

iii RISLA
College Planning Center



THE
BIG GUIDE

FOR ALL YOUR COLLEGE PLANNING NEEDS

RISLA College Planning Center

FREE TOOLS & RESOURCES TO HELP STUDENTS AND PARENTS PREPARE FOR COLLEGE

- ▶ Conducting college searches
- ▶ College admission process
- ▶ Financial aid procedures & policies
- ▶ Completing the FAFSA
- ▶ Financial aid packages
- ▶ Researching college scholarships
- ▶ Financial aid for students
- ▶ Assistance with the Common App
- ▶ Seminars & workshops at high schools
- ▶ Assistance available in Spanish

Schedule your appointment online at collegeplanningcenter.org

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College Planning Timeline

START

FRESHMAN YEAR

BUILD STRONG ACADEMIC & EXTRACURRICULAR SKILLS

Freshman year is about getting involved in activities, finding an academic path, dabbling in career planning, and starting a resume.

SOPHOMORE YEAR

START RESEARCHING OPTIONS FOR COLLEGE

Sophomore year is time to build upon academic skills, delve further into activities, which should include community service and volunteerism, and start researching colleges.

ASK QUESTIONS

Attend information sessions at school or visit the College Planning Center or an open house event.

JUNIOR YEAR

TIME TO GET SERIOUS

Students have had two years to explore and discover themselves. Now, college is right around the corner. It's time to start preparing.

SEPTEMBER

Make appointments with college reps visiting your high school.

OCTOBER

Take the PSAT/PLAN.

NOVEMBER

Start to compile a college list, thinking about academics, affordability, location, size, etc.
Attend College Planning events at your school.

DECEMBER

Get excited – your PSAT scores will arrive soon!
Review midyear grades.

JANUARY

Narrow down the list of factors important to you in your college search.

FEBRUARY

Students should identify teachers to ask for recommendation letters. Choose teachers that know you and your work well.

MARCH

Request info from colleges that interest you. Plan to **visit colleges** during spring break. Go online to book a tour!

APRIL

Take the advanced placement exams and **SAT/ACT** if you have not already done so. Use Khan Academy to help prepare.

MAY

Register for the June SAT. Meanwhile, continue to evaluate colleges on your list.

JUNE

Before summer break, don't forget to **ask two teachers to write you a letter of recommendation**. Provide them with your resume for reference.

Consider enrolling in an academic course at a local college, pursuing a summer school program, or volunteering. If you work over the summer, save money for college.

Take virtual tours.
Register for the Common Application at **commonapp.org**.
Create an FSA ID at **studentaid.gov**.

JULY/AUGUST

Polish your resume. Assemble writing samples, portfolios or audition videos, if needed. Begin to work on your college essay.

Consider volunteering or job shadowing to explore careers.

Contact coaches at colleges if you are interested in participating in athletics or think you may be able to receive an athletic scholarship.

SENIOR YEAR

IT CAME FAST, DIDN'T IT?

It wasn't so long ago college seemed like a far off dream. Now it is here, right in front of you, and it is time to get busy and start sending in your applications.

Finalize your college list. Make sure there's both an academic and financial fit school on your list.

SEPTEMBER

Didn't ask for **recommendation letters** last year? Now is the time!

Create an **FSA ID** for both student and parent if you haven't done so yet. (see page **26**)

Meet with school counselor to discuss your plan. Keep your parents in the loop. Start preparing any early admission applications.

OCTOBER

You can submit a FAFSA beginning October 1st. Prior to that, you can prepare by getting your FSA ID at **studentaid.gov**.

Also time to submit CSS Profile, if required.

Set aside plenty of time to **draft, edit, and re-write your college essay**.

If necessary, register for the December-January SAT tests.

Use a calendar to keep track of admission and financial aid deadlines.

Send in early decision and early action applications by the deadlines. Begin to send in regular admission applications. Keep copies of everything!

NOVEMBER

Check with your school counseling office weekly for new scholarship opportunities.

Continue submitting applications. Make sure your test scores will be sent to colleges you are applying to.

Consider attending a financial aid night, usually sponsored by your high school.

If you are applying to URI and wish to be considered for the Merit Scholarship, your admission application must be received by Dec 1. If you're applying to RIC and wish to be considered for the Presidential Scholarship, your admission application must be received by Dec 15.

DECEMBER

Make sure to send your test scores to desired colleges if applying regular decision.

JANUARY

Ask your high school to send transcripts of your first semester grades to your colleges.

If you applied for early decision, you should have an answer by now. Check admissions portals.

Your college applications should be submitted prior to winter vacation.

FEBRUARY

If you have not decided on a favorite school, arrange a second visit to those in which you are most interested. Talk to students and faculty and sit in on classes.

MARCH

Monitor your applications to make sure that all materials are sent and received on time.

Create an account at **rischolarships.org** to search for outside scholarships and grants.

Review your financial aid award letters with your parents. Be sure that you understand the terms and conditions that apply to each type of aid offered. Contact the College Planning Center for help.

APRIL

Determine how much of the total cost is covered by your financial aid package. When planning for college costs, it is always very helpful to create a four-year student expense budget.

APRIL

Decide on the college that you will attend and send in your tuition deposit. Inform other colleges that accepted you of your enrollment decision. Other students will want your spot! Be sure to respond by May 1.

If your first choice college places you on the waiting list, do not lose all hope. Contact the college admission office to let them know you are still very interested and keep the college updated on your activities.

If you want to live on campus, complete a housing/meal plan application and send it along with any necessary deposits.

MAY

Work with your parents to establish a budget for your tuition, books, supplies and living expenses. Get your deposit in by May 1.

JUNE

Carefully read anything you receive from your college, especially a request for additional info. Check your email regularly.

Request that your high school sends a copy of your final transcript to the college you will attend. Notify the college financial aid office of any private grants or scholarships that you will be receiving. Find out when payment for tuition, room, board, etc. will be due

and start thinking about ways to cover additional costs.

Apply for a summer job or consider volunteering at a community service agency. Plan to save a portion of your earnings for college.

JULY

You can expect to receive your bill from the college in the early part of this month. If you have a balance due, make arrangements to make payment by the due date. Contact the College Planning Center for help with payment/financing options.

Gather all the stuff that you think you will need for your dorm room. Pack about half because that is usually what will fit! If possible, meet your roommates.

AUGUST

Contact your roommate to prevent duplication of major room items (refrigerator, TV, area rug, etc.).

Start looking forward to a great college experience!

YOU
MADE
IT

High School RESUMES

Do you need to showcase your education, jobs, skills, activities, and awards? That's where a resume comes in! Use your resume to apply for jobs and provide it to teachers and others who will be writing letters of recommendation for you.

DO

- ▶ List all of the jobs, activities, projects, awards, and community service work you've been involved in since freshman year.
- ▶ Type it! Make sure the format is easy to read and follow.
- ▶ Ensure your best qualities show up at a glance.
- ▶ List your skills, such as computer, language, artistic, etc.
- ▶ Proofread!
- ▶ Have someone you trust look it over.
- ▶ Update it frequently.
- ▶ Give it a KISS! (Keep It Short & Simple)
- ▶ Look at samples online to find what works best for you.

DON'T

- ▶ Forget the obvious. Remember to include your name and contact information.
- ▶ Ever make anything up.
- ▶ Worry if it is short. Resumes are typically only one page, even for professionals.
- ▶ Think grammar and spelling don't matter.
- ▶ Let it get stale.
- ▶ Use too many fonts and/or colors, as it can make it difficult to read.

TIP:
Although the Common Application has an activity section that includes this info, you should also create a resume as some schools recommend it. Also, it is a good habit to get into.

TWO EXAMPLE RESUME FORMATS

MARY SMART	VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE
	CRANSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY September 2024 - present Tutored ESL students in an after school program Conducted story hour to elementary students at library camp
	PROVIDENCE ANIMAL RESCUE LEAGUE December 2024 - June 2025 Maintained cleanliness of animal cages Ensured animals were receiving proper care by walking, feeding and grooming them daily
CONTACT 123-456-7890 1234 Address City, Postal website	SCHOOL ACTIVITIES
	STUDENTS AGAINST DESTRUCTIVE DECISIONS (SADD) 2024 - present Presented on the importance of making positive decisions at numerous high school assemblies Attended events at the state house and reported to the assembly the facts on teenage alcohol abuse
EDUCATION Providence High School Class of 2026	DRAMA CLUB 2024 - 2026 Worked on 16 stage productions including: The Crucible, Twelfth Night, and Jersey Boys Worked the 2024 and 2025 Rhode Island Youth Festival as an actor, stage crew, and technical crew member
SKILLS	SOCCER TEAM 2023 - 2025 Starting right wing for three years.
SPANISH	ACHIEVEMENTS
HTML/CSS	Ensemble award in the State Drama Festival 2025
WRITING	Leading scorer on the soccer team with 13 goals 2025

MARY SMART 56 Long Street, Providence, RI 02903 401-555-5555 msmart@education.edu	
Education • Class of 2026, Providence High School	
Volunteer Experience	
Cranston Public Library	September 2024 - present • Tutored ESL students in an after school program • Conducted story hour to elementary students at library camp
Providence Animal Rescue League	December 2024 - June 2025 • Maintained cleanliness of animal cages • Ensured animals were receiving proper care by walking, feeding and grooming them daily
School Activities	
Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD)	2024 - present • Presented on the importance of making positive decisions at numerous high school assemblies • Attended events at the state house and reported to the assembly the facts on teenage alcohol abuse
Drama Club	2024 - 2026 • Worked on 16 stage productions including: The Crucible, Twelfth Night, and Jersey Boys • Worked the 2024 and 2025 Rhode Island Youth Festival as an actor, stage crew, and technical crew member
Soccer team	2023 - 2025 • Starting right wing for three years.
Achievements	
Ensemble award in the State Drama Festival	2025
Leading scorer on the soccer team with 13 goals	2025

Developing

A COLLEGE LIST

YOUR COLLEGE LIST

Developing a list of colleges to apply to is no easy task. Each school must address all of the characteristics you are looking for and you should be happy to attend any college on your list. Creating a college list is a big research project, but one worth your investment in time.

6

5-10

Number of schools you should apply to

REACH

(1-2)

Your credentials may not be as good as the typical student's or the school has a low acceptance rate, making it hard for any student to be accepted. Keep the number of reach schools on your list to a minimum.

TARGET

(2-4)

Your credentials are competitive and you have at least a 50/50 chance of admission. Make sure you are confident you will like these schools just as much as the schools on your reach list.

LIKELY

(2-4)

Your credentials are highly competitive and it's very likely you'll be admitted. It's extremely important to find several of these schools where you truly believe you'll be happy. Make sure at least one is affordable.

Collegeboard.org can help you see what each school's average student looks like. If you are within that range, it is "target." If you are below, it may be more of a reach. If above, a likely.

TIPS ON NARROWING CHOICES

- College is expensive. At schools where your credentials are better than the typical student's, you may be eligible for merit-based scholarships.
- "Good value" schools are those that provide a good education for the price.
- Don't completely rule out higher priced colleges. Use the "Net Price Calculator" on the college's website to first get an idea of what that college would cost a family like yours.

Looking for more tips on developing a college list? Follow our blog at blog.risla.com for more information!

CONSIDERATIONS

What's important to you in your college search? Review the below factors and circle your priorities to help you narrow your list of colleges.



ACADEMICS

- Curriculum requirements
- Degrees offered
- Special programs – study abroad, college exchange, accelerated, honors
- Teaching – by professors, grad students
- Availability of courses – registration procedures



FACILITIES

- Dorms – options, programming, roommate selection, amenities
- Dining – menu choices, quality of food
- Gym – access and availability, quality and condition
- Library – computer access, availability of staff, volume of books
- Health facilities – medical, counseling, dental, hospital



STATISTICS

- Size
 - Small – under 2,000 students
 - Medium – under 5,000 students
 - Large – more than 5,000 students
- Graduation rate
- Average class size
- Student-to-teacher ratio
- % of students admitted
- Average GPA/SAT of students



TYPE

- Public or private
- 2-year or 4-year
- Calendar – semesters, trimesters
- All women
- Historically black
- Hispanic serving
- Religious



CAREER PLANNING

- Career center
- Advisor
- Internships
- Job placement
- Grad school counseling



COST & LOCATION

- How much aid does the typical student receive?
- What is an affordable “net” price for your family?
- Distance from home
- Urban, suburban, or rural



CAMPUS LIFE

- Diversity of student body
- Greek system
- Safety of campus
- Religious services



EXTRACURRICULARS

- Athletic programs
- Arts, music, theatre
- Clubs & organizations
- Intramurals
- Student government
- Community service

College Application

C H E C K L I S T

There is more to applying to college than just sending in an application. College essays, letters of recommendation, and standardized tests are required for admission to most colleges. Understanding college application requirements early on will help you stay organized and avoid a last minute rush.

- ☐ **College list.** Narrow down your list of schools (we recommend 5-10). Make sure there is at least one likely school on your list. "Likely" means you know you will get accepted and can afford to attend regardless of the financial aid package you receive.
- ☐ **Application.** Make note of the following:
 - Do they accept the Common Application or do they have their own?
 - Are there additional supplements or essays?
 - How many recommendation letters do you need?
 - What is the application fee?
- ☐ **Resume.** Create a resume. This can be used in the activity portion of the application as well as for any job interviews.
- ☐ **Recommendation letters.** Get recommendation letters. Find out the policy at your high school but make sure you ask teachers in advance if you would like for them to write you a recommendation letter. It is also a good idea to give them a copy of your resume/activity sheet so they can personalize the letter for you.
- ☐ **Standardized test scores. Know Test Policy.** Request your SAT/ACT scores be sent to the schools you are applying to via collegeboard.org or actstudent.org. If a school is a "test optional" school, you do not need to send these scores but can do so if you feel it will help your application.
- ☐ **Essays.** Complete your college essays, remembering to use your unique voice.
- ☐ **Transcripts.** Transcripts will be needed for each application. This is typically handled through your school counseling department. Check with them on your school's policy.
- ☐ **Application fee/fee waiver.** Without sending in your application fee or fee waiver, your application will not be processed by the college/university. Make sure you send it!
- ☐ **Deadlines!** Make sure you meet all deadlines!

NOTE: Colleges look favorably on "Demonstrated Interest": College interview, college visits, attending open houses, etc.

SAT vs. ACT

The American College Testing (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) are standardized tests that help colleges assess you in comparison to other applicants. But how do you know which test you should take? Most colleges will let you know if they require one test or the other, so be careful to review application requirements at specific schools. Some students find that one test helps show their strengths (or weaknesses) more than the other test. Which test is best for you?

	ACT	SAT
Content	ENGLISH Includes punctuation, grammar & usage, and sentence structure. 75 questions in 45 minutes. MATH Includes pre-algebra, algebra, geometry, and trigonometry. 60 questions in 60 minutes. READING Includes readings based on four topics: social studies, natural science, prose fiction, and humanities. 40 questions in 35 minutes. SCIENCE Measures interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, and problem-solving skills required in the natural sciences. 40 questions in 35 minutes. WRITING Optional - 40 minute essay measuring writing skills.	MATH With calculator: 55 minutes No calculator: 25 minutes Delves into algebra, geometry, trigonometry, problem solving & data analysis, and advanced math. Max score is 800. 58 questions, 80 minutes. EVIDENCE-BASED READING & WRITING This section is separated into two tests. Writing & Language - Read passages, find mistakes and weaknesses, and answer questions about how to fix them. 44 questions, 35 minutes. Reading - Multiple choice questions based on reading passages. 52 multiple choice questions, 65 minutes. ESSAY The Essay is only available in states where it's required as part of SAT School Day administrations. Students scheduled to take the SAT on a school day should check with their school about whether the Essay will be included.
Essay	Optional. But required by some schools.	No
Scores	Each section score ranges from 1-36. Your ACT score is the average from all sections.	Each section is scored on a scale of 200-800. Your total test score can be a max of 1600.
Penalty for incorrect answers	No	No
College score sharing	If you take the test multiple times, you can choose which scores to send to your colleges.	If you take the test multiple times, you can choose which scores to send to your colleges.
Question difficulty	Question difficulty is random.	Questions become more difficult as you progress within each section of the test.
Popularity	Tends to be more popular with public schools and schools in the Midwest and South.	Tends to be more popular with private schools and schools on the East and West coasts.
When to take the test	Offered 7 times per year: January or February, March or April, June, September, October, November, and December.	Offered 7 times per year: January, March, May, June, October, November, and December.
Registration	actstudent.org	sat.collegeboard.org

Types of Colleges

FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES

Four-year colleges award bachelor's degrees upon completion. Some four-year schools are liberal arts colleges, which tend to focus on undergraduate education, while others are universities, which offer graduate, doctoral, and professional degrees in addition to undergraduate degrees. Certain four-year colleges focus on specialized studies, for example in art, music, agriculture, or religion. A bachelor's degree is necessary if you are considering pursuing an advanced degree such as a master's degree, Ph.D. or professional degree such as a J.D. (for lawyers) or an M.D. (for doctors).

Four-year colleges may be public or private. Certain colleges may be single sex, have a religious affiliation, or are considered a historically black college or Hispanic serving institution. The type of school you choose to attend depends on your individual preferences and goals.

COMMUNITY/JUNIOR COLLEGES

Community and junior colleges offer associates degrees or certificates in two years and are often much more affordable than four-year schools. Many community colleges offer programs that teach you a specific skill to prepare you for a job immediately upon graduation. Other programs prepare graduates to transfer to a four-year college to pursue a bachelor's degree. If you are undecided on your major or want to save some money, you may want to consider pursuing your first two years at a junior/community college.

Both Rhode Island and Massachusetts offer free tuition programs for resident eligible students.

TRADE SCHOOL/TECHNICAL

Entering a program at a trade school could lead to a certificate, license, or degree, depending upon the school and program. Technical colleges and trade schools teach skills that prepare you for a specific career, such as computer technology, culinary studies, cosmetology, automotive repair, medical assistance, paralegal studies, etc. The length of time it will take you to complete your program depends on what you study but can range from less than one year to several years.

PRIVATE VS. PUBLIC

Public colleges, which receive funds from the state government, tend to have a lower sticker price, especially for in-state residents. However, private colleges may have more funds available for financial aid. You shouldn't rule out a school just because it is private or public. Instead, pay attention to whether or not it is the right fit for you and it has the potential to meet your personal and financial needs.

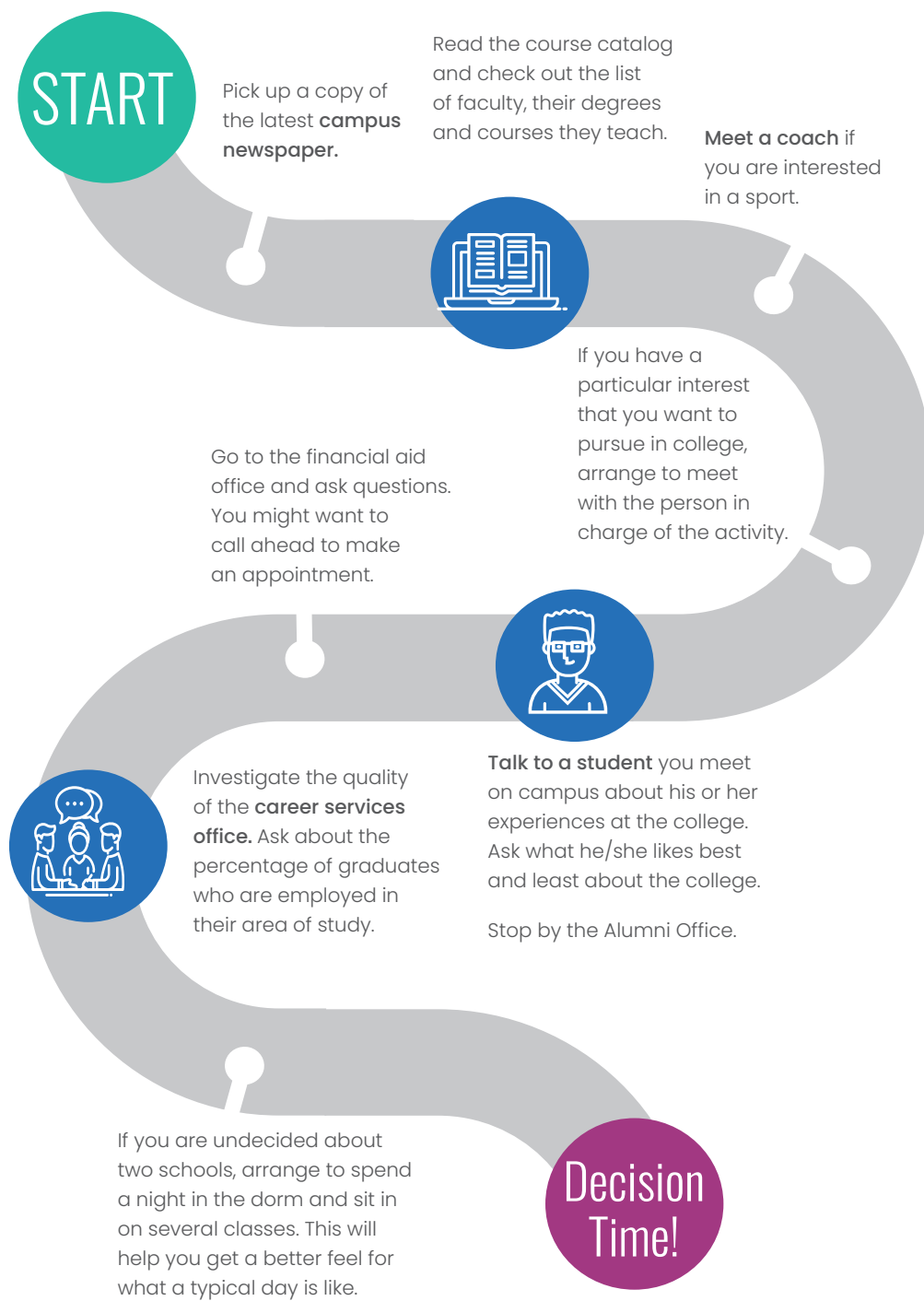
College Fair Tips

- Make a list of questions to ask the college representatives.
- Bring student information labels with your name and address on them to save time filling out college information cards.
- Take notes when talking to college representatives.
- Pass out copies of your high school resume.
- Get business cards from the representatives.
- Follow up once the fair is over.

Campus Visits

TOURS & INTERVIEWS

PLACES TO STOP ON CAMPUS



Questions to Ask

- How large are your classes?
- What is the student to faculty ratio?
- What is the average GPA/SAT score?
- Who teaches the courses (graduate assistants or professors?)
- Does the school have a core curriculum? How restrictive is it?
- How adequate is the library? Are you able to get the books you need when you want them?
- When do you have to declare your major? What are the most popular majors?
- What percentage of students get a job in their field after graduation?
- Is housing guaranteed? How are housing options chosen? Do many students live off campus?
- Can you tell me about the (art, history, education, etc.) department?
- What impact does Greek life have here? Athletics?
- What do you like best about your experience here?
- Which kinds of students do you think are happiest here? Which ones are the least happy?
- What do you think are the greatest challenges of this college? What do students complain about?
- (Ask a student this one) If you could attend another college now, where would you go? Why?

College Admission Interview

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Mary Smart

- ☐ How do you like your high school? What has been the most positive experience you have had? The most negative? What would you change about your high school?
- ☐ What is your role in the school community? What would your teachers say about you as a person? As a student?
- ☐ What is the most significant contribution you have made to your school?
- ☐ What are you looking for in a college? How did you become interested in this college/university?
- ☐ What are some of your goals for the future? Personal? Professional?
- ☐ Tell me about a particular class or assignment in which you found yourself most intellectually stimulated.
- ☐ What is your reason for participating in athletics (or student government, or the newspaper, etc.)? What are the benefits?
- ☐ How and in what ways do you expect, plan and hope to transfer your secondary school contributions, achievements and activities to the college level?
- ☐ What has been your favorite subject in high school? Why?
- ☐ What might you study in college?
- ☐ What events, if any, would you deem critical in your life thus far? Who has most influenced you?
- ☐ How have you spent your summers?
- ☐ How would you describe yourself as a person?
- ☐ Have you ever thought of not going to college? What would you do?
- ☐ How do you spend your free time?
- ☐ Why do you think you are a good match for this college?
- ☐ Many qualified students apply to our school. What characteristics single you out from others?
- ☐ Do you have any questions? (Always ask questions!)

College Admission Types

Early Action

Early Action is an admission plan that allows a student to submit his or her application by the college's deadline and receive an early admission decision. The Early Action student, if accepted, is not automatically bound to enroll.

Students accepted under Early Action are not required to notify the college of their enrollment intentions until May 1. Check with each specific college to see if you can apply Early Action to more than one college with no penalty. (SAT I, SAT II, and ACT tests should be taken in the spring of the junior year if considering this option.)

Regular Admission

The college has a specific deadline date for Regular Admission. Generally, the college will also have a time frame for notification of admission decisions sometime after the application deadline.

For example, the application deadline may be December 15 and notification may be March 31 with an acceptance of admission offer by May 1.

Wait List

Wait List is a term used by institutions to describe a process by which the institution does not initially offer or deny admission, but extends to a candidate the possibility of admission in the future.

Early Decision

Early Decision is an early application process that **binds you** to attend the school if you are accepted. The student and a parent must sign an agreement that, if accepted, the student will attend unless the aid award is inadequate. The colleges share early decision lists, so if accepted, you must withdraw all other applications. Students not admitted under Early Decision are usually not reconsidered with the regular decision applicants. (SAT I, SAT II, and ACT tests should be taken in the spring of the junior year if considering this option.)

Restrictive Early Action

Restrictive Early Action is a program for students who know at the time of application that this is their first choice school. Generally, Restrictive Early Action differs from Early Decision in the following ways:

- Restrictive Early Action programs usually provide time for families to consider financial aid awards from multiple schools before making a final commitment to enroll.
- Applicants agree not to apply to any other school under an Early Action, Restrictive Early Action, Early Decision, or Early Notification program.

Rolling Admission

Rolling Admission is a procedure whereby a college accepts or rejects a student shortly after the student's application folder is complete. Many colleges use this system in selecting their incoming freshman class.

Deferred Enrollment

Many colleges allow an accepted candidate to defer enrollment for a year if he/she plans to work, travel, perform military service or develop an independent study program. Generally, a student may not defer in order to become a full-time student at another institution.

Admission policies vary from school to school. Remember to consult with individual institutions for specific admission policies.

Writing Your College Essay

TIPS AND TRICKS

GETTING STARTED

- 1 Make sure you answer the essay question.
- 2 Write as if you are brainstorming and then go back to revise and edit.
- 3 Think about what you are going to write about for as much time as you actually spend writing.
- 4 If you get stuck, brainstorm with someone you are close with.
- 5 Don't ask yourself, "What should I write about?" Instead ask, "What are they asking and how can I best tell them about me?" Have someone read your essay to see if your point comes across.

Proofread & Edit

You may have a beautifully crafted essay, but if you don't take the time to proofread, your essay may be overlooked and end up in the rejection pile. Spelling errors are unacceptable. Careful proofreading shows the reader you care. Before you send it, have someone you trust read it and provide feedback.

Be Clear, Concise & Direct

Be clear about the theme of your essay from the first paragraph. Grab the reader's attention with a compelling opening sentence. Keep your essay around 500 words, unless otherwise specified.

Make Your Story Unique

Many students write about similar topics in their college essay: family; loss; vacations; sports; career goals. Your job is to make your essay unique. One of the best ways to do this is to use imagery and sensory details. Be creative.

Choose a Theme

Think about your best personal trait, your interests, values and goals. Focus on one of these qualities and make it the theme of your essay. For example, your best trait might be determination, creativity, or compassion. Tell a story that makes that trait clear to the reader. Provide evidence by citing specific instances from your life.

Type Your Essay

Type your essay in a separate document first and then copy and paste into the Common Application or the school's application.

Use Your Voice

The college essay may be your only opportunity to show your personality to the admission office. Avoid writing it like a research paper. Let your personal voice shine through.

Accentuate the Positive

Even if you are writing about a painful experience, focus on what you learned from it and how it changed you for the better.

College Essay

SAMPLE

I have a passion for writing. It started when I was little and has continued to evolve throughout every stage of my life. I believe the seed was first planted when my mother started reading to me. She would make the stories come to life with great drama or silly voices and I hung on to every word. We would construct a reading fort out of couch cushions or hang a sheet over the table and pretend we were in a secret castle where we read in whispers so as not to disturb the sleeping giant guarding the door.

I loved the sound of the words and couldn't wait to write them. I remember in elementary school, we would make homemade cards for our parents to mark a special occasion or holiday. While all the other kids fought over stickers and glitter glue to decorate their cards, I was busy writing an essay about the joys of the season and my love of family. Even when I was sent to my room for what I can only imagine was a well-deserved "Time Out", I would make good use of my solitary confinement by writing a reflection on the great injustice that was cast upon me when the altercation in question was clearly my sister's fault. In short, writing became the vessel I used to navigate life. Whether the seas were calm under sun-filled skies or raging under dark, thunder-filled clouds, writing would guide me safely home. It has been the one constant thing in my life that I can always turn to, besides my mom.

When you look at my transcripts, you will see a GPA that is more average than scholarly. I make no excuses for the fact that I simply could have done better, tried harder. However, these grades do not define me. Instead they represent a time in my life when I lacked focus and drive, a time when the goal of social inclusion was greater than that of academic excellence, when finding a friend you could really trust far outweighed finding the symbol for sulfuric acid on the periodic table in chemistry. I admit that I had succumbed to the social pressures of high school. I wandered aimlessly in search of my own identity and direction. I felt like I had fallen into a deep hole and finally realized that the only person with the power to pull me up was the very same one that had let me fall...Me. I started writing again and once again it proved to be the beacon of light that guided me in a new direction, setting sail with renewed strength, determination and the personal acknowledgment that while I may not graduate with honors, I will graduate with honor.

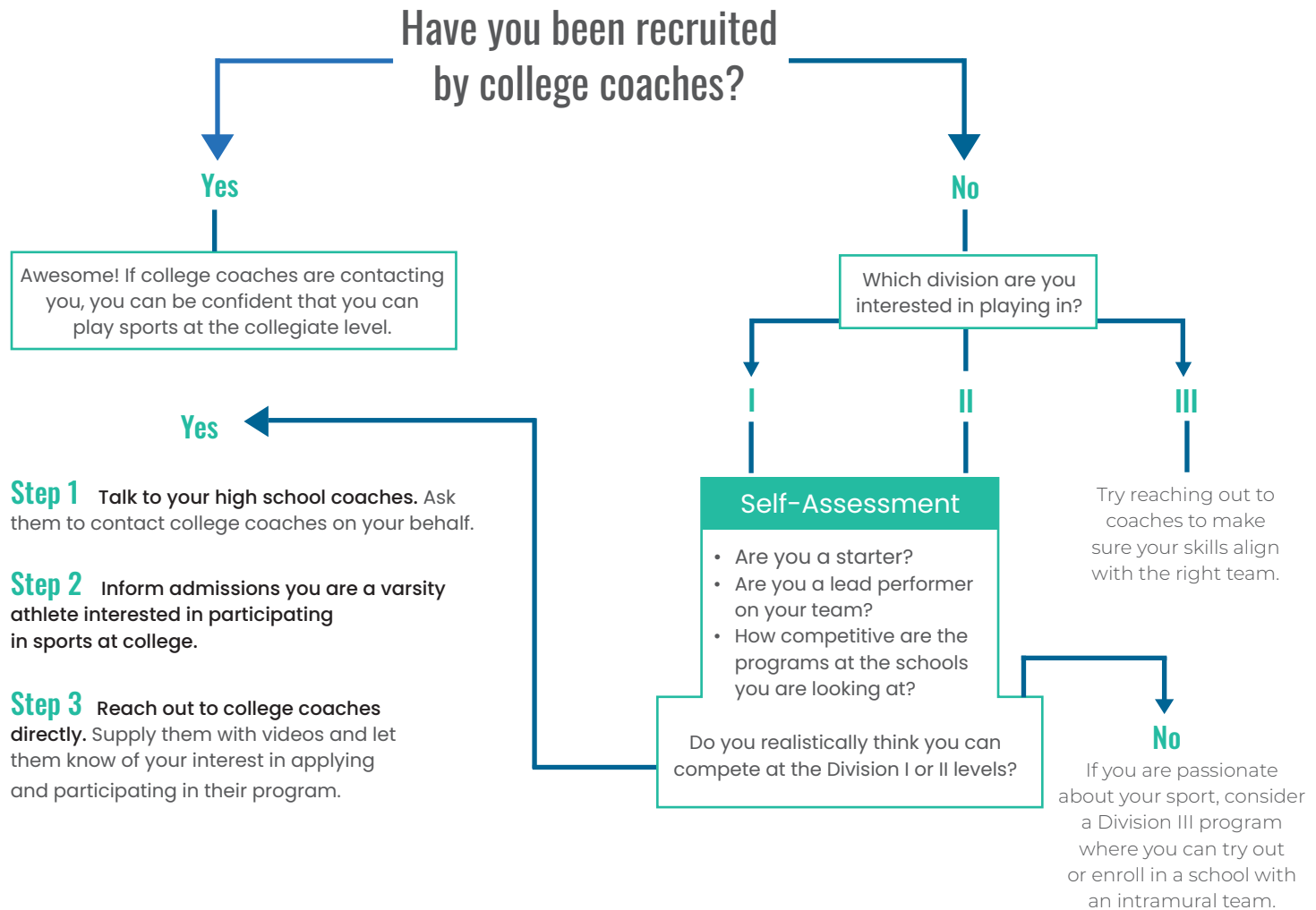
I ask that when you review my academic record you don't rush to judgment and reach for the "Declined" stamp with the impossibly red ink but rather you take a moment to think about what I have shared with you. I want to study communications in all forms. I want to challenge my reading level and develop my writing style. Who knows, someday when I'm published I'll be able to reflect on the education I received at Keene and credit my time there as the stepping stone to my wildly successful literary career.

Until then, what I know for sure is...I have a passion for writing.

College Athletics

PROCESS & ELIGIBILITY

16



NCAA ELIGIBILITY CENTER

Registering at the NCAA Eligibility Center should be started at the beginning of your junior year.

The Eligibility Center certifies that you have completed a core of courses that may be different from your high school's graduation requirements, including two years of natural or physical science. Also be aware that the NCAA core requires four years of English. Check with your school counselor if you have any questions or concerns about these requirements.

All students with an interest in division I or II programs, but especially those interested in making official visits (expenses paid) in the fall of their senior year, should register with the Eligibility Center. You can register online at: ncaa.org and follow the links to register to become a student-athlete.

For more information, please visit: ncaa.org.

How to Apply

THE COMMON APPLICATION

To apply to college, you will either have to apply directly to the school or through the Common Application. The Common Application is an online only application that allows you to submit college applications to multiple schools at one time. Not all schools accept the Common Application, but it can reduce the amount of applications you need to complete.

- 1 Go to commonapp.org.
- 2 Click on “Apply Now” and then “Create an Account” to get started.
- 3 Enter your profile, family and education information, as requested.
- 4 Decide if you want to enter your ACT/SAT test scores. Some schools are “test optional.” You will still need to send official scores through the ACT/SAT website if schools require them.
- 5 Enter your activities (clubs, community service, sports, etc.)
- 6 Include your writing sample. See sample essay questions below!
- 7 Under College Search, list all the schools you are thinking of applying to. It is here you will be able to see if they have additional essays or other requirements.
- 8 Submit your application! Pay the fee and wait for responses!

COMMON APPLICATION ESSAY QUESTIONS

The essay demonstrates your ability to write clearly and concisely on a selected topic and helps you distinguish yourself in your own voice. What do you want the readers of your application to know about you apart from courses, grades, and test scores? Choose the option that best helps you answer that question and write an essay of no more than 650 words, using the prompt to inspire and structure your response. Remember: 650 words is your limit, not your goal. Use the full range if you need it, but don't feel obligated to do so. (The application won't accept a response shorter than 250 words.)

- Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- 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?
- Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
- 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?
- Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
- Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging 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.
- 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.

—From commonapp.org, April 2026



Let's Talk About Financial Aid

Financial Aid 101

WHAT IS IT?

A source of money that helps students and parents fund a college education.

Need-based aid: Awarded based on a family's financial need.

Merit-based aid: Awarded for academic achievements and other talents.

SOURCES OF FINANCIAL AID

FEDERAL AID	STATE AID
Awarded through the school after completing the FAFSA. Comes in the form of grants, work-study, and loans.	In RI, awarded directly through the colleges after completing the FAFSA. Comes in the form of grants.
INSTITUTIONAL AID	PRIVATE AID
Usually scholarships and grants awarded through the school financial aid office.	May be provided by local businesses, lenders, community organizations, or religious foundations. Private funding comes in the form of loans, grants, and scholarships. You must secure private funding on your own.

TYPES OF FINANCIAL AID



Gift Aid: Grants & Scholarships

Gift aid does not need to be repaid. As a rule, you always want to maximize grants & scholarships before borrowing. You must submit your financial aid application by the school and state deadlines in order to receive grants or scholarships funded by the federal government, the state government, or the school itself.

Private scholarships are also a form of gift aid. However, private scholarships are not awarded directly through the school. In order to receive this kind of aid, you will need to seek it out on your own. Many private scholarships come from nominations through the school counselor's office. Check in regularly for new opportunities. Also search on the web to find opportunities, primarily focusing on local scholarships which are often less competitive.



Self-Help Aid: Work-Study & Loans

Self-help aid requires an investment from the student. The Federal Work-Study Program provides funding to needy students in exchange for work. Funds are awarded based on need and the school's level of funding.

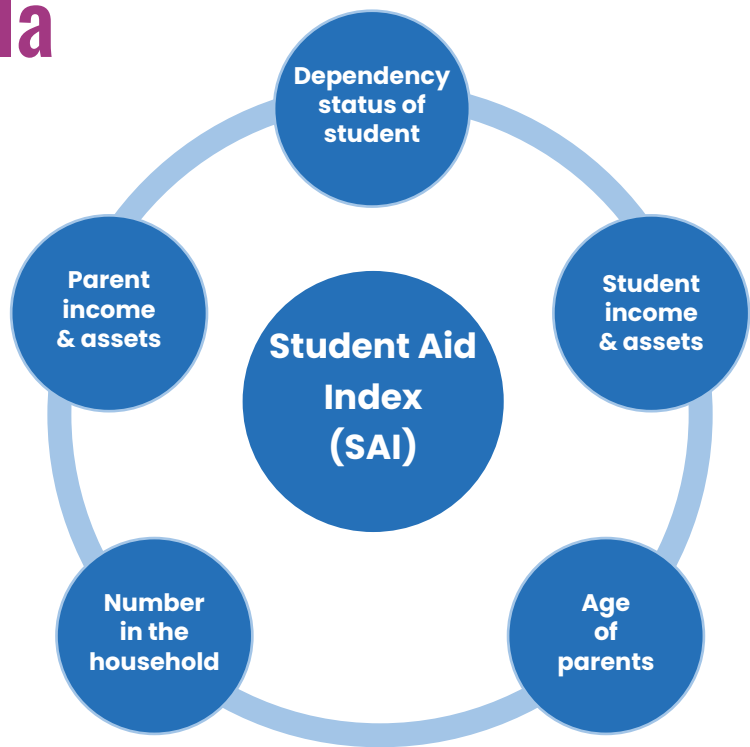
Students participating in the Federal Work-Study Program will earn at least the federal minimum wage. Undergrads are paid at least once a month. Only U.S. citizens and permanent residents are eligible for this program.

Education loans are borrowed money that must be repaid with interest. If you receive a loan, you will need to sign a Promissory Note binding you to the terms of the loan and stating that you agree to repay your loan.

Eligibility Formula

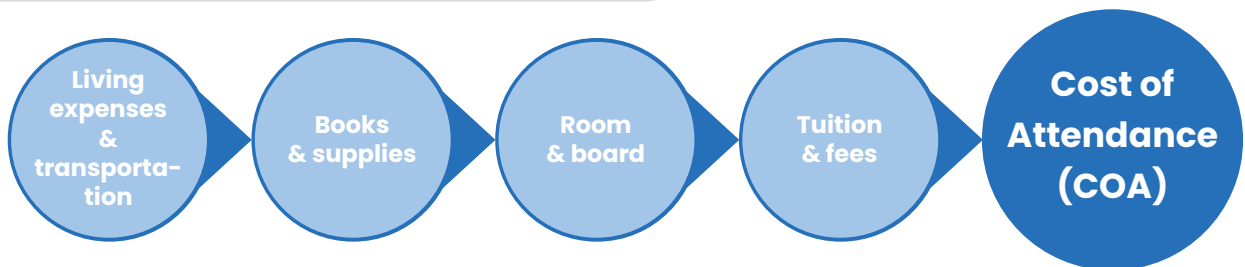
STUDENT AID INDEX

Student Aid Index (SAI) is determined by the government once you submit your FAFSA. SAI is the tool colleges will use to determine your financial need. The following factors are considered when determining your family's SAI.



COST OF ATTENDANCE

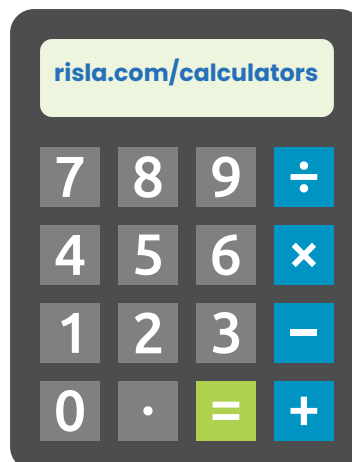
Cost of Attendance (COA) includes direct costs (those on your tuition bill) & indirect costs (such as books, transportation, and living expenses).



SAI CALCULATOR

Use our free online calculator to gain insight into your potential financial aid eligibility and to estimate your family's Student Aid Index (SAI).

Also check out our calculators, to calculate your school costs, estimate how much you should borrow, if borrowing is needed, and how much repayment might be.



NET PRICE CALCULATOR

Look for this tool on each college's financial aid website. This can help you estimate what the cost of college will be at each school for a family like yours.

Grants & Scholarships

GRANTS

Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)

Grant for financially needy undergraduates awarded through the school financial aid office. FSEOGs are awarded to the lowest income undergraduate students. Preference is given to Pell Grant recipients. Awards range from \$100 –\$4,000 per year. Not all schools participate.

College & University Grants

A grant that is considered a gift from your school and may be awarded based on financial need, academic merit, or some combination. Institutional grants often supplement federal awards to help financially needy students meet the total cost of attendance. Award amounts are determined by each individual college.

Federal Pell Grant

Grant for financially needy undergraduates awarded through the college financial aid office. For the 2026/27 academic year, the maximum Federal Pell Grant award is \$7,395.

Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant Program

Program for students who are enrolled in a teaching program and intend to teach full-time in a high-need area at a public or private elementary or secondary school that serves students from low-income families. Student must meet certain requirements after graduation or grant must be repaid as a Federal Direct Unsubsidized Student Loan with interest accruing from the date of each grant disbursement. Maximum award amount is \$4,000 each year.



SCHOLARSHIPS



Institutional Scholarships

Many colleges now offer some type of merit scholarship. Merit scholarships are most often awarded based on certain academic requirements such as GPA, SAT scores, class rank, etc., or may be awarded for some other talent. When inquiring about merit aid, you should ask the following questions:

- What types of scholarships do you offer and what are the dollar amounts?
- What are the criteria for the scholarships?
- If I meet the criteria, am I guaranteed to get one?
- What do you need to do to keep the scholarship?

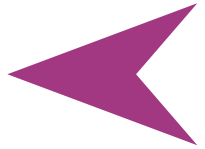
Private Scholarships

Many businesses, community organizations, and foundations award scholarships. These scholarships may be awarded based on need, merit, or for some other quality. You never know what you will be eligible for unless you look! Follow these tips for a successful search:

- Be diligent. Search a little bit each week over a few months. A scholarship search isn't a one night project.
- Beware of scams. Never pay a service to find you scholarships.
- Ask everyone. Let everyone know that you are on the hunt for scholarships.
- Look everywhere. Don't limit your search to the web. Visit the school counseling office, look at the library, contact community centers, etc.
- Don't miss deadlines!



15 QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE BORROWING A STUDENT LOAN



SAVING FOR COLLEGE

Investing in your child's future is one of the best investments.

Start Saving Early

The earlier you start saving, the more you'll have to put towards tuition, which translates to less borrowing. Set a goal of how much you would like to save each year, increasing your contributions annually.

Open a College Savings Account

Starting an account specifically for college funds is a great way to monitor your college savings and watch your money grow. Keep in mind that when it comes time to fill out the FAFSA, students are expected to contribute a higher percentage of their assets/savings than parents, so it may be best to create the account in the parent's name. Consider Coverdell Education Savings Accounts, Education Savings Bonds, and 529 Plans. Consult your financial advisor for more information on which option works best for your family.

Track Your Spending

When college is still years away, it is easy to put off saving. Monitor your spending and decide where you can cut costs from your monthly budget. A \$2 cup of coffee a day translates to \$730 a year. If you put that money in your college account instead for 18 years, you've saved \$32,181 at a 9% annual return.

Make Regular Contributions

The more often you put money away, the better. Saving regularly will help you accumulate savings without putting as much burden on your wallet as an annual contribution might. Look into getting funds automatically transferred to your college savings account each month. If you receive a bonus from work or some other large sum of money, put it directly in your college savings account instead of spending it.

When You Have More, Save More

If you receive a raise at work, increase the amount of money you direct towards your college savings account each month. If you finish making payments on an installment loan, such as a car, use the funds you were previously applying toward that payment to invest in your college savings account.

Before you borrow, always ask the lender:

1. What is the interest rate?
2. Is the interest rate fixed or variable? (Variable rates can change monthly, quarterly, or annually until your loan is paid off, which means your payment can also change.)
3. Is the rate I receive based on my credit?
4. Does the interest rate ever change? (Some loans have different rates while you are in school vs. after you graduate.)
5. What are the fees?
6. What is the loan term?
7. What would my monthly payment be if I borrowed \$X,XXX?
8. When would my first payment be due?
9. How are loan funds disbursed? (to you or the school?)
10. What steps do I need to take to complete an application?
11. How long does it take to process an application?
12. Are there loan limits? Annual? Aggregate?
13. Who is eligible for this loan?
14. Do I need a cosigner?
15. What deferment and forbearance options are available to me?

Looking for more tips on how to approach the financial aid process? Follow us at blog.risla.com for more information!

Smart College Borrowing

The average student graduates with over \$30,000 in student loan debt – some students graduate with much less, and others, with a lot more. Many students and parents are surprised to learn that they owe hundreds of dollars a month in student loan payments after graduation. That's why before you borrow, you should understand your options and learn how to borrow responsibly.

On minimizing financing charges...

Your goal should be to borrow at the lowest cost possible, while still allowing for manageable monthly payments. This means looking for the lowest rates and fees and balancing those with benefits of the loan and the length of the repayment term. Being a good consumer and comparing your options takes work, but the payoff can make the effort well worth the time spent.

During your research, keep in mind shorter repayment terms typically mean you will pay less interest than if you had chosen a longer repayment term (assuming the rates are equivalent). As an added bonus, shorter repayment terms in the private loan market often have lower interest rates, compounding your savings. Keep in mind that although your monthly payments may be higher with a shorter term, you'll save more money in the long run and pay-off years earlier, freeing up cash for other things!

Does interest rate really matter? You may think it is immaterial, but look at how much a 1% difference in interest rate can really make!

Interest rate	Number of Payments	Estimated		
		Monthly Payments	Total Interest Charges	Total Cost of Loan
For a \$10,000 Immediate Repayment loan with \$0 fees and a 10-year term				
4.00%	120	\$102	\$2,252	\$12,252
5.00%	120	\$107	\$2,862	\$12,862
6.00%	120	\$112	\$3,490	\$13,490
7.00%	120	\$118	\$4,138	\$14,138
8.00%	120	\$123	\$4,804	\$14,804
9.00%	120	\$129	\$5,490	\$15,490
10.00%	If your loan's interest rate is over 10%, consider refinancing it with RISLA!			

What amount is the “right” amount to borrow for college?

Many students are eager to sign whatever it takes to go to their dream school. Unfortunately, they often don't understand how much it will cost them after they graduate. Borrowing for college isn't always bad – as long as it is done responsibly. Think about your return on investment and what will be affordable after graduation.

Only borrow what you absolutely need.

You don't need to borrow the full amount listed on your financial aid award letter. It is tempting to borrow a little extra for something you want but don't actually need. When you borrow money, you pay it back with interest, increasing your total costs. Only borrow what you absolutely need and no more.

How much will you earn?

Do your research on entry level salaries in your field of choice. Will you be able to afford your monthly payments with the salary you will make? Remember to account for all four years of your education when estimating your total borrowing needs. Too many students have a “borrow now, deal later” attitude that ends up getting them into trouble. A good rule of thumb is to borrow (for all years of education combined) no more than your expected starting salary after graduation. Use our “How Much Can I Afford to Borrow?” calculator at collegeplanningcenter.org.

How will your education debt affect your future goals?

When deciding between two schools, you may find you want to go to one more, but it will mean you have to borrow a lot more. Think about how that will affect your ability to reach your future goals. Will you be able to afford to reach your goals with a higher student loan payment?

Student Loan FAQ

24

What are Entrance and Exit Interviews?

Students are required to complete an entrance interview prior to receiving a federal student loan and an exit interview before graduating. Entrance interviews help you understand your federal student loan responsibilities. Exit interviews inform you about your repayment obligations and options. Federal student loans can be taken in student's name only. No cosigner required.

What is a grace period?

After you graduate, there may be a period during which you are not required to make student loan payments, typically for six months. All federal student loans offer a grace period but you will need to ask on your private loans. Typically, at the end of your grace period, any accrued interest on your account is added to the principal balance on your loan.

What is deferment and forbearance?

During a deferment or forbearance, you are not required to make payments on your student loans. If you are going back to school, are unemployed, in the military, or having trouble making your student loan payments for any other reason, contact your lender or student loan servicer to see if you qualify for a deferment or forbearance.

What happens if I default on my loan?

Defaulting on your student loan has serious consequences. If you are having trouble making payments, call your loan servicer to learn about your options. Avoidance is not the key! If you default on a student loan, you may:

- Be ineligible for federal & private student aid in the future.
- Lose your deferment and forbearance options.
- Have to pay your entire loan balance immediately.
- Pay additional costs if your account is turned over to a collection agency or attorneys.
- Hurt your credit and therefore your ability to borrow in the future, rent an apartment, or even get a job.
- Have your federal or state tax refund withheld so that it can be applied to your defaulted loan balance.
- Have your wages garnished.

Financial Aid

MYTH VS.

REALITY

“Only straight ‘A’ students get financial aid!”

Reality: A good academic record can help students qualify for merit-based scholarships. However, most federal financial aid, such as Pell Grants, Federal Work-study, and Federal Direct Subsidized Loans, is awarded based on need and not on merit. Furthermore, many outside scholarships are awarded based on need or for other qualities. Visit rischolarships.org to get matched with hard-to-find local scholarships.

“We saved for college, so we won’t qualify for aid.”

Reality: Saving money for college doesn’t mean you won’t qualify for aid if you need it. Only a portion of your assets is included in your Student Aid Index. File the FAFSA to find out if you qualify.

“My child is 18 and on their own for college so they will complete the FAFSA as an independent student.”

Reality: Parent information is still required to be considered for any aid. Unless a student is 24, has a child of their own or is a ward of the court, the student is still considered a dependent. This, however, does NOT mean a parent must cosign or pay for the student’s education.

“Our family just can’t afford college.”

Reality: Billions of dollars in financial aid are available to help families pay tuition bills. Grants, scholarships, student loans, and work-study can all help defray the cost of college. Also, most financial aid is based on your family’s financial need, meaning the less money you have and make, the more aid you may be eligible for.

“It doesn’t matter how much money we make. Our child will fund his/her education him/herself.”

Reality: Student Aid Index is based off of both parent and child income, regardless of whether the parents are willing to pay for college, as long as the child is not considered “independent” of the parents. See definition of “independent student” in the glossary on page 32.

“The FAFSA form is too hard to fill out!”

Reality: Applying online makes filling out the FAFSA easier. The web application provides step-by-step instructions on how to complete the form and allows you to skip questions that are not relevant to your family. Free assistance is also available through the RISLA College Planning Center. Make an appointment with an experienced counselor today at collegeplanningcenter.org.

“Private schools are too expensive for our family.”

Reality: Some private schools offer more financial aid to attract students from all income levels. Cost shouldn’t be the only factor you consider when developing a college list. Finding a school that meets career, academic, and personal needs is also important. Just make sure to apply to at least one reasonably affordable school that you will be happy at.

Applying for Financial Aid

26

START

1. APPLY FOR AN FSA ID

Apply for an FSA ID at **studentaid.gov**. Your FSA ID will consist of a user name and a password that will enable you to “sign” documents electronically and make corrections to your FAFSA through the web. Both the parent and the student must each apply for a separate FSA ID, using different email addresses.



2. SUBMIT THE FAFSA

File the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at **studentaid.gov** before your college's deadline. The FAFSA is used by all colleges to determine your eligibility for federal and state aid. Many colleges also use the FAFSA to determine eligibility for institutional aid.

The FAFSA must be completed every academic year prior to the college's deadline date. Both the student and parent must “sign” the FAFSA using their individual FSA IDs.

There is no fee involved in filing the FAFSA and all families are encouraged to apply regardless of their family circumstances.

If you find yourself needing assistance, make an appointment with the RISLA College Planning Center at **collegeplanningcenter.org**.



4. APPLY FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

Start your search at **rischolarships.org** to be matched with Rhode Island scholarships. Use tools like **bigfuture.collegeboard.org/scholarship-search** to search for national scholarships. Don't forget to check your school counseling office and local library for opportunities.



3. SUBMIT OTHER AID FORMS

Some private colleges require a CSS PROFILE application or an institutional financial aid form to determine your eligibility for their own sources of financial aid. The PROFILE application can be completed as early as October and is available at **cssprofile.collegeboard.org**. Make sure you know if you need to file any forms in addition to the FAFSA and be sure to submit them by the school's specified deadline.



Looking for more? Follow us at blog.risla.com for more information on financial aid!



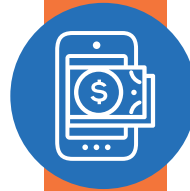
5. COMPARE YOUR AWARDS

Each college's financial aid office determines what aid it has available to help meet your financial need. Most schools cannot afford to meet 100% of your financial need. The financial aid office will put together a financial aid award letter for you containing grants, work-study, scholarships, and loans.

Read it over carefully. Decide which portions of the award you would like to accept. Pay attention to the school's instructions. You may have to complete additional paperwork to fully accept the award.

If you feel that the award does not fully meet your financial needs or your needs have changed due to illness, unemployment, or some other reason, you can appeal the award. Make sure you have documentation that supports your request.

Your financial aid package may or may not cover your total financial need. If financial need is not entirely met, this unmet need is called "gap." This means that resources must be found in order to meet the full cost of education.



6. APPLY FOR LOANS

Your school may include Federal Direct Student Loans in your award letter. To accept these awards, you will need to complete a Master Promissory Note. Keep in mind that just because a loan is included in your award letter doesn't mean you are obligated to accept it. Limit your borrowing as much as possible.

Some schools also include Federal PLUS Loans in their award packages. Before accepting this award, make sure to compare this loan to other options as you might find a better deal for your family. Be sure to look into benefits as well, such as deferment, forgiveness in the unfortunate incidence of death, and rate discounts. If a PLUS loan was not included in your award letter, but you believe it is the best option for your family, you will still have the opportunity to apply.

If you decide to take out a state-based education loan or private student loan, you will need to select a lender and complete an application with that lender.

YOU
MADE
IT!

TIPS FOR FILING THE FAFSA

Don't miss deadlines.

This is a common mistake. In addition to school specific deadlines, some states require you to file by a specific deadline in order to qualify for the state grant. In Rhode Island, state-funded grants are awarded by Rhode Island colleges and universities.

Don't include your retirement savings in your assets.

The federal government does not expect your family to cash out its 401(k), 403(b), or other qualified retirement savings accounts to pay for your child's education.

Get free help completing your form.

There are many free resources available to help you complete your FAFSA. If you live in Rhode Island, you can get free one-on-one assistance at the RISLA College Planning Center. Visit collegeplanningcenter.org to book your appointment.

Comparing Award Letters

When you receive your financial aid award packages from colleges that accepted you, there will be some tough decisions to make. Follow these steps to determine which aid package best meets your family's needs.

28

Direct costs are paid directly to the school and include tuition & fees, room & board, and other fees. Books, travel costs, personal expenses, and other miscellaneous costs, while they add to your total cost of attendance, are considered indirect costs. You may find it easier to cover indirect costs throughout the year as they accrue, but direct costs will need to be paid up front or through a payment plan (more details on that later!).

ADD UP GIFT AID

Compare the remaining direct costs and indirect costs at each school. This is the amount you will need to pay out of pocket, either through savings, income, or loans.

ASSESS YOUR SAVINGS

Determine if you have any income available to help pay college costs. Most colleges offer a payment plan that allows you to spread out the cost of tuition over the course of a school year. Typically, a payment plan administrator charges a one-time enrollment fee. Be aware that making payments late can result in high fees. Contact the college Bursar's office or Financial Aid Office to get information regarding payment plans.

01

TOTAL DIRECT COSTS

02

Gift aid is free to you and includes grants and scholarships. Subtract any gift aid from your total costs. Want more? There is still time to explore private scholarships. Continue your search at RIScholarships.org.

03

FIND THE DIFFERENCE

04

Consider what savings you have available to help meet tuition costs. Do you have a 529 college savings plan or a Coverdell savings account? Any other savings or gifts meant for college? Subtract any resources you will use from your direct costs.

05

WHAT ABOUT INCOME?

If Federal Direct Subsidized or Unsubsidized Loans are included in your financial aid award, decide if you would like to accept these awards. Remember, you will have to pay interest on loans so you want to borrow as little as possible. Make sure you understand the terms of these loans before accepting them.

PLAN FOR GAP

When comparing financial aid awards, focus on the ratio of gift aid to total aid received. It is easy to get swept away by a big financial aid offer. But remember, it isn't always the total award amount that is most important. Pay attention to how much of your financial need each college met and how they meet your need. The higher ratio of gift aid the better. Also, figure out if awards are renewable. Be wary of scholarships and grants that are only good for your first year.

ACCEPT RESPONSIBLY

Be sure to accept your award by the deadline. If you do not, the aid awarded to you may go to another student.

06

ADD FED STUDENT LOANS

Most schools are not able to meet 100% of your financial aid eligibility. Some schools may include the Federal PLUS Loan in your financial aid package. Keep in mind that you can apply for this loan regardless of whether or not it is listed on the financial aid award letter and you don't have to accept it just because it is included. If you plan to borrow, be a good consumer and **explore rates and terms**. Factor your borrowing into the whole picture when determining which aid package is best for you.

07

08

FOCUS ON PERCENTAGES

You do not need to accept the financial aid package as is. Loans need to be paid back with interest, so try to limit the amount you borrow by reducing your award amounts or declining loans if you don't need them. If you think you need more aid, you can always try to appeal the offer. Make sure you have documentation to support your request. Many schools will take a second look at the award package, if asked.

09

10

MEET THE DEADLINE

NOTE: Financial Aid Appeals are a request to a college to re-evaluate your aid package due to a special or changed circumstance. Examples: loss of income, divorce or emergency such as loss due to natural disaster.

File your appeal in writing, be concise, focus on the facts and be sure to follow up.

Meeting College Costs Worksheet

30

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
College name				
Direct Costs				
Tuition				
Room & board				
Health insurance fees				
Fees				
Total Direct Costs (A)				
Gift Aid				
Federal Pell Grant				
Federal SEOG Grant				
Federal TEACH Grant				
State grant				
College grant				
College scholarship				
Outside scholarships & grants				
Total Gift Aid (B)				
Personal Resources				
529 Plan				
Coverdell savings account				
Other college savings account				
Parent savings & assets				
Student savings & assets				
Other				
Total Personal Resources (C)				
Self-Help Aid				
Tuition payment plan				
Federal Direct Subsidized Loan				
Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan				
Federal PLUS Loan				
State-based student loan				
Private education loan				
Home equity loan				
Total Self-Help Aid (D)				
Summary				
Total Direct Costs (A)				
Total Gift Aid (B)				
Amount Due to School (A - B)				
Total Personal Resources (C)				
Total Self-Help Aid (D)				
Gap (A-B-C-D)				

Don't forget to come up with a plan for paying indirect costs, like books, transportation & living expenses. Visit us online at collegeplanningcenter.org to use the online version of the Meeting College Costs Calculator.

Glossary

-A-

Accrued Interest - The interest that accumulates on the unpaid portion of the loan.

Amortization - The process of repaying debt in regular payments over a period of time through installments consisting of principal and interest.

Annual Percentage Rate (APR) - The percentage rate that represents the annual cost of borrowing a loan. This includes interest charges and any fees or additional costs associated with the loan.

Award Letter - A document from your college financial aid office detailing the financial aid awarded to the student.

-B-

Balance - The remaining portion of an unpaid debt. A balance may be comprised of both principal and interest.

Budget - A plan that outlines your income and spending during a particular time period.

Bursar - The office at a school that is in charge of collecting education costs.

-C-

Collection Agency - A company hired by a lender or bank to collect and recover funds on a defaulted loan or line of credit. A collection agency may also add collection fees to the balance that the borrower will need to repay.

Consolidation - The act of combining existing federal student loans into a single loan.

Compound Interest - Interest computed on the accumulated unpaid interest as well as on the original principal.

Cosigner (a.k.a. Co-borrower) - A secondary person who signs the promissory note of a loan and assumes responsibility of paying a loan should the borrower fail to pay.

Cost of Attendance (COA) - The total sum of attending a school, including tuition, fees, room & board, books and supplies, food, incidentals, travel expenses, and personal expenses. The Cost of Attendance is different at each school.

Credit Bureau - An agency that collects and distributes credit history and information.

Credit History - A person's history of borrowing and repaying debts.

Credit Limit - The amount of credit you are authorized by an issuer. For example, with a credit card, you may have a credit limit of \$1,000.

Credit Score - A numerical evaluation of an individual's credit history. Many lenders use the credit score to determine how likely a borrower is to pay back a loan.

CSS PROFILE - A supplemental financial aid form required by some schools in order to be eligible for institutional financial aid.

-D-

Debt-to-Income Ratio - The proportion of monthly debt payments to monthly income.

Default - A failure to meet the terms of a loan as stated in the promissory note. Typically, a borrower who fails to make several payments in a row on a loan is considered in default. Defaulted loans are often assigned to collection agencies or attorneys.

Deferment - A temporary postponement of repaying a loan as agreed by the lender, typically granted to students while they are in school.

Delinquent - A failure to meet the terms of a loan as stated in the promissory note and/or to make timely payments on a loan. Delinquency may result in late fees and will have a negative impact on your credit score. Continued delinquency can result in default.

Disbursement - When a lender releases loan funds to a school or borrower.

Disclosure Statement - A document outlining the actual cost and terms of a loan along with the stated interest rate and any fees.

-E-

Entrance Interview - A session in which an administrator, counselor or financial aid officer informs student borrowers about rights and responsibilities of having federal loans.

Equal Credit Opportunity Act - A law established by the federal government that prohibits lenders from discriminating on the basis of religion, race, color, national origin, sex, age, marital status, or participation in any public assistance program.

Exit Interview - A session in which an administrator, counselor, or financial aid officer informs student borrowers of their student loan obligations and responsibilities.

-F-

Fair Credit Reporting Act - A law established by the federal government that allows individuals the right to examine their own credit report.

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) - A financial aid application that must be completed in order to be eligible for federal aid and many other types of aid provided by your state or college.

FAFSA Submission Summary (FSS) - Provides students with basic information about eligibility for federal financial aid.

Federal Direct Student Loan Program

- A loan program in which the lender is the federal government and the school manages funds.

Federal Pell Grant - A federal grant awarded to undergraduate students based on financial need.

Federal Direct Student Loan - A federal loan awarded to students based on need

with a subsidized option, where the federal government will cover interest payments while the student attends college, and an unsubsidized option, where the student is responsible for all interest charges.

Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG) - A federal grant awarded to only the neediest students.

Federal Work-Study - A program that allows undergraduate and graduate students to work part-time while attending school. Work-Study funds are awarded based on need, the school's level of funding and when the student applies for financial aid. The amount of money students earn during their work-study position cannot exceed the amount they are awarded by their school.

Financial Aid Package - The package of grants, scholarships, work-study, and loans offered to a student by a school's financial aid office.

Finance Charge - A fee charged to your account and added to your outstanding balance.

Financial Need - The difference between Cost of Attendance (COA) and cost not covered by Aid and scholarships.

Fixed Rate - An interest rate that does not change over the life of the loan, resulting in consistent monthly payments.

Forbearance - A temporary period, as agreed by the lender, in which no payments or smaller payments are due. In general, interest continues to accrue while a loan is in forbearance.

-G-

Garnishment - A court order that allows a creditor to deduct a portion of a borrower's salary prior to the paycheck being given to the employee when the borrower has not responded to notices regarding their unpaid debts.

Gift Aid - Financial aid such as scholarships and grants that a student does not need to repay.

Grace Period - Credit cards: The period of time between the purchase date and the date that the purchase begins to accrue interest. Student loans: The period of time after you drop below half-time status, leave school or graduate and your loan repayment term begins.

-H-

Holder - The lender, institution, or agency that owns the legal title to a borrower's loan.

-I-

Identity Theft - When someone uses your personal information to access credit in your name. Your social security number, name, and driver's license number can all be stolen for someone else's personal gain.

Income Contingent, Sensitive, or Based

Repayment – Programs in which the size of a student loan payment is contingent upon the borrower's income. As the borrower's income increases, the size of the monthly student loan payment also increases.

Independent Student – A student that is at least 24 years old by January 1st of the academic year and reports only his or her income and if relevant, his or her spouses income when applying for federal aid. Also, a student that is under 24 and not claimed as a dependent by his or her parents during the previous tax year, a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces, an orphan or ward of the court, a graduate student, or a supporter of a legal dependent themselves. A student cannot legally declare independence simply because his or her parents will not help fund the cost of his or her education.

Institutional Methodology – The method that a particular institution of higher learning uses to determine how much they believe a family is able to contribute to the cost of their child's education. The institutional methodology is used to determine how institutional funds are awarded and cannot be used when awarding federal government funds.

Interest Rate – The rate paid on borrowed money expressed as a percentage.

Interest Capitalization – The process of adding accrued interest to the principal balance of a loan. Interest is typically capitalized after a period of payment deferral, delinquency, or forbearance.

-J-

No terms.

-K-

No terms.

-L-

Lender – The institution that provides funds to eligible or approved applicants.

Loan – Money that is borrowed and must be repaid with interest.

Loan Forgiveness – When a student loan is either reduced or canceled when a borrower meets certain criteria such as performing military service, teaching a critical subject in a high need area, disability, etc.

-M-

Merit-based Aid – Aid that is awarded to a student based on academic or other merit. Financial need is not necessarily considered when awarding merit-based aid.

-N-

Need Analysis – The method used to calculate how much money a family is able to contribute to their child's college education. In order to be considered for financial aid, a family must submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and, if applicable, a CSS PROFILE or any

supplemental forms required by the college.

Need-Blind Admission – A school policy in which financial need is not taken into consideration when deciding whether or not to admit a student. Not all schools have a need-blind admission policy.

-O-

Origination Fee – A fee, typically paid by the borrower to the lender, generally used to fund the cost of administering a loan. Origination fees may be added to the principal balance or deducted from the principal loan amount prior to the loan's disbursement.

-P-

Pell Grant – See Federal Pell Grant.

PLUS Loan – A federal loan available to the parents of dependent undergraduate students and to graduate students used to help finance the cost of education.

Prime Rate – A short-term interest rate quoted by a commercial bank as an indication of the rate being charged on loans to its best commercial customers. Banks and other lenders frequently charge more than the quoted Prime Rate.

Principal – The amount of money borrowed or the amount that remains unpaid on a loan.

Private Loan – A private supplemental loan for students available from lenders nationwide.

Promissory Note – The legal and binding document which borrowers are required to sign prior to loan funds being disbursed. The Promissory Note states all terms and conditions of the loan.

-Q-

No terms.

-R-

Repayment Schedule – A document that outlines the monthly payment amount, payment due dates, interest rate and total repayment period of a student loan.

Repayment Term – The period of time as stated in the promissory note in which a borrower agrees to repay a loan with interest.

-S-

Scholarship – A form of gift-aid that does not have to be repaid. Eligibility may include a need component or a merit component such as outstanding academic achievement.

Self-Help Aid – Financial aid such as student loans and work-study that requires some sort of investment from the student.

Servicer – A business or company that manages the billing and administration of loans.

Simple Interest – Interest that is paid only on principal. Interest is not compounded.

State Grant – A financial aid program that is run by the state and available for state residents. Grants do not need to be repaid.

Student Aid Index (SAI) – This amount is

calculated by the federal government upon receipt of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Family income, assets, size of family, among other factors, are taken into account when calculating SAI.

Subsidized Direct Loan – A federal student loan in which the federal government will pay any interest accrued while the student is attending school or in deferment.

-T-

No terms.

-U-

Unmet Need (a.k.a. Gap) – Any financial need that is unmet by the financial aid package. Ideally, a school will provide the full amount of aid needed to meet financial need as determined by the school and/or the federal government. However, due to budgetary constraints, schools are often not able to provide this full amount of aid.

Unsubsidized Direct Loan – A federal loan in which the student is fully responsible for paying all interest charges accrued while they are in school, deferment, in his/her grace period or in repayment.

US Department of Education – The federal agency that administers many student aid programs such as Federal Student Loans, Federal Pell Grants, Federal Work-Study, and Federal PLUS Loans.

-V-

Variable Interest Rate – An interest rate that changes periodically throughout the life of the loan. Variable interest rates are often based off of Treasury bill rates, the Prime rate, or the LIBOR rate and may change monthly, quarterly, semi-annually or annually.

-W-

Work-Study – See Federal Work-Study.

-X-

No terms.

-Y-

Yield – The rate of return on an investment.

-Z-

No terms.

The RISLA College Planning Center is a free service provided by RI Student Loan Authority, a non-profit state authority.

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