to those eligible. Students can work on campus or at approved off-campus locations to earn money to help cover educational expenses.

Scholarships are awarded on academic merit, athletic ability, community involvement, or specific talents and do not require repayment.

Federal Direct Subsidized Loans are low-interest loans offered to undergrad students based on financial need. The federal government pays the interest while the student is in school and usually six months after graduation.

Grants are need-based financial aid that don't need to be repaid.

Parent PLUS Loans are federal loans available to parents of dependent undergrad students to help cover educational expenses not covered by other financial aid.

Alternative or Private Loans are offered by private lenders and are used to fill the gap between other financial aid and the total cost of attendance. Private loans typically have higher interest rates and fewer borrower protections than federal loans. Try to avoid these unless absolutely necessary.

Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loans are available regardless of financial need. Interest begins accruing as soon as the loan is received by the student.

When reviewing a financial aid package, carefully read and understand the terms and conditions of each type of aid, including repayment obligations, interest rates, and deadlines.

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FINANCIAL AID, CONTINUED

Students, please remember that the aid you receive from a school is for your education and to support your time while in college.

Please be mindful that students and families must apply for aid annually and the requirements vary from one institution to another. Additional factors that may influence aid are citizenship status, other family members who may be in college, and other institutional criteria. That's why it's important that families connect with each school they are applying to in order to best understand their aid policies.

Financial Aid Platforms

There are two main platforms to consider when applying for financial aid: the Free Application for Federal Student Aid ([FAFSA](#)) and College Scholarship Service Profile ([CSS](#)).

All schools that receive federal aid will require the FAFSA. The FAFSA is the most important financial aid application form. It's used to determine your eligibility for federal grants, loans, and work-study programs. The form opens late in the fall each year, and you should submit it as soon as possible to maximize your

aid options. You can access the FAFSA online.

Some schools will also require students to complete the CSS Profile. The CSS Profile is an additional financial aid application form used by many private colleges and universities in the United States. It is administered by the College Board.

Unlike the FAFSA, which is used primarily for federal financial aid programs, the CSS Profile is used by colleges to determine eligibility for institutional and private financial aid. This includes grants, scholarships, need-based aid, and sometimes merit-based aid offered directly by the college or university.

*Note: If you need a CSS Non-Custodial Parent Waiver, you can access one from the College Board or the university's website.

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Breaking down Cost of Attendance

The **Cost of Attendance** for a college or university is usually broken down between *direct* and *indirect* costs. Understanding these distinctions is essential for determining the total cost of attendance. Here are some differences between direct and indirect costs.

Direct costs are expenses that are billed directly by the college or university. These costs vary based on type of college (public vs. private) and whether the student is an in-state or out-of-state resident.

Tuition and fees

Instruction and academic services

Meals and housing

College-affiliated housing and meal plans

Mandatory university health insurance

Some colleges require students to have health insurance and may offer a university-sponsored plan

Indirect costs are expenses not billed directly by the college. These costs vary significantly.

Textbooks and course materials

Textbooks, supplies, software

Transportation

Travel expenses to and from the college

Personal expenses

Miscellaneous expenses, such as clothing, toiletries, and entertainment.

Off-campus housing and utilities

Rent, utilities, other

When determining the total cost of attendance, consider both direct and indirect costs. Financial aid packages provided by the college often take into account direct costs when offering aid (scholarships, grants, loans). However, you must also budget for indirect costs and plan accordingly.



FINANCIAL AID, CONTINUED

Breaking Down Student-Demonstrated Need

Demonstrated need in financial aid refers to the difference between the total cost of attendance (including tuition, fees, meals and housing, books, and other expenses) at a college or university and the Student Aid Index calculated through the financial aid application process.

Demonstrated need is calculated by subtracting the Student Aid Index from the total cost of attendance. The formula for demonstrated need is:

It's important to note that demonstrated need is specific to each college or university. Different institutions may have different costs of attendance and financial aid policies, so the demonstrated need can vary from one school to another. Additionally, not all colleges meet the full demonstrated need of every admitted student, which means that some students may receive less financial aid than their demonstrated need depending on the school they apply to. This is an unmet need.

**Demonstrated
Need**

EQUALS

**Total Cost of
Attendance**

MINUS

Student Aid Index

Demonstrated need is a key factor in determining the type and amount of financial aid a student may receive, and it plays a significant role in making college more affordable for students and their families.

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FINANCIAL AID, CONTINUED

Don't Be Afraid of Sticker Prices

College is expensive. But only a fraction of people pay full price. Please don't avoid applying to a school because of cost. If there's a school that's a good fit, apply. Get your financial aid package and decide when you see the actual costs. **Never assume you cannot afford a school, as many schools offer aid to make college accessible.**

Helpful Tips when Applying for Financial Aid

Apply early: complete your application as soon as it's available. Aid is awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

Know the deadlines: Familiarize yourself with the for each college you're applying to. Missing deadlines could result in reduced aid opportunities.

Provide accurate information:

Double-check all the information you provide on the FAFSA and CSS Profile. Errors can delay processing and affect your aid eligibility.

Seek help if needed: If you need assistance with the application process, reach out to the college's financial aid office or your high school counselor. They can provide valuable guidance.

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Emory-Specific Links and Financial Aid Information

Emory University is committed to making education accessible to all qualified students. Emory meets 100 percent of demonstrated financial need for first-degree admitted undergrad students. Through Emory Advantage, we have eliminated need-based loans and replaced them with institutional grants. Learn more about our financial aid policies [here](#).

Other resources include:

- [Student aid](#)
- [MyInTuition](#)
- [Financial aid podcast](#)



FINANCIAL AID, CONTINUED

Apply for state aid: Investigate state-specific programs and grants for which you may be eligible.

Consider work-study: If you're eligible for federal work-study, consider participating. Earn money for college expenses and gain work experience.

Appeal for more aid (if necessary): If your circumstances have changed significantly since you applied for financial aid, contact the financial aid office to discuss an appeal.

Check for special circumstances: If your family has experienced significant changes in financial circumstances such as job loss or high medical expenses, inquire about the possibility of an appeal.

Beware of scams: The FAFSA is free to complete and no one can guarantee aid. Be wary of anyone who claims otherwise.

Use the language that's best for you: You can complete the FAFSA in Spanish or English if one is better for your family. There are also resources for the CSS Profile that are in other languages.

Research institutional funding:

If you are DACA-eligible or undocumented, make sure to research universities that can fund you from their institutional funds because not all schools can. Some states may have separate applications as well.



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FINANCIAL AID, CONTINUED

What Is a Scholarship?

A scholarship is gift aid that you **do not** have to pay back, usually awarded based on academic or other achievement. Financial aid is solely based on a student's financial need. Scholarships, however, can be both need-based or merit-based.

Start researching scholarship opportunities now. Identify scholarships that align with your talents, skill sets, and achievements. If you are a strong writer, check out opportunities for essay contests. If you are a talented dancer, look for opportunities in the performing arts. There might even be one if you are left-handed! You'll never know the possibilities unless you do the research.

Remember, every dollar counts. If you apply for and receive five scholarships that each give you \$750, that's almost \$4,000 towards your cost of attendance. **Don't disregard the smaller scholarships for the more selective, big scholarships.**

Scholarships are free money, so they are always worth applying for, especially at universities where there are no additional eligibility requirements. If all you must do is click a button to be considered for a scholars program, why wouldn't you apply? You just increased your chances at receiving free money.

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Types of Scholarships

Merit Based

These are awarded for certain GPA or academic accomplishments and may include:

- [National Merit Scholarship](#)
- [Horatio Alger Scholarship](#)
- [Coca-Cola Scholars](#)

Talent Based

These are awarded for certain skill sets, mastery, or accolades and may include:

- Artist abilities such as musical talent or dance
- Chess mastery
- Debate recognition

Athletic Based

These available at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I and Division II institutions as well as National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) institutions for athletic talent.

Miscellaneous

These are scholarships awarded for talents, accomplishments, or accolades that aren't necessarily part of a formal program. They can be one-off scholarships that might be smaller in amount, but just as valuable, and may include:

- Scholarships for identifying deer teeth (true story!)
- Scholarships for essay contests/poetry
- Scholarships from your church or local community-based organization



FINANCIAL AID, CONTINUED

Where to Find and Apply for Scholarships

In addition to the links below, it's also helpful to research major corporation websites, state-based scholarship websites, and college and university websites for scholarships.

- FinAid.org
- Studentaid.gov
- Scholarshipamerica.org
- Scholarships.com
- Myscholly.com
- Goingmerry.com
- Meritmore.com
- Bold.org
- Finaideapp.com
- Fastweb.com
- Nextstudentloans.com
- Raise.me
- Salliemae.com
- Wiredscholar.com
- Scholarshiphelp.org
- Appily.com
- Collegesofdistinction.com

Emory Scholarships

[The Emory University Scholars Program](#) provides merit scholarships, unique programming, mentorships, a strong Scholars community, and early class registration, among many great benefits. Students must apply by November 15 to be considered for the Scholars Program.

Please note: QuestBridge finalists participating in the National College Match process are automatically considered for the Woodruff Scholars Program. All other QB applicants will need to apply via the Common Application by the November 15 deadline to be considered for scholarships at Emory.

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HOLISTIC REVIEW

What Is a Highly Selective Institution?

Typically, highly selective institutions evaluate incoming first-year applicants through a process called holistic review. Most highly selective institutions have the following characteristics:

- 25 percent or fewer of the applicants are admitted
- Receive more applications than there are spots available
- There's no magic formula for admission (no cut-offs or ceilings)

Using a holistic approach to application review, institutions assess fit just as much as they assess academic preparedness. Holistic Review allows admission counselors to consider both objective and subjective assessments of applicants.

Holistic Review at Emory

The holistic review process at Emory University is driven by guiding principles of academic excellence, intellectual curiosity, and the potential to contribute to community life on campus.

Learn more about Holistic Review at Emory through the links below:

- [Inside Emory Admission: The Holistic Review Process](#)
- [Inside Emory Admission: College Admission Explained/](#)
- [Emory Admission YouTube: Holistic Review Process](#)

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HOLISTIC REVIEW, CONTINUED

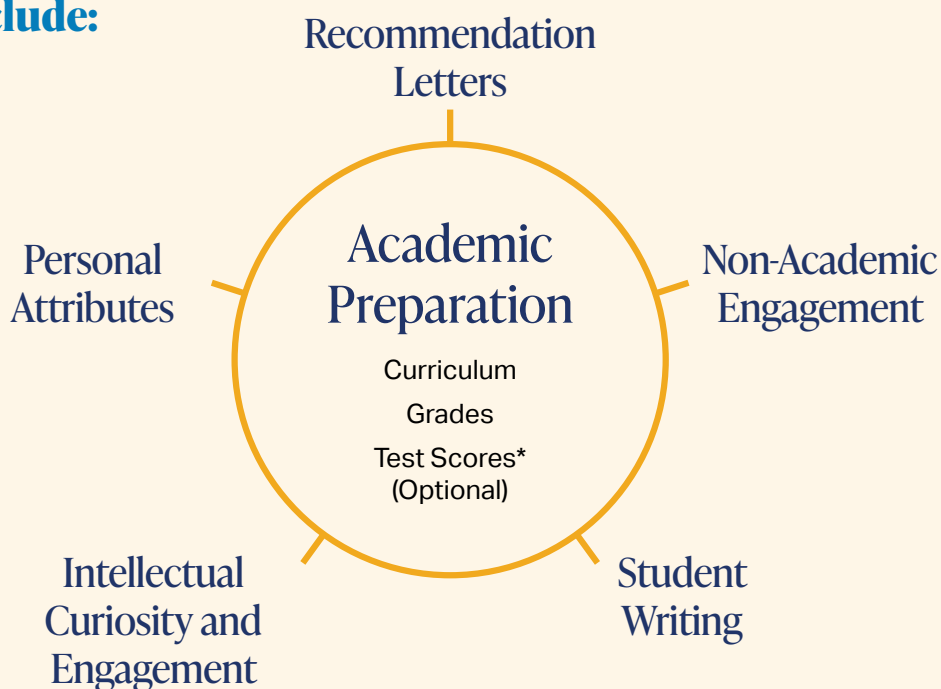
Purpose of Holistic Review

The purpose of holistic review aims to be contextual. It goes beyond solely reviewing academic metrics to truly understanding a student's context and institutional needs to confidently make an admission decision. **It means institutions are looking at your qualifications, experiences, and personal characteristics beyond just academic achievements and standardized test scores.** This approach aims to assess applicants as whole

individuals, taking into account their unique backgrounds, talents, achievements, and potential contributions to the campus community. The goal is to create a well-rounded class complete with a range of attributes and talents including, but not limited to:

- Diversity of thought
- Socioeconomic background
- Community impact-makers
- Athletic achievements
- Musical talent

A holistic review may include:



*Emory test scores are optional, but students should check the testing requirements for each school.

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ACADEMIC PREPARATION

The most important part of the college application is your transcript and academic preparation or what some call rigor. In the college admission process, **rigor refers to the academic challenge and depth of a student's high school coursework**. Admission officers consider the level of rigor in an applicant's course selection to assess the student's academic preparedness and ability to handle the challenges of college-level coursework. Rigor is an important factor in evaluating an applicant's academic strength and potential for success in higher education.

There are all kinds of different rigor, but most fall into one of the following categories:

Advanced Placement (AP)

International Baccalaureate (IB)

Dual Enrollment

In the college admission process, all three programs can be viewed positively. Admission officers recognize the rigor and challenge these programs offer and value students who take advantage of opportunities to push themselves academically.

Finally, it's important to know that the *context* of your application is very important. Admission officers consider the context of each applicant, and their school, to gain a deeper understanding of their achievements, experiences, challenges, and potential for success in college. The goal is to assess applicants holistically and fairly, acknowledging that students come from diverse backgrounds with varying opportunities and challenges. Some of the factors that admission officers consider may include, but are not limited to:

First-Gen College Status

School and Community Involvement

Socioeconomic Background

Personal Challenges

While there are a lot of factors considered in holistic review, academic preparation will always be the most important factor of the application.

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ACADEMIC PREPARATION, CONTINUED

Standardized Testing

Students may wonder if they should take the test and submit scores with their applications. The truth is that you should do what is best for yourself based on the schools that you are looking to apply to. With so many variables in the college application process, no one factor is determinant, and testing is just one of the many factors that are considered at

some schools, given many schools offer different test options. Here are the options most schools offer:

Test-Optional: applicants may choose whether or not to submit their standardized test scores.

Test-Blind: standardized test scores not considered.

Test Flexible: applicants may choose to submit various standardized test scores.

Standardized Tests

SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test)

ACT (American College Testing)

International Tests

International Baccalaureate (IB)

Diploma Programme: Students who complete the IB Diploma Programme are evaluated based on their performance in various subjects.

A-levels: A subject-based qualification usually taken in the UK and some other countries.

Language Proficiency Tests

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language): Measures the English proficiency of non-native English speakers.

IELTS (International English Language Testing System):

Similar to TOEFL, it assesses English language proficiency.

DET (Duolingo)

Other Standardized Tests

AP (Advanced Placement) Exams:

Students can take AP exams after completing AP courses, demonstrating their proficiency in specific subjects.

CLEP (College-Level Examination Program): Allows students to earn college credits by demonstrating knowledge in specific subjects.

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ACADEMIC PREPARATION, CONTINUED

Typically, at highly selective institutions, AP exam scores of 4s and 5s and IB exam scores of 6s and 7s are seen as a student demonstrating mastery in a particular subject. These scores further highlight the student's academic potential for success in a university setting. Generally, submit only those test scores that are going to paint you in a positive light.

It's important to note that college admission requirements vary significantly depending on the country, region, and individual college or university. The tests required for admission can differ from one institution to another. Always check the specific requirements of the colleges you are interested in to understand which tests are necessary for your application.

Emory Philosophy about Testing

Emory University is test optional for the 2025-2026 admission cycle. Not all applicants choose to submit test scores when applying. Review our full test optional policy here:

- [Inside Emory Admission: Emory University Remains Test Optional for 2025-2026](#)

Other resources include:

- [Transfer Credit](#)
- [Standardized Exam Policies](#)



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ESSAYS AND WHY THEY MATTER

Essays matter because they are the one area of the application where we get to hear from you directly, in your voice. Admission counselors will:

Read your letters of recommendation where your teachers and counselors are advocating on your behalf

Note your accomplishments and achievements in your extracurricular activities

Evaluate your strong academic performance based on your transcript

What writing samples provide that those areas do not is the ability to connect with you directly; they are an intimate look into your personality, aspirations, goals, and interests from your point of view. **Your essays might be the closest we come to having a conversation with you**, so be intentional and thoughtful with the topics you choose to write about. We get inspired hearing about you!

Formula

There's no magic formula to creating a well-written personal statement, but if there was one, we would propose the following:

time + introspection + vulnerability



The measured or measurable period during which an action, process, or condition exists or continues (duration)



The examination or observation of one's thoughts, feelings, ideas, or processes; the act of looking within oneself



Willingness and ability to address, show, and articulate emotions or to be seen as you are

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ESSAYS, CONTINUED

Your writing samples show us that you can:

- Write clearly and concisely
- Thoughtfully choose an essay topic
- Reflect on your lived experiences and your future
- Be passionate about a subject
- Draw us into your narrative/story

We know as seniors in high school, you are balancing rigorous course loads, extracurricular activities, home responsibilities, and many other duties. However, it's important to make time to reflect on your lived experiences and define the narratives that are most important to you—to begin to understand the “how” and “why” behind those impactful moments in your life. It's by understanding yourself better that you can create an essay that stands out with your authentic and genuine voice. In the pages ahead, we will walk you through ways to begin brainstorming your essay topic.

Types of Writing Samples/Essays

It's important for you to carefully read and follow the instructions for each college's application to submit the correct writing samples. Adhering to the specified word limits and demonstrating your unique qualities can help make your application stand out.

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Additional Information Context

It's important to note that given COVID-19 and the pandemic, students are given the opportunity to write about things that affected their education during that time in the “Community Disruption” section of their application. Students are also given the opportunity to write additional information that they feel may add to their application or help provide context to any part of their application. While these areas are not required, you should be prepared to write on these areas if you think it will help readers better understand your application.

Colleges may ask for some of the following types of writing samples as part of the application process:

Personal Statement: This is one of the most common writing samples required by colleges. It allows you to share your personal back-



ESSAYS, CONTINUED

ground, experiences, interests, and aspirations. The personal statement provides insight into your personality, values, and motivations.

Supplemental Essays: Many colleges require you to submit additional essays in response to their institution-specific prompts. These essays may be about a particular aspect of the college, such as why the applicant is interested in attending, how they will contribute to the campus community, or how they have overcome challenges in their life.

Academic Essay: Some colleges may ask for an academic essay that demonstrates the applicant's writing and critical thinking skills. This essay may be on a general topic or a specific subject area.

Writing Sample in a Specific Field:

For applicants intending to major in certain disciplines (e.g., creative writing, journalism, or humanities), colleges may request a writing sample that showcases their skills in that field.

Short Answer Questions: In addition to longer essays, colleges may include short answer questions on the application. These questions

Personal Statement Information and Tips

Writing a college essay is hard. Very few students go into the writing process "pumped" to sit in front of a computer to tell a story. Too often, students have no idea what to write about, at which point it becomes an overwhelming task.

But do you know what makes it easier? Documenting life. Instead of trying to devise some clever creative epiphany that students think will change the landscape of college admission and help them get into the college of their dreams, they should share what has happened in their lives or what is happening. **Documenting is the key to storytelling.** College essays are not supposed to be imaginative per se; they should be revealing. Colleges want to see essays that:

- **Are real and authentic**
- **Share details about something not already in a student's application**

Very few students will be the best at anything in a selective applicant pool given the number of applications, but one thing they can definitely be the best at is being themselves, so remember the value of being authentic.

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ESSAYS, CONTINUED

typically require brief responses but still offer the opportunity to show-case writing abilities.

Research Paper or Project:

Applicants to specific programs or honors colleges might be asked to submit a research paper or a project they have completed, especially if it aligns with their academic interests.

General Essay Tips

- Proofread and read out loud in the editing process
- Avoid procrastinating
- Adhere to word limits
- Seek help from your English teacher, school counselor, or another adult
- Do not copy/paste from websites or depend on AI programs like Chat GPT
- Ensure that your voice (not your best friend or parent for example) is at the forefront of your essay, and others don't take over your story

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Picking Your Topic / How to Get Started

Reflect on your own story and personal experiences.

What has been meaningful to you and why? Be honest and authentic with yourself.

List all the impactful experiences that come to your mind.

Pinpoint a particular experience.

How has this moment / topic / experience helped you grow?

Go more in depth and explain why this moment was so impactful to you.

What would you like to communicate to the admission counselors reading your application?

How does this story explain your personality? Where in the story does the reader get a sense of your curiosity, dreams, goals?

As you craft your story, where can you insert more detail? Where can you remove unnecessary or repetitive details?

Showing Maturity in Writing / How to Avoid Trauma Dumping

Showing maturity in your writing is a very important part of your application. There are any number of topics you can write about, including “traumatic” events that may have taken place. Whether or not you should write about trauma in your college essay is a personal decision. There are pros and cons to both

approaches. Your college essay should not be the first place you share something that you never told anyone else. This is often referred to as “trauma dumping,” which you want to be careful of in your essay writing.

Writing about trauma can be a powerful way to connect with admission

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ESSAYS, CONTINUED

officers and show them who you are as a person; it can also be a way to process your own trauma and find meaning in it. On the other hand, writing about trauma can be difficult and triggering. It's always important to be respectful of yourself. Avoid sharing anything that makes you uncomfortable. If you're unsure whether to write about trauma in your college essay, it's always a good idea to talk to a trusted adult, such as a parent or counselor. They can help you decide what's best for you and how to write your essay in a way that is safe and respectful of all parties involved.

The college essay is an opportunity to showcase who you are beyond your grades and test scores. Be authentic, sincere, and thoughtful in your writing, and use the essay as a platform to let your personality shine through.

Emory-Required Writing Samples

Students who apply to Emory University via the Common Application will need to write:

- **One Personal Statement** that is roughly 650 words.
 - Students will choose from the Common Application prompts for their essay.
- **Two Emory-specific short answer essays** that have a maximum word count of 150 words each.
 - [Click here](#) to learn more about the Emory short answer requirements.

Please note: QuestBridge Applicants applying to Emory University are not required to submit any additional information beyond their complete QuestBridge Application and updated mid-year grades if they are not matched.

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Common Essay Mistakes to Avoid

- 1. Clichés and overused topics:** Opt for unique and personal experiences that truly showcase your individuality.
- 2. Overwhelming bragging:** Strive for a balanced portrayal of your accomplishments.
- 3. Overly complicated language:** Aim for clarity and sincerity in your writing.
- 4. Ignoring the prompt:** Tailor your essay to address the prompt provided by the college or university. Avoid writing a generic essay that doesn't directly respond to the question.
- 5. Relying on a thesaurus:** Use language you are comfortable with and that accurately expresses your ideas.
- 6. Writing about negative or controversial topics:** Avoid writing subjects that may create a negative impression.
- 7. Waiting until the last minute:** Start working on your essay early. Give yourself time to revise and improve your writing.
- 8. Using inappropriate humor or tone:** While humor can be effective, make sure it is appropriate and doesn't overshadow the sincerity and importance of the essay.
- 9. Focusing solely on accomplishments:** Your essay should reveal more about your personality, values, and character rather than just listing accomplishments or a brag sheet.
- 10. Overusing quotes:** A quote can be a great way to start an essay, but overusing them or relying on them too heavily can detract from your own voice.
- 11. Not proofreading:** Spelling and grammar errors can make a negative impression. Always proofread your essay carefully or ask someone else to review it for you.
- 12. Writing an autobiography:** Focus on specific moments that highlight your growth and values.

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ESSAYS, CONTINUED

Emory-Specific Essay Resources

[Writing the College Essay](#)

Inside Emory Admission Blog

[Strong Personal Statement Part 1](#)



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LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Letters of recommendation provide admission committees a different point of view beyond the grades you've earned in school. They enable institutions to learn more about you as a human being, including your personality, motivations, and aspirations.

Institutions will typically require letters of recommendation from your high school counselor and/or core academic teachers (English, math, natural science, social science, global / foreign language, or visual / performing arts). These letters can provide insight into:



What you are like as a student in the classroom

- Do you help your classmates when they get stuck on a problem?
- Do you submit your homework on time?

Why they see you as a strong scholar and candidate for college admission

- Do they admire your resilience and persistence in overcoming challenges?
- Do they feel inspired by your attitude in class and the way you bring a fresh perspective into the class material covered?
- Do they see you as a kind classmate, caring friend, and mature young adult?

How you handle setbacks, challenges, or areas of strength

- Do you ask for help when you need additional clarity on a class topic?
- Do you enjoy the class material and share insightful comments that improve the class environment?

Using the information above, admission committees can better understand whether a student would be a good academic, social, and personal fit for their institution. After all, highly selective institutions want students who are going to achieve in the classroom and thrive equally outside of it—someone who is going to invest in their personal growth and that of the institution.

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Your background, family dynamics, and relevant context

- Are you maximizing the curriculum offered at your school?
- Did you transfer schools? Move out of state?
- Do you have family responsibilities that prohibit you from engaging in activities after school?



LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION, CONTINUED

Who Should You Ask?

If institutions require letters of recommendation from teachers, it's best to ask teachers who:

- Have taught you recently (junior or senior year)
- You have kept in touch with (either by taking more than one class with them or kept in touch outside of the classroom)
- Know you beyond the grade you earned in their class
- Taught you in a core academic area

Carefully select teachers to write your recommendations. You do not have to pick the teacher who gave you the highest grades. Consider the teacher who challenged you the most, can share details about your strengths, or can tell us how you overcame obstacles.

Additional Letters of Recommendation

Institutions will specify how many letters are required as part of their application. However, there may be circumstances that warrant submitting additional letters of recommendation. For example, if you've worked the same part-time job throughout high school

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Commonly Asked Questions

Does it have to be a core academic area teacher?

Most institutions prefer letters of recommendation that come from teachers who have taught you in a core academic class versus an elective class. This is because there are too many elective courses for admission committees to be knowledgeable about. Every institution has specific requirements so check their admission criteria when applying.

What if my teacher/counselor doesn't work at the same high school anymore?

Universities understand that teachers/counselors might transition to other roles or schools. Most institutions will still accept a letter of recommendation from them. They may have to email or contact admission offices directly if they can no longer access your direct application via the school system. It's best to check school criteria when applying.



LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION, CONTINUED

and have gotten promoted, your supervisor may have an additional perspective about you that's worth sharing with admission committees.

Generally, you should only submit additional letters of recommendation if they provide a different perspective or new narrative than the ones already shared.

What to Include in Your Ask

You might ask your teacher/supervisor/advocate for a letter of recommendation in person or via email. In both instances, you'll want to be prepared. Think about timing. If you know your favorite teacher gets many requests but they only write a maximum number of letters a year, you might want to consider asking them in late summer or at the beginning of the new school year. If you've worked the same full-time job the past few summers, you may want to ask your supervisor for an additional letter of recommendation before the current summer ends.

Thinking about when you're going to ask your recommender is just as important as giving your recommenders enough time to write their letter on your behalf. Some recommenders may even want to meet with you and discuss your accomplishments or learn more about your goals and the institution to which you're applying.

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Emory-Specific Letter of Recommendation Requirements

- Secondary school report / counselor's recommendation
- Two teacher letters of recommendation from core-area academic teachers

When you ask your recommender, you should be prepared with the following:

- Why you are asking them specifically for a letter of recommendation on your behalf
- A list of accomplishments/ school accolades or your resume that they can reference in their letter
- Specific deadlines and instructions to submit their letter of recommendation
- Institution-specific information / list of colleges to which you're applying



LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION, CONTINUED

Example Email for a Letter of Recommendation Ask

While not to be used verbatim, below is an example email of a request for a letter of recommendation. Use this as an example to craft your own request.

Hello Ms. [Last Name],

I hope you're having a great summer. I know historically students have asked you for a letter of recommendation on the first day of class, but I wanted to take the time now to ask you more formally. As I reflect on my high school experience, I continue to believe that you have been fundamental in my appreciation for the humanities. Our countless conversations about English poetry and your personalized approach to my learning style have made all the difference in my educational journey.

If you have the opportunity, I would be honored if you wrote me a letter of recommendation for my college application. I am applying to Emory University, Pomona College, and University of Chicago. All three have a deadline of January 1, 2026. Your class has shown me the importance of creativity and personal expression, and I look forward to further exploring these areas within the humanities at these institutions.

I have attached my resume for additional context outside of your classroom. I'm happy to meet in person to further elaborate on my accomplishments and answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for considering this request and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best Regards,

[First Name, Last Name]

[Email Address]



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EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Institutions seek students who will contribute well to the life of the university, the city they're located in, and beyond.

What will you gain from our community and what will you give?

Whether you've been involved in clubs, sports, a job, helping with family, research, or community service, we want to know more in-depth about those things. To review our tips related to extracurricular activities please visit our [Leadership](#) section.

Personal Attributes + Intellectual Curiosity

Institutions want students who are going to be kind, compassionate, caring human beings. Students that

they can envision being a helpful roommate, classmate, or teammate. Admission counselors identify these personal attributes by the essays you write, the activities you engage in, and the letters of recommendation others submit on your behalf. Some institutions may also require or offer interviews, which can be used to highlight your personal attributes and how you can contribute to a college campus.

Ultimately, institutions want students who are going to be equally as engaged civically and mentally—students who are lifelong learners and leaders, who are intellectually curious and engaged in their world, and who assess intellectual thought intentionally.



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GLOSSARY

Key Terms/Vocabulary/Terminology

ACT (American College Test).

A standardized test that is often required for admission to college. The test is divided into four sections: English, math, reading, and science.

admission requirements. A set of rules established by every college or university for determining whether students qualify for admission.

Advanced Placement (AP).

Advanced high school classes that allow students to earn credit that can be transferred to a college and may let them bypass entry-level college courses. Credit is earned only if a student earns a high enough score on a standardized test. Most highly selective schools expect applicants to have taken AP courses in high school if they are offered at their school.

College Board. A nonprofit organization that provides tests and other educational services for students, high schools, and colleges. The SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test), College

Scholarship Search Profile, and AP tests are products of the College Board.

College Scholarship Search Profile (CSS Profile).

A financial aid form used by many private colleges to award private, non-federal funds.

cost of attendance. The total cost of college for one year as a full-time student. This covers the cost of tuition, room and board, books, transportation, and personal expenses.

defer. For students who apply Early Decision or Early Action, a school may decide not to admit or deny them at first but may postpone making a decision and reevaluate the applicant among the general pool of applicants.

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid).

A form that allows applicants to apply for financial aid in the form of scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study.

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Federal Direct Loan. Formerly known as a Stafford Loan, this is a loan from the US government for student financial aid.

fee waiver. Exemption from having to pay a cost. Students who register to take a standardized test or who submit an application to a college can apply to be relieved of having to pay the associated fee. This request is often granted when a family's income falls below a certain threshold.

financial aid. Scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study programs that allow students to attend college when their families demonstrate a need for additional money to pay for college. Financial aid packages are determined by a family's financial need as measured by their assets, liabilities, and debt-to-income ratio. Some financial aid is also determined by the availability of government funds.

grade point average (GPA). The total number of grade points earned, divided by the number of credits taken.

grant. Financial aid that does not need to be repaid. It is usually awarded based on need or academic achievement or a special skill, talent, or heritage.

International Baccalaureate.

A course of study that allows high school students to satisfy the curricular admission requirements of universities in more than 70 countries.

part-time student. A college student who takes fewer than a full-time schedule of classes (usually 12 to 16 units, or credit hours, per term); part-time status may make students ineligible for financial aid.

Pell Grant. Financial aid from the federal government available to students with significant financial need at many types of colleges and vocational schools.

PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test). A shortened version of the SAT offered in October to high school juniors and younger. The scores offer an initial assessment for college planning and may help students qualify for National Merit Scholarships.

SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test). A college admission exam measuring critical reading and math reasoning skills.

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scholarship. A gift of money (which does not need to be repaid) given in recognition of student financial need or achievement, skills, or talent.

school profile. This document, produced by high schools, provides school demographic information, curriculum, GPA and class rank calculation, extracurricular activities offered, and other information about the school to give admission offices an understanding of what was available to an applicant in high school.

Student Aid Index (SAI). A formula used to calculate the amount of financial need of a family and student (this was formerly called "Expected Family Contribution).

Student Aid Report. A form distributed by the College Scholarship Service for the purpose of estimating the family contribution to a student's college costs.

superscoring. Taking SAT or ACT subscores from different test administrations to assemble the highest combined score.

test-blind. Institutions that do not factor standardized test scores in their admission decisions even if applicants submit them are said to be test-blind.

test flexible. Institutions that allow students to choose which type of test (or tests) they'd like to submit with their application. Other options include an International Baccalaureate exam or an Advanced Placement test.

Test optional. Institutions that do not require standardized test scores for admission are said to be test optional. These institutions will, however, review scores from applicants who opt to submit them.

transcript. An official copy of a student's high school or college courses taken and the grades they earned.

tuition. The fee for instruction at a college or vocational school.

work-study. A federally funded program that makes part-time jobs available to students with demonstrated financial need.



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