

COLLEGE PREP GUIDE



Find the Right School

You have completed, edited and submitted your application. You watch for the mail with laser-like focus. You check your inbox compulsively for e-mail updates from your recruiter.

Waiting to learn your collegiate fate is definitely not a stress-free experience. It is an extremely vulnerable feeling knowing that your qualifications and experience are being scrutinized by a board of high-level school officials.

But if you are well-prepared and willing to work through the lengthy, sometime-tedious process of applying for college, then you can increase your chances of success.

NARROW YOUR SEARCH

Conventional thinking may suggest that the more colleges you target with admissions applications, the better your chances of being accepted. Not so, say many experts.

High school students are urged to focus in on five or six key college options instead of the 20-plus that many feel they need to pursue.

In fact, a recent College Board study showed that students feel more stress for every additional college they target. Over-applying can spread your focus too thin and increase your chances of making mistakes on applications.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Now more than ever, foreign language is a big plus for college admissions officials.

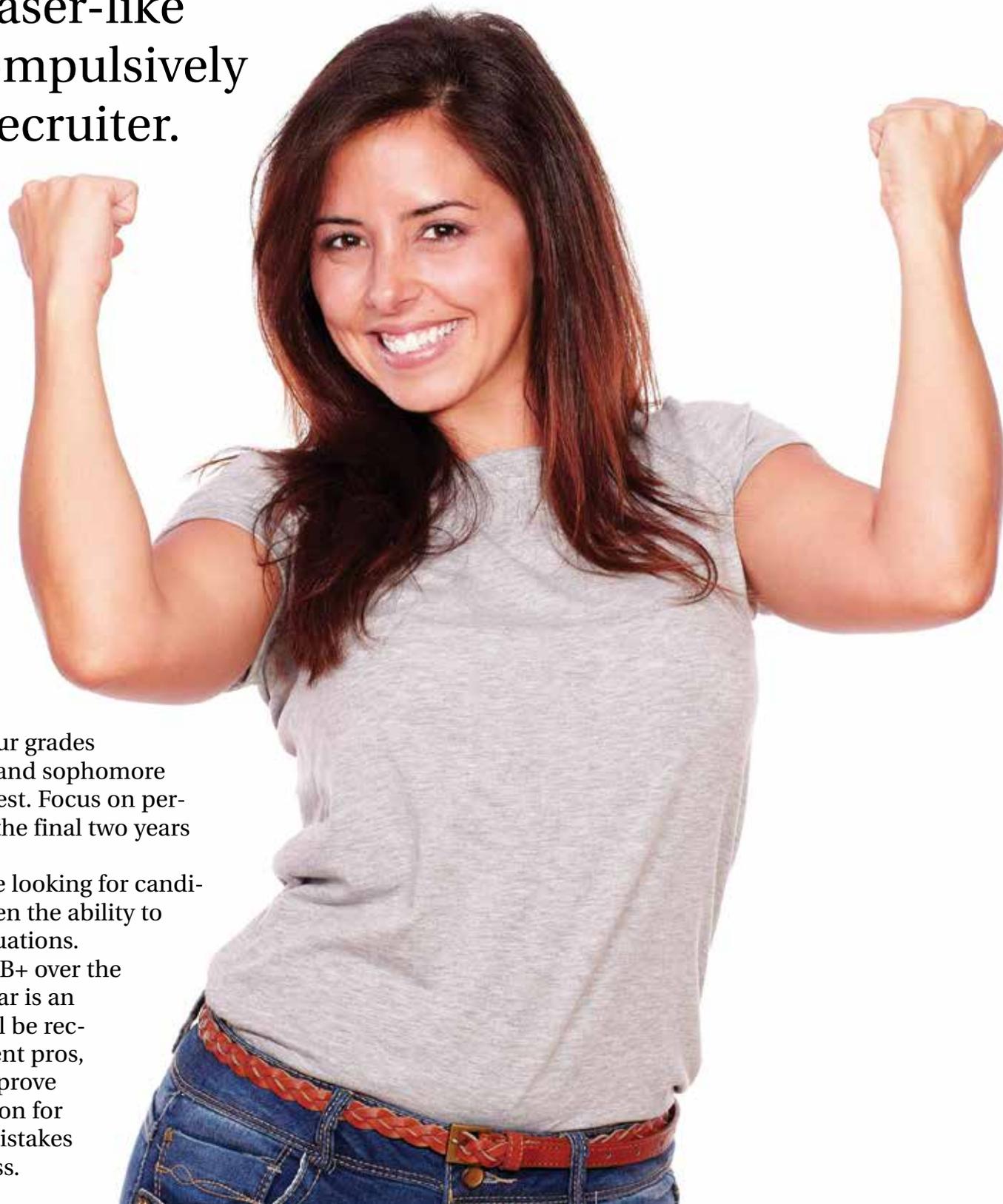
Some selective universities only

accept students with four years of high school foreign language education. Capturing an advanced knowledge of Spanish, French or Chinese will help you during everyday life in building positive relationships with diverse populations.

TURN THINGS AROUND

Don't sweat it if your grades from your freshman and sophomore years aren't the greatest. Focus on performing well during the final two years of high school.

College officials are looking for candidates who have proven the ability to turn around their situations. Improving a C into a B+ over the course of a school year is an achievement that will be recognized by recruitment pros, especially if you can prove that you have a passion for learning from past mistakes to drive future success.



Meeting New People

Sure, college is primarily about advancing your knowledge and catalyzing your career. But it is also about meeting new people.

And it is never too early to start. You can make college-level connections well before you leave high school.

Participate in activities and events at your college of choice, and volunteer to work at events. College professors, students and staff members are likely to be at these same events, and you never know what kind of connections you can make.

PUT YOURSELF OUT THERE

Whether you are a high school student entering college for the first time or a non-traditional student seeking to advance your education, have confidence when interacting with new college connections.

Introduce yourself as a prospective college student and ask questions related to the university.

Keep in mind that not every interaction is going to lead to a lasting relationship or a dynamic internship. But by simply putting yourself out there, you will meet interesting people with diverse skill sets and interests.

ATTEND SPORTING EVENTS

A college baseball, football or volleyball game presents the perfect opportunity to experience the collegiate culture.

Sit near student sections to meet present attendees and ask them what they like and dislike about their col-



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lege.

Remember that you are in control of your educational future. You owe it to yourself to research your prospective college choices and make your final decision as painless as possible.

Sporting events can be a great place to do just that, as students are in a social, exciting environment.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The advent of social media has opened a whole new world of connections – literally. You can interact with people from across the globe with a simple click of a mouse or tap of a keyboard.

Follow your targeted universities on Twitter and friend them on Facebook. You will find updates on campus events, news and developments.

You can also find professors and students on social networking sites who share valuable knowledge pertaining to your field of choice.

Extracurricular Activities

Performing well academically in high school is half the battle in getting accepted into college. Extracurricular activities go a long way, as well.

Playing sports and volunteering your time to charitable causes are only a couple of examples of activities you should be participating in to increase your marketability to college admissions leaders.

Ask your high school guidance counselor what type of activities are available in both your school and the community, and the process for pursuing these opportunities.

TUTOR

Do you excel in a particular subject? If so, then you should consider lending your smarts to the cause of developing students who aren't quite as proficient in that area.

Tutoring shows off your leadership, patience and organizational abilities – all key attributes that college recruiters and admissions officials are seeking in prospective students.

PLAY SPORTS

Sports mean teamwork and teamwork translates to collaboration with fellow students, professors and other college officials.

From the business world to the teaching industry, candidates with sports backgrounds can leverage their experience to convey a competitive, team-oriented spirit.

Playing sports also teaches you how to manage your time and work with diverse personalities to achieve common goals.

Other In-School Functions

Most high schools offer plenty of options for students, no matter what major they plan on pursuing in college.

Theater, drama, yearbook and the school newspaper are activities that can teach you skills that are highly transferable onto a college application. But be careful not to load up on too many activities just to have a more impressive submission.

Pick a few options and do them well.

VOLUNTEER

Many college and scholarship applications prefer some form of community service experience from their candidates.

Reach out to local soup kitchens, nursing homes or wildlife refuges for short-staffed organizations always looking for extra help. Devote at least a few months to the cause to show college officials that you were willing and dedicated to helping those in need.

Try to keep accurate, organized records of all duties and projects you are involved in.



Landing an Internship

Working hard with no pay isn't exactly ideal, but it can be crucial to your future success. By choosing the right internship, you can set yourself up with vital experience, lasting connections and even a chance to land that first full-time gig.

An internship is a big commitment, so make sure you have the availability and energy to pursue one.

Most companies understand the constraints on your time and are willing to work around your schedule. Find an internship that is not only flexible, but also in line with your objectives and strengths.

ON-THE-JOB EXPERIENCE

There is no substitute for learning real-world job requirements and duties on the job. An internship affords this opportunity to aspiring professionals across all industries.

Garnering hands-on experience will either solidify your passion for pursuing your targeted career, or convince you to change your direction. Either result will benefit you in the end as you continue your educational journey.

CONNECTIONS

Managers and directors are sometimes more willing to share insight with an intern because they were likely once in the same position. Take their guidance to heart.



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They have been there and done that, and are excellent sources for honest advice.

And don't just focus on the managers and employees in your department. Branch out and make connections across business lines. This will help you gain an understanding of

how companies operate, and will also help you cultivate and strengthen relationships with a diverse set of established professionals.

FIRST JOB

Many times, internships are

followed by promotions into full-time positions within the same company.

You can impress your way into a permanent job by picking up extra duties, asking the right questions and performing and conveying an enthusiastic willingness

to learn.

As your internship progresses, don't be afraid to ask your manager about the possibility of being hired full-time. Don't make a habit out of it though – just ask once and let your performance speak for itself.

Choose the Right Major

Some people are lucky enough to find their career passion from an early age. For many of us, though, choosing a field of interest can be downright intimidating.

The choice between accounting and financial analysis, for example, may not sound very vast, but the intricacies of each are diverse indeed.

As such, difficulties in choosing a major are the driving force behind many college students opting for an “undeclared” designation. Experts advise students to settle on a major by the time they earn about 60 credit hours.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Read, watch and listen to everything you can related to information on careers and emerging industries.

A great resource to start with is the Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH), a publication by the U.S. Department of Labor that shares thorough information for nearly all jobs in the U.S. economy.

Use the OOH and other print, video or radio resources to educate yourself on salaries, job outlooks, working conditions and required education.

Career centers are also a great place to pick up informational packets, pamphlets and flyers that can help educate students on available majors.

DISCUSS YOUR OPTIONS

Talk with your advisor, parents, other family members and friends about your options. Sometimes the people around us have a better understanding of our key attributes and

how we can leverage them into a successful career.

Academic advisors are trained in guiding students toward choosing appropriate courses, pursuing scholarship opportunities and maintaining extracurricular activities that tie in with the requirements of their prospective majors.

TAKE AN ASSESSMENT

Your high school should be able to supply you with a skills assessment test that will help link your proficiencies with various career options.

Assessments are not meant to be the lone strategy in choosing a major, rather one of many pieces to the puzzle.

zle.

You can find a variety of free online assessments that require little time and effort in discovering the job options that excite you. Simply fill out information related to your key strengths and interests, and discuss the results with your parents.



Smart Packing Tips



In the rush and excitement of leaving home for college, many students have also accidentally left behind toothbrushes, clothing and gadgets.

Don't fall into this trap. Think of packing as your first big exam. Put in the preparation for optimum results. Failing to do so could lead to a long day, a busted budget and a failing grade from those who are helping you with the process.

PLAN AHEAD

Having a plan of action and a to-do list will help lead to a relatively stress-free moving experience.

Start collecting free, foldable boxes months in advance to help reduce the cost of packing materials. If you have items that you know will be making the trip with you that you don't necessarily use every day – like trophies or other keepsakes – pack and store them for easy access come moving day.

The more preparation you put in now, the easier your move will be.

THINK SMALL

Stick to the essentials when packing for your dorm.

If your new room comes under-furnished, find new, affordable furniture at local consignment shops near campus. This will cut down on clutter inside your truck or moving van, and will also keep you from taking furniture away from mom and dad.

Find great deals on couches or chairs, and customize them with slipcovers or a throw. This is a good way to stretch your budget and exercise your creative muscles.

STICK TO A BUDGET

Moving expenses can add up quickly, eating into the money you have saved for college. Develop a simple budget and stick to it.

Factor in packing supplies, meals and gas into your budget, and try not to splurge on extras that can bust your budget in a hurry.

Coordinate with your roommates to make sure you're not all bringing a refrigerator or couch set.

Share decorating ideas and plan what items each roommate will bring. This will keep you from spending money on duplicates.

Seek Out Scholarships

The good news? There are literally thousands of scholarships available to students of all fields of interest. The bad news? The competition for these awards is fierce.

Luckily for you, there are ways to differentiate yourself and your skill set from that of your peers.

Doing so successfully will take a combination of relentlessness and attention to detail, as many scholarships require extensive documentation, letters of recommendation and adherence to stringent deadlines.

FILE A FAFSA

Completing a Free Application for Federal Student Aid is a vital step in securing financial assistance. Fill yours out as early as possible every year.

The application is available each January and could help you qualify for many scholarships and financial assistance awards.

The application process is a relatively simple one, especially considering the large payoff that the FAFSAs can generate. Upon approval, you will find out your qualified amount and types of scholarships that may be available to you.

THINK CREATIVELY

When compiling information for your scholarship submission, think through any added pieces that would help you stand out to a reviewer.

If the requirements include a short description of your interests, put together a short video or portfolio of your artwork, writing or other passions.

Also, be on the lookout for unique opportunities. Many universities use unique video documentary competitions or interactive contests to attract creative candidates.

Seek out these scholarship options for the chance to combine fun, innovation and the chance to secure financial assistance.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Many scholarships require the submission of at least two letters of recommendation, so be sure to have at least three to five at your disposal. Find employers, teachers and coaches who will be willing to write glowing letters on your behalf.

Try to avoid family members and friends, as scholarship boards will be looking for examples of how you perform at work and in the classroom, not at home or in the movie theater.

Selecting an English or journalism teacher to write at least one of your letters will ensure a strongly composed, persuasive document that will help you stand apart from other candidates.



Application Timeline

Applying for college can be a long, time-consuming process, but it's easier if you take it one step at a time and know what to expect. Here's a month-by-month guideline for what high school seniors can expect as they go through the admissions process.

AUGUST

Compile a list of colleges that you want to apply to. Experts recommend categorizing them into three areas: “safe” schools that you should easily get accepted into, “match” schools that are a good fit for your academics, and “reach” schools that are a long shot but still worth applying for.

Check the websites of these colleges to find out their admission requirements, including their application deadlines. For schools you're most seriously considering, now can also be a good time for an on-campus visit to see it in person.

You should also review your high school class schedule to make sure you're meeting all the requirements for your target colleges, including any foreign language courses or special English or math classes that may be required.

SEPTEMBER

As soon as school starts, plan on scheduling a meeting with your guidance counselor to make a road map for your college application process.

You'll want to write down all the deadlines for when applications are due — usually Dec. 1 for freshman applicants, but check with each school to make sure — and take particular note of any early decision deadlines.

You should also start requesting letters of recommendation from teachers, bosses, church leaders and anyone else who can offer a positive, honest opinion about you.

Now is the time to start working on

2013-2014 SAT

TEST DATE	REGISTRATION DEADLINE	LATE REGISTRATION DEADLINE
Oct. 6, 2013	Sept. 6, 2013	Sept. 20, 2013
Nov. 2, 2013	Oct. 3, 2013	Oct. 18, 2013
Dec. 7, 2013	Nov. 8, 2013	Nov. 22, 2013
Jan. 25, 2014	Dec. 27, 2013	Jan. 10, 2014
March 8, 2014	Feb. 7, 2014	Feb. 21, 2014
May 3, 2014	April 4, 2014	April 18, 2014
June 7, 2014	May 9, 2014	May 23, 2014

2013-2014 ACT

TEST DATE	REGISTRATION DEADLINE	LATE REGISTRATION DEADLINE
Sept. 21, 2013	Aug. 23, 2013	Sept. 6, 2013
Oct. 26, 2013	Sept. 27, 2013	Oct. 11, 2013
Dec. 14, 2013	Nov. 8, 2013	Nov. 22, 2013
Feb. 8, 2014	Jan. 10, 2014	Jan. 24, 2014
April 12, 2014	March 7, 2014	March 21, 2014
June 14, 2014	May 9, 2014	May 23, 2014

your college essays, too, and you can boost your college resume by looking for leadership positions, volunteering and taking on some extracurricular activities.

OCTOBER

If you haven't done so already, take the SAT and/or ACT tests as appropriate for your situation. Depending on your school's application deadline, October may be your last chance to get test scores submitted to the school on time.

Use this month to get extremely organized, with a chart of every application requirement and its associated deadline: financial aid, letters of recommendation, essays and application forms.

NOVEMBER

This is the month when you should be putting the finishing touches on your regular admissions applications, which are typically due in December.

Have teachers, counselors and parents review your college essays, and double-check each of the applications to be sure you're meeting all the requirements.

DECEMBER AND JANUARY

With your regular admissions applications finished and polished to perfection, Dec. 1 is the deadline to actually submit them for most schools.

You'll want to do a lot of double-checking to make sure other people are doing their part of the job: getting the right, up-to-date high school transcripts submitted and letters of recommendation mailed off.

You should also do lots of digging into available scholarships and completing your FAFSA form as early as possible if you plan to apply for financial aid.

FEBRUARY AND MARCH

You may begin receiving some acceptance letters now, but be thoughtful about making your final decision. You'll want to compare financial aid offers and make in-campus visits before picking one.

Students who filed a FAFSA form should receive their Student Aid Report (SAR). You'll want to make sure all the information on it is correct.

APRIL

Keep all the information you receive from schools organized. You may want to compile them in folders labeled “accepted,” “rejected” and “waitlisted.”

If you've decided not to attend a college after receiving your acceptance letter, it's a good courtesy to send them a letter letting them know you have ruled that school out.

MAY

If you haven't done so already, finalize your decision and start to make financial plans for attending your chosen school.

Let the school know about any scholarships you have received. Also take note of any deposit deadlines, because many colleges require a deposit by May 1. Sometimes you can request an extension if you need more time.

You can take AP exams to get college credit before you leave high school.

And finally, do the polite thing by sending thank-you letters to everyone who helped you get into college — from teachers and counselors to your mentors and family members.

Financial Aid Options

While it can be one of the best investments of your life, getting a college education is undeniably expensive, with a four-year degree sometimes costing as much as a home mortgage.

Fortunately, a wide range of financial aid programs are available to help students afford their education if they're willing to do the leg-work. While the process can seem overwhelming at first, starting early and staying organized are two keys to getting the financial help you need.

START IN THE FALL

Depending on which school you are attending and what financial aid programs you're applying for, deadlines will vary. You need to begin by finding out the specific deadlines for financial aid at your schools.

Guidance counselors can be great resources for the application process, and you should plan on meeting with them in September or November to get a head start and make your financial aid road map.

You can also start to search for scholarships using free resources like collegeboard.com or gocollege.com. Many libraries and financial aid offices also have publications that list scholarship opportunities.

You should start compiling

your personal financial information in November and December. It's a good idea to get a copy of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) so you know exactly what documents will be required for income and asset verification.

If you plan on filing the FAFSA electronically, you should apply in the fall for a PIN to sign it. Often times parents and students will both need their own separate PINs, so apply for them early and keep them in a safe place where you can find it in January when it's time to file the FAFSA form.

FAFSA FILING

It's hard to understate the importance of filing a FAFSA early, in January if possible. Many financial aid programs rely on the information in your FAFSA filings to determine how much aid you're eligible for — including Stafford loans and Pell grants.

Plan to complete your income tax returns as early as possible because they're a requirement of many financial aid applications.

FAFSA
FREE APPLICATION for FEDERAL STUDENT AID

July 1, 2013 - June 30, 2014

Federal Student Aid

Use this form to apply free for federal and state student grants, work-study and loans.
Or apply free online at www.fafsa.gov.

Applying by the Deadlines
For federal aid, submit your application as early as possible, but no earlier than January 1, 2013. We must receive your application no later than June 30, 2014. Your college must have your correct, complete information by your last day of enrollment in the 2013-2014 school year.
For state or college aid, the deadline may be as early as January 2013. See the table to the right for state deadlines. You may also need to complete additional forms.
Check with your high school guidance counselor or a financial aid administrator at your college about state and college sources of student aid and deadlines.
If you are filing close to one of these deadlines, we recommend you file online at www.fafsa.gov. This is the fastest and easiest way to apply for aid.

Using Your Tax Return
If you (or your parents) need to file a 2012 income tax return with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), we recommend that you complete it before filling out the FAFSA. If you have not completed your return yet, you can submit your FAFSA now using estimated tax information, and then correct that information after you file your return.
The easiest way to complete or correct your FAFSA with accurate tax information is by using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool through www.fafsa.gov. In a few simple steps, you may be able to view your tax return information and transfer it directly into your FAFSA.

Filling Out the FAFSA
If you or your family has unusual circumstances that might affect your financial situation (such as loss of employment), complete this form to the extent you can, then submit it as instructed and consult with the financial aid office at the college you plan to attend.
For help in filling out the FAFSA, go to www.studentaid.gov/completingfafsa or call 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243). TTY users (for the hearing impaired) may call 1-800-730-8913.
Fill the answer fields directly on your screen or print the form and complete it by hand. Your answers will be read electronically; therefore if you complete the form by hand:
• use black ink and fill in circles completely: Correct Incorrect
• print clearly in CAPITAL letters and skip a box between words: 1 5 E L M S T
• report dollar amounts (such as \$12,356.41) like this: \$ 1 2 3 5 6 (dot cents)

Green is for student information and purple is for parent information.

Mailing Your FAFSA
After you complete this application, make a copy of pages 3 through 8 for your records. Then mail the original of pages 3 through 8 to:
Federal Student Aid Programs, P.O. Box 7002, Mt. Vernon, IL 62864-0072.
After your application is processed, you will receive a summary of your information in your Student Aid Report (SAR). If you provide an e-mail address, your SAR will be sent by e-mail within 3-5 days. If you do not provide an e-mail address, your SAR will be mailed to you within three weeks. If you would like to check the status of your FAFSA, go to www.fafsa.gov or call 1-800-4-FED-AID.

Let's Get Started!
Now go to page 3 of the application form and begin filling it out. Refer to the notes as instructed.

APPLICATION DEADLINES
Federal Aid Deadline - June 30, 2014
State Aid Deadlines - See below.
Check with your financial aid administrator for these states and territories:
AL, AS*, AZ, CO, FM*, GA, GU*, HI*, IA*, IL*, IN*, KS*, KY*, LA, MI*, MN*, MO*, NE, NM, NV*, PR, PW*, SD*, TX, UT, VA*, VI*, WI and WY*
Pay attention to the symbols that may be listed after your state deadline.
AK AK Education Grant and AK Performance Scholarship - June 30, 2013 (date received)
AR Academic Challenge - June 1, 2013 (date received)
Workforce Grant - Contact the financial aid office.
Higher Education Opportunity Grant - June 1, 2013 (date received)
CA Initial awards - March 2, 2013 - *
Additional community college awards - September 2, 2013 (date postmarked) +
CT February 15, 2013 (date received) #*
DC May 31, 2013 (date received) * For priority consideration, submit application by April 30, 2013.
DE April 15, 2013 (date received)
FL May 15, 2013 (date processed)
IL July 1, 2013 (date received) earlier priority deadlines may exist for certain programs. *
ID Opportunity Grant - March 1, 2013 (date received) #*
As soon as possible after January 1, 2013. Awards made until funds are depleted.
IN March 15, 2013 (date received)
KS April 1, 2013 (date received) #*
KY As soon as possible after January 1, 2013. Awards made until funds are depleted.
LA June 30, 2014 (July 1, 2013 highly recommended)
MA May 1, 2013 (date received) #
MD March 1, 2013 (date received)
ME May 1, 2013 (date received)
MI March 1, 2013 (date received)
MN 30 days after seven state (date received)
MS April 1, 2013 (date received)
MO MTAG and MESG Grants - September 15, 2013 (date received)
N.J. HELP Scholarship - March 31, 2013 (date received)
NC March 1, 2013 (date received) #
ND As soon as possible after January 1, 2013. Awards made until funds are depleted.
NDP April 15, 2013 (date received) # Early priority deadlines may exist for institutional programs.
NH NH is not offering a state grant this year.
NH 2012-2013 Tuition Aid Grant recipients - June 1, 2013 (date received)
All other applicants - October 1, 2013. Fall & spring terms (date received)
March 1, 2014, spring term only (date received)
NY June 30, 2014 (date received) #*
OH October 1, 2013 (date received)
OK March 1, 2013 (date received) #
OR OSAC Private Scholarships - March 1, 2013 (date received)
Opportunity Grant - February 1, 2013 (date received)
PA All first-time applicants at a community college; a business/technical school; a hospital school of nursing; or enrolled in a non-transferable two-year program - August 1, 2013 (date received)
All other applicants - May 1, 2013 (date received)
RI March 1, 2013 (date received) #
SC Tuition Grants - June 30, 2013 (date received)
SC Commission on Higher Education - As soon as possible after January 1, 2013. Awards made until funds are depleted.
TN State Grant - As soon as possible after January 1, 2013. Awards made until funds are depleted.
State Lottery - September 1, 2013 (date received) #
VT As soon as possible after January 1, 2013. Awards made until funds are depleted. *
WA As soon as possible after January 1, 2013. Awards made until funds are depleted.
WV Promise Scholarship - March 1, 2013 (date received) #*
WV Higher Education Grant Program - April 15, 2013 (date received) #

For priority consideration, submit application by date specified.
+ Applicants encouraged to obtain proof of mailing.
* Additional forms may be required.

STATE AID DEADLINES

Within six weeks after filing the FAFSA you can expect to receive your Student Aid Report (SAR) which summarizes the amount of money your family will be expected to contribute toward college costs.

If everything goes smoothly, by March you should be getting some financial aid award letters that detail how much monetary help you're being offered by your chosen colleges.

LOANS

Part of your financial aid package will likely include some form of loan offers.

Federally insured student loans carry a lower interest rate than private loans, and many students rely on them to pay for college.

However, keep in mind that every dollar you borrow will eventually have to be repaid. It's a good time to review your career plans and balance your realistic future earnings expectations with the amount of debt you take on in college.

Keep in mind that you're not required to accept loans as part of the package. Your financial aid offers will include a maximum amount you're allowed to borrow, but you may be able to reduce your debt accumulation by working extra jobs and living a bare-bones lifestyle while studying.

The role of loans will vary for each individual's circumstances and career plans. How much debt you plan to take on, and the precise terms of loan agreements, should be something you weigh carefully and fully understand before embarking on your college dreams.