

# YOUR COLLEGE SEARCH, APPLICATION, & GUIDANCE



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## Your Search, Your Future

Whether you are thinking of going to college, entering a career, or enlisting in the military, many of the tips on the following pages will apply to you. There are numerous resources listed and described here that can help you and your family make informed decisions.

## Working Together

As always, if you have questions, ask at any time. Or, if you have school specific questions, see your Guidance Counselor.



# Decision Making

*After 12 years of school, now what?*

**Points of Interest and Things to Know:**

**Work Ethic: (n)**

**A strong work ethic is vital for achieving goals. Certain factors come together to create a strong work ethic: Integrity, Sense of Responsibility, Emphasis on Quality, Discipline, and Sense of Teamwork.**

“What do you want to be when you grow up?”  
How many times have you been asked this question?

At one time in history, not so long ago actually, people would graduate from high school or college and enter a job in a career field. Forty or fifty years later, they would retire from that same career (maybe even the very same job).



The world of work, education, and knowledge has changed dramatically over the past few decades. Now (in the 2000's) students will graduate from high school and not only change jobs upwards of 10-15 times but change entire career paths.

It is important to note that while in high school you have the unique opportunity to develop critical and creative thinking skills that can be applied to a wide variety of jobs and careers.

The following pages focus on college searches. If your current goal for after high school is to enter the military, a career, or trade school, many of the steps are the same. Admissions Officers, Employers, and Military Recruiters are all looking for the same thing, someone who is fully prepared with the professional and personal skills to be successful.

Choosing a Major  
 VS  
 Choosing a College  
 VS  
 Choosing a Career Path

If you are still unsure of what your career goals are, it might feel like you are the only one; like all your friends have “it all figured out.” Not true. Many, in fact most enter college without a solid career path.

It is all too common to enroll as one major, graduate with a different major, and be employed in an entirely different field.

Unless you have a very specific and definite career goal, your choice of major and college is still wide open.

Only certain majors (eg nursing or veterinary) may require you to apply and state this. Some schools will review applications differently based on the intended major.

Many careers pull employees from multiple majors. More important than your course of study can be your attitude, involvement, and most importantly your work ethic.



## College to Career

The college search is more involved than simply attending college fairs, tours, and looking through mailings. Also, the application process is more involved than simply filling out an application.

College tuition is without question one of the largest investments you will make. With tens of thousands of campuses to consider, finding the right college in which to make that investment can be difficult.

It's not about “getting in;” it's about finding the right “fit” and where you will be comfortable. You do not want to be looking to transfer (or worse, quit) simply because you did not have an engaging experience.

Working together, we can investigate what you want from your college experience. By defining the campus environment, major, location, size, and student life you looking for, specific and unique colleges will peak your interest. In considering these and many other facets of college life, you should become increasingly more confident that you are accepted to and ultimately graduate from a college you are proud of.

## College Search Overview

*It is about finding the right "Fit."*

### Points of Interest and Things to Know:

**Start your search process as early as possible.**

**You do not need to have a specific major or area of study in mind. Many students enroll as "Undeclared."**

**However, certain majors may have a unique and separate admissions process.**

**Stay ORGANIZED.**

**There is no "perfect" school for anyone. Instead, think of the perfect "fit."**

### What & When to Start

The college search process really begins as early as your freshman year. Time should be used to think about long term goals and interests.

Ideally you will begin your search in your Junior year by attending college fairs and taking the SAT's. You will have many conversations with your family and friends, as well as a lot of self evaluation about what type of school would be a good match for you. Some of the issues to think about include: size, location, area of study, academic expectations, and expense among others.

This section is intended to be a beginning in the final steps in your decision-making. This process may be adjusted due to unique circumstances of your interests. Be sure to meet with your Guidance Counselor to stay on top of everything. This process will stress out many seniors. One way to alleviate some of the stress is to be prepared, organized, and to start as early as possible.

What type of school best fits you?

There are many things to consider when looking at colleges. This can be thought of as the most stressful or the most exciting part of the process. Taking your time and having the right attitude will dramatically make this process more productive.

- Location
- Size
- Setting
- Academic focus
- Campus life

These are just some of the criteria you should consider. When you imagine yourself at college, walking across campus; what do you see? What is around you? What are the residence halls like? Classes? Consider the campus ENVIRONMENT and YOUR FIT IN IT.



## College Search Overview

## What type of school should you look for?

Because there are countless options to look for in a school, you should begin this process as early as possible. Campus setting, location, academic rigor, and program offerings are only some of the concepts to keep in mind.

Tips to finding the right school for you:

- ☑ Attend college fairs and open houses
  - ☑ This is a busy time, it will be important to stay organized
- ☑ Get on campus! Go on “road trips” to visit school. Set up interviews keeping in mind you are interviewing for school for a fit as much as they are interviewing you.
- ☑ Geographic location is a main aspect to both the school’s review of applicants and your interest in a school. Colleges are looking for a diverse student body, including home states. Look to school out of the norm or different states from everyone else.
  - ☑ Consider extended family or ease of travel if you are hesitant to travel far from home
- ☑ Always remember, it’s not about finding the “perfect” school. It’s about finding the right “FIT.”
- ☑ Consider the “mid 50” when looking at the rigor of a school and your chances of acceptance. (refers to the middle 50% of accepted applicants and their test scores and GPA)
  - ☑ This will give you a sense of rigor and selectivity of a school and how you fit into their academic expectations.
- ☑ Talk with friends and family about their college experiences.

**Deciding where to attend college can be a difficult decision. Be sure to discuss your thoughts with parents, friends, guidance counselors, ANYONE.**

**At the same time, it is important to recognize you do not want to put additional stress into your decision and relationships. Relax. Do not dwell on “looming” decisions. Let conversations happen naturally and move on when not productive.**

## Year by Year Steps

*Each year builds on the previous year's experiences.*

### Points of Interest and Things to Know:

**No Year is more or less important than the others.**

**Themes that carry over from year to year:**

**Communication,  
Academic Progress,  
Community Involvement**

### Keep in Mind:

The following pages will lay out detailed points and action steps that you should be aware of each year of high school. No matter your plans for after high school, each year plays a role and is just as important as the others. Senior year is no more or less important than your freshman year. It is critical that you give your best effort at all times.

That being said, it is important to know that a solid and strong start in your Freshman year can improve your high school experience and opportunities after graduation. Opposite a strong first year, demonstrating continued improvement and growth will impress upon employers and admissions counselors that you are prepared to face the next challenge.

Communication with parents, teachers, and Guidance Counselors throughout each year is a critical component to your planning and development of college- and career readiness.

**Freshman Year** – The transition into high school is an important first step into fulfilling your goals for later in life. Be sure to become involved in class and school then make a strong investment into your academic environment.

**Sophomore Year** – It may feel as if your second year of high school is not as busy as others. Freshman year is full of “new.” New school, new friends, new activities are always popping up. You may already anticipate the challenges of being an upperclassman. So that leaves the sophomore year to feel like a great middle ground and not as involved. Wrong! This is your chance to build on the foundation of a strong freshman year and prepare for what’s next.

**Junior Year** – You should be developing and acting on your plans. What have you accomplished and what more would you like to do? How will you make it happen?

**Senior Year** – You have worked hard to earn your way to graduation, now is the time to put those plans and goals into action. Your final search and decisions will now require full attention to meet deadlines and put your efforts in the best light for admissions counselors.

## Year by Year

## Spring of Your Junior Year

- Parents & students should attend college informational sessions.
- Begin self-assessment. Determine tentative college criteria. Discuss the process & your impressions with your parents.
- Conference with your counselor to discuss future plans.
- Register for Spring SAT and/or ACT.
- Attend college fairs and meet with college representatives.
- Make a tentative list of college choices (10 is a good start).
- Make appointments to visit colleges...schedule interviews for summer dates too.
- Get a copy of your grades and testing to take with you on interviews.

## Summer of your Junior to Senior Year

- Read college catalogs & guidebooks. Talk to friends, parents, and alumni of colleges that interest you. Learn as much as you can about college life. Talk to students returning from college about what life is like on campus.
- Visit college campuses. Keep notes on your visits.
- If applicable, set up college interviews for the fall.
- Begin narrowing your list of colleges (get realistic and cut the list to +/- 5 or so)
- Work at least one-half-hour each day on test preparation.

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*Grades and your transcript are the single most important piece of your application. Do not think that once you have received an acceptance letter you do not need to maintain academic progress.*

*Students are accepted by colleges on the basis they maintain, or improve, their current academic standing.*

*If your grades slip, colleges have the right to rescind your acceptance or place you on "academic probation."*

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## Year by Year

## Fall of your Senior Year

- For late starters...complete all activities listed that you should have done during your junior year. Yes all of them!
- Schedule a conference with your counselor or review your transcripts, discuss who should write your college recommendations and narrow your college choices.
- Attend college fairs, visit with representatives, ask lots of questions.
- Sign up for the SAT's or other needed tests.
- Organize your college information into a filing system. Put aside what you no longer need.
- Make a chart of deadline dates for applications and financial aid deadlines.
- Check admission requirements at chosen colleges to determine what specifics are required for admissions.
- Update your resume.
- If you are interested in applying for early decision or early action, get started on the application. Check the deadline!
- Participate in final college visits

## Winter of Your Senior Year

- Complete your applications before you return from the holiday break.
- Distribute all of your secondary school report forms to your teachers for recommendations.
- Attend FINANCIAL AID NIGHT.
- Ensure SAT/ACT scores are sent to the colleges you are applying to.
- Keep up your grades!
- Study for mid-terms and finals. These grades are sent to all of your colleges.
- Watch for scholarship announcements and applications.
- Report all communications that you have with colleges to your counselor.
- Attend local college receptions for applicants if you are invited. Alumni contact or interviews usually take place at local businesses, restaurants, or libraries.
- File your FAFSA form as soon as possible.

## Spring of your Senior Year

- Keep up your grades!
- When you hear from a school (Accepted, Waitlist, Deferred or Denied) be sure to let your Guidance Counselor know the status of your application.
- Discuss choices with your family.
- Decide on college plans...reply to the college of your choice. Submit tuition deposit.
- Notify other colleges of your choice. They may be able to offer admission to someone else.
- Complete any required senior projects. KEEP UP YOUR GRADES!



## College Application

*This process can be simplified when organization is a priority.*

### Points of Interest and Things to Know:

**Do NOT miss deadlines.**

**Get started EARLY.**

**Proofread everything.**

**Organization is critical.**

The application itself is the easiest part of the entire college process. The real essence of the application is your high school academic transcript. Your high school record of grades, involvement, activities, work, and recommendations will be what admissions offices review as they make decisions.

Applications themselves can be school based, Common App, Universal App, online, or paper copy. However you complete your application, the most important piece to understand is, "deadline." If you miss a deadline, might as well not apply at all.

This is why it is so important to start this process early. School, job, life in general, may all provide distractions as your senior year progresses. Start early and ensure you are able to proof read, compile all material, and submit your application all before the deadline.

### Terms to Know:

**Early Action-** An earlier application deadline where the school will provide a response sooner than the general applicant pool. Non-binding.

**Early Decision-** Same as above. However, student enters a contractual agreement where if accepted, the student will pull all other applications and attend that specific school. This is a binding application.

**Rolling-** School will review and notify applicants as their applications are submitted.

**Wait List-** Due to the large number of highly acceptable students, schools can hold applicants until a time when room may open up. Do not count on being accepted off the wait list.

**Deferred-** If a school can not offer admission to the program or semester to which you have applied, they may defer your acceptance to a different program or to the following year's freshmen class.

**Common Application-** One application that will be accepted at over 250 schools. [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org).

## College Application

### The Application

As stated, the application itself is very simple. You know your name, address, and demographics. The real work is developing your grades, transcript, and experiences. The application is how a college records your personal information. Supporting documentation is how the college makes its decision. The essay, recommendations, activity list, and interview make up some of these supporting pieces.

Developing these supporting points is why each year is important and builds on previous experiences. This is also why meeting deadlines is critical. The hard work should already be done. Colleges receive countless more applications than they can accept; if you cannot meet the deadline it is a reflection of you as a possible student. Point made.

The essay and interview are the last two opportunities for you have the exclusive attention of the admissions office. Take care and put forth your best effort.

### Completing and Submitting

Each college will establish its own application process, deadline, essay topic, and even application form. It is critically important to know what is expected.

The Common Application ([commonapp.org](http://commonapp.org)) is accepted by over 700 schools world wide. However some schools will also have a supplemental form and/or essay to complete.

First and foremost, know your deadlines! Also, understand that a deadline is the last date an application can be sent. You do not need to wait for this date. You can, and should, send it before.

**Give people plenty of time to write recommendations. You may want to give some teachers notice as early as junior year.**

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**Fill out applications as neatly and as professionally as possible. Do not have someone else fill out your application. It's yours, you do it!**

—

**Be sure to have someone proof read both your application and your essay for content, grammar, and mistakes.**

—

**If you receive a notice that some material was not received, don't panic. Often times admissions offices will generate this type of notice before the application is fully reviewed. Let your Guidance Counselor know and additional copies will be sent as needed.**

## College Application - The Essay

## Writing Your Essay

Your essay is the only time you may have to demonstrate your academic AND your personal experiences. At first this is an intimidating and overwhelming concept. It can be difficult to talk about yourself. However it is important to recognize, this can be difficult for adults too. You are not alone.

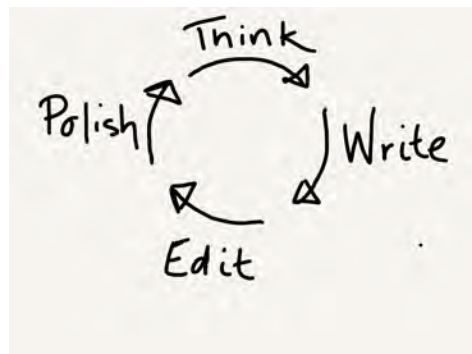
What is also important to understand is you know the subject better than ANYONE. The subject is you. Speak from the heart. Tell your story. Be the narrator to your life. Anyone proofreading should do so, looking for grammar and flow not necessarily for content.

## Things to DO:

- Narrow your focus and keep it personal
- Prove a single point or thesis
- Try having someone read just the introduction to see what they think the rest of your essay is about
- Prove your point with specific information
- Use vivid and specific facts, events, quotations, and reasons
- Proofread, proofread, proofread!
- Don't state a point, develop it
- If writing a personal narrative, tell your story - not your biography

## Things to AVOID:

- Don't tell the reader things they already know
- They know their school is great, tell them something new that only you can say
- Don't write a resume
- Admissions can find a list of your accomplishments elsewhere, leave them out
- Don't use 50 words when five will do
- Typos and errors can be interpreted as careless or just bad writing



## College Application - The Essay

## Key Points That Admission Offices Look For:

- A command of the basics of good writing
- Direct answer to the essay question
- Strong opening paragraph that captures the reader's attention
- A comprehensive argument or narrative - make your point and stick to it
- A style that is comfortable for your and that is appropriate for the subject matter
- Correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling
- Correct data - check your facts, dates, and names
- Succinctness - pay attention to the recommended length

*From The College Board*

- ☑ The essay is your opportunity to put your voice to your application and personalize it. You are more than a test score; more than a transcript. Let that side of you come out.
- ☑ Your essay can tell the reader a lot about you; and most importantly the type of person and student you are. Be confident in your writing just like you should be confident in yourself.
- ☑ Many topics/questions will ask you to discuss a personal experience or someone who has had influence on your life. Do not just provide a narrative.
- ☑ Dive into the story and explain from a personal level. You are the only applicant with that story to tell. Do so in a way that is unique to you. Show why and how are you different from other applicants.
- ☑ Show how you will be a good fit for them as well. You are obviously interested in them, that's why you are applying - so give them a reason to be interested in you. What contribution will you bring to campus?

## College Application - The Interview

Job and college interviews both can be nerve wracking and intimidating. It's not just the case for high school students, trust that adults get nervous too.

It is important to note that everyone gets anxious before an interview. It's ok to be scared. It's ok to be fidgety. It's how you handle the situation that is important.

Being nervous shows you understand the situation. Admissions counselors know this and have talked with hundreds, if not thousands of applicants before you. Heading into an interview, they will take a moment to put you at ease and that the experience is comfortable.

An interview can be described as a mutual "exchange of information" because it provides the applicant with an opportunity to discuss his/her own skills and interests as well as the occasion to gain information about the school for their own purpose as well. With that in mind it is important to come prepared with your own questions.

By asking your own questions, it demonstrates you have put thought and effort into learning about campus. You are showing a certain level of investment and interest in being a student there.

Final point, parents should NOT go in the interview room until clearly invited. This is the student's time to shine.

#### Questions You May be Asked (and why)

- ☑ What will you contribute to this college? (This is often an icebreaker. Stay focused on the connections you have made to the school.)
- ☑ What is the most difficult situation you have faced? How did you handle it? (These are designed to understand your personality and work ethic)
- ☑ What courses have you enjoyed the most? (Another icebreaker but designed to understand your work ethic/style.)
- ☑ Which of your activities has been the most rewarding? (Answer with excitement and enthusiasm.)
- ☑ Why do you want to attend this college? (Show that you have put some thought and research into the job/college.)
- ☑ Are your grades an accurate reflection of your ability? (Looking into your effort and work ethic.)

**Be on time.**

**A little early is ok.  
A little late is not.**

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**There IS a  
difference between  
"cocky" and  
confident.**

—

**Take time to think  
about the  
interview scene,  
what you might be  
asked, and what  
your answers might  
be.**

—

**Be careful that you  
do not talk too  
much. Answer the  
question with clear,  
concise language.  
Nothing more.**

—

**"Thank you" notes  
go a long way to  
making a good  
impression.**

## College Application - The Interview

## Tips For Your Interview

## DON'T

- Be late
- Memorize speeches
- Chew gum
- Use your phone
- Swear or use too much slang
- Be arrogant or act as if you are better than everyone else
- Lie
- Respond with only "yes" or "no"
- Be rude to the receptionist
- Bring a parent into the interview
- Refuse an interview

## DO

- Be on time (be early but not too early)
- Be gracious and polite
- Have a firm and confident handshake
- Answer questions honestly and from a personal perspective
- Send a thank you note afterward
- Turn your phone off
- Be confident in yourself and who you are
- Be prepared with questions
- Remember to send a "Thank You" note!



Your interview is an opportunity to be singled out by an admissions office or employer. It is your chance to have the school or company focus on nothing else but you. The interview will play a deciding factor in making a decision between two applicants who might otherwise be very similar.

## Testing Resources

*Standardized tests ..... UGGH! But can set you apart.*

### Points of Interest and Things to Know:

**Do NOT miss registration deadlines!**

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**Students often see different results due to different test designs.**

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**Do not underestimate the potential of test prep books and online resources.**

—

**Be sure to carve out time for your own test prep.**

—

**Know the difference between "studying" and "cramming."**

Depending on your post-secondary goals, you are likely to need some form of placement testing:

SAT - Scholastic Aptitude Test - Used to to determine academic level and college readiness.

ACT - Identical use as SAT, different test design

Accuplacer - Through the College Board, but used by numerous colleges for placement testing

SAT Subject Tests - Like the SAT, except focus on one subject. Specific schools, or specific majors may require one or more of an identified subject.

ASVAB - Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery



If you are a junior or senior who is considering going to college after graduation you should be taking either the SAT or the ACT college entrance exam. While both tests are accepted at every school you will be looking at, the SAT is a more popular test in this region of the country. There are differences in the design of each test and you may find that you score better on one or the other. You should consider and investigate both tests to see which one you are more comfortable with.

## Taking the Test

These tests are designed to be challenging, don't think that you can jump right in and perform well. You are expected to be prepared and ready. After all the work, be sure to go into the test rested and organized. Keep these points in mind.

You'll need to bring the following items:

- Photo ID
- If a College Board test, you will need your entry ticket
- Sharpened pencils and an eraser
- A calculator with fresh batteries (if permitted)

Get a good night's sleep the night before the test.

### The morning of the test:

- Eat breakfast. You'll be at the test center for a few hours and you're likely to get hungry.
- Bring snacks. During one of the breaks, you can eat or drink as permitted.
- Leave your cell phone at home. It could cost you your scores! If you are seen using a cell phone or other prohibited electronic device while in the test center, or if the device makes a noise or vibrates, you may be dismissed immediately, your scores may be canceled, and the device confiscated. This policy also applies to any other prohibited digital and/or electronic device such as Blackberry, pager, PDA, camera, or other photographic equipment, or a separate timer of any kind.

### During the test:

- Use breaks to eat or drink any snacks you may have brought with you. You will have several breaks during the testing time. Use them to relax and stay focused.
- Work only on the section you are supposed to be working on. You are not allowed to go back to a section or test once it has ended. You also cannot start the next section or test if you finish early.
- Do easier questions first. Know how each test is scored in terms of correct answers, wrong answers, and unanswered questions.
- Use all of your time. Students around you may close up their test books and rest their heads on their desks; but you know better. Go back to review problems you weren't quite sure about. Or, if you skipped any hard problems, use the time to try to work them out.



## Scholarship Search

*Can be more stressful than the college application, but there is help.*

### Points of Interest and Things to Know:

**Do NOT miss deadlines!**

—

**Start your search process as early as possible.**

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**You are encouraged to submit your FAFSA as early as possible based on estimated tax returns, and update later.**

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**Save Save Save**

—

**Apply for as many scholarships as possible.**

—

**Save all PIN numbers and passwords**

Even if you don't think you can afford college, please be sure to apply anyway. Scholarship and financial aid monies may become available but if you have not even applied to college in the first place, that money will not help you. Applying to college is the first step.

It is important to note that scholarship and financial aid awards can be used at a variety of institutions, not just traditional four-year colleges. If your goals include trade or technical colleges, scholarships can help you achieve those goals as well.

### Definitions

**Financial Aid** – Money awarded based on need and availability of funds.

**Scholarship** – Money awarded based on a set of specified criteria (academic, need, involvement). Does not need to be repaid.

**Grant** – Money awarded usually based on need or merit. Does not have to be repaid.

**Loan** – Money borrowed from an organization such as a bank or financial institution. Must be repaid, possibly with interest.

**Work Study** – Money awarded in the form of part-time work to be performed on campus.

**FAFSA** – (Free Application For Federal Student Aid) Application that each student must fill out to be eligible for federal financial aid.

Many colleges use this information in their awarding process as well.

**CSS Profile** – Form used by colleges and scholarship organizations to assist in awarding non-federal student aid funds. (coordinated through the College Board)

**Expected Family Contribution (EFC)** – Based on your filed tax returns, the number used to determine your aid eligibility.

**There are countless awards out there and many target a small applicant pool. Don't get discouraged about scholarships you may not be eligible for.**

### Filling out the FAFSA:

In an effort to provide important information to students and parents, the US Dept. of Education has moved this step up to October 1. The information used on the FAFSA will be pulled from your previous two year's tax returns (referred to as "prior-prior year"). Steps to applying for federal financial aid:

1. You will first need an ID. (An FSA ID is a username and password that you must use to log in to certain U.S. Department of Education websites. Your FSA ID identifies you as someone who has the right to access your own personal information on DoE websites such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.)
2. Go to **[www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov)** and click "FSA ID" at the very top of the page. This will open a new window with **[www.studentaid.ed.gov](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov)**
3. Click "create an FSA ID Now." This will open a window where you can begin to create an account and ID to be used on your FAFSA form.
4. Go to [fafsa.gov](http://fafsa.gov) and click "Start a New FAFSA"
5. You will need the tax return information for the previous two years

### Quick Resources:

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education in the U.S. and other nations. This web page provides comprehensive college search and financial information: **[www.nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/](http://www.nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/)**

College Affordability and Transparency Center: **[www.collegecost.ed.gov](http://www.collegecost.ed.gov)**  
Compare and investigate college costs, use Net Price Calculators, and search college score cards.

### Points of Interest and Things to Know:

**The IRS Data Retrieval tool can be used to pull your tax returns right into your FAFSA application. By using this tool, you are ensured that your application will use the most recent and accurate federal tax information.**

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**Colleges are required to post a Net Price Calculator on their web site.**