

# Life after High School

## Being College Ready



SPECIAL TOPIC

# Things I Wish I Had Known:

## COLLEGE EDITION

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**THIS IS ADDRESSED** to all of you graduating seniors who are exactly the way I was last year—busily preparing to enter your freshman year in university. A lot of you will be leaving home for the first time, and even if you’ve moved around your whole life as a military child, the task of picking up and going alone to a college where you don’t know anyone certainly seems scary. I know that I was nervous, and the first month or so was difficult. But I can say honestly, looking back on my experiences throughout the entire year, it was one of the most enjoyable years of my life. Between college classes and campus life, university is both fun and challenging and teaches you more than anything how to think, manage time, cope with stress, deal with different types of people, make friends, and enjoy yourself in the midst of it all. It isn’t always going to be easy, but I can promise you one thing - you will appreciate the journey all the more for the little bumps in the road. I learned a lot in my first year, and not just about scholarly subjects I was studying.



### NUMBER 1: College is where the real world and the rest of your life begin.

That might sound a little too clichéd for an opening, but I found it to be almost unnervingly true. Everything you’ve done up until now has been as a child and teenager under the loving guidance of your parents. While they will always be there to look out for you, you are an adult now and for the first time are expected to take responsibility for your life and your future. As scary as that sounds, it’s alright, because your parents have been preparing you your entire life for this transition from high school to university. As a military child, you already have an advantage. You’ve traveled and have seen different places and met all sorts of people, and it’s likely that you’ve changed schools at

least once, so you are more prepared than you think to go off to college on your own. The odds are that your transition will go smoother than you expect. But it’s important to know that while you might still feel like a child, everything you do from now on will have an effect on the rest of your life, which isn’t as terrifying as it sounds. There will be bad times you will learn from and good times you will remember forever.

### NUMBER 2: Transitions that are difficult at first only improve with time.

I’ll admit it. The first few nights that I spent in my new dorm room all alone, I cried myself to sleep. I had never been away from my family for more than a few days at a time (except for

overseas deployments), and I hadn't expected that I would miss them so much. Of course, I had chosen to attend a university that was nearly two thousand miles from my last home, so I knew that I was headed for a place full of unrecognizable faces. I woke up those first mornings with red eyes and a sinking feeling in my chest that I had made the worst mistake of my life in choosing to leave home. But every single day that I got dressed, left the comfort of my dorm room, and made myself socialize by meeting new people and joining clubs before classes started meant that I spent many more busy, pleasurable days, and fewer depressed and lonely evenings on my own. And suddenly, the hours and days that I spent learning and making friends turned into weeks and months that passed with enjoyment and the satisfaction that I had broken out of my comfort zone and learned so much and had fun along the road.

### NUMBER 3: College classes aren't easy A's.

It might seem obvious that college is harder than high school. If you're like me, you sailed through high school taking advanced classes and not studying hard at all for them, but still landing mostly A's with the occasional B in classes you didn't like (in my case - chemistry!) I hope that it won't come as a surprise to you like it did for me that college is different. I'll just put it plainly: Don't expect to get straight A's with a minimum level of effort. Looking back, I see high school as a sort of dreamland in which it was possible to succeed by simply using the formulas of learning that are taught to us at a young age in the American school system. It was fairly easy. Show up to class, listen to the teacher, skim your textbook, and somehow absorb enough information to

## WHAT TO EXPECT YOUR FRESHMAN YEAR

According to a recent study at UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute, 48% of college freshmen have issues with effective time management, 61% experience some type of homesickness, and another 48% experience a roommate issue. Knowing that this first year of college is full of transitions can make a difference! You can help make your freshman year successful by preparing for the additional workload, managing time wisely, and managing stress.

**Time management is an important skill that takes time to master!** Make use of your university's resource center. Staff can help you come up with a schedule that won't make you feel overwhelmed.

1. **Use a planner:** Write everything down! When you have a clear list of things to do and deadlines to meet, you won't be surprised by a forgotten detail or assignment.
2. **Schedule time for relaxation:** Just because you CAN schedule things from 7:30 straight through to 11:30, doesn't mean you should. Stop and have a cup of tea with a friend or grab a burger with a classmate at the cafeteria.
3. **Expect the unexpected; plan ahead:** Two tests can happen on the same day. Knowing that and building time into your schedule for studying and work can make a difference between a passing and a failing grade.
4. **Feed your brain:** College students cannot exist on Starbucks and ramen. Take time to eat a healthy diet, exercise, and get eight hours of sleep.

### Freshman Year Stress Plan

For many freshmen, it is their first time away from home for an extended amount of time. Laundry, funds management, roommates, sports, along with scheduling classes and homework, can lead to some serious stress. Planning ahead for stress and knowing effective ways to alleviate it is imperative. Take a moment to fill out your "3x5" card for stress management

#### Three Positive People I Can Talk to When I Get Stressed:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Don't forget to make use of your College's counseling center! They are there to help!

#### Five Things I Can Do to Alleviate Stress:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

These are five activities that can help manage stress in a positive way...

Examples could be: take a walk, exercise, volunteer, take a nap, do laundry with a friend, play an instrument, read a book. Remember that positive coping skills help manage stress from reaching levels that can affect your well-being. Find out what works for you.

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be able to clearly parrot it back. In my educational experiences pre-university, complex thinking and a higher level of analysis was not necessary. When I got to college, I was taken aback by how hard it was to get an A and how much understanding and sophistication was required to achieve that grade letter. But that only meant that when I did land an A in a class, I was much happier because I knew it had come as the result of hours and hours of hard work.

#### **NUMBER 4: It's not the end of the world if you get a "bad" grade.**

It's important to keep in mind that you are going to college to learn new things and use your mind in ways you never have before in order to be able to ultimately get a job that seeks to benefit society. You aren't going there to ace every class and impress your professors with your astounding acumen and superior intelligence. The raw truth is that college is not high school, and classes are not structured the same way. The idea of a university class is to press you harder than you've been pressed before and teach you as much as possible and

#### **NUMBER 5: You are entering a much bigger pond of people.**

Whether you end up attending a small college or a larger university like I did, there will be people and many of them. The truth is that, basically everywhere you turn on campus you will see nice-looking people your age who seem like possible friend candidates, but then you turn again and they are gone, only to be replaced by new friendly faces. As a military child, you will have already been exposed to the phenomenon of constantly meeting new people in new places and making new friends. College takes that to a whole other level, with all of the different nationalities, ethnicities, religions and personalities of people you will meet. And there are clubs for just about anything you can think of, from political groups to sports clubs and community service groups (my campus has both a "Chocolate Appreciation Club" and a Quidditch team.) But don't get overwhelmed, because the chances are that at least one-fourth of the people on an undergraduate campus are just like you - new and shy and unsure about how to proceed. The others that aren't freshman any longer at least know how it feels. So don't be afraid to put yourself out there, try new things, and make friends - you just might be glad that you did!

## **I WOULD ADVISE YOU TO STAY TRUE TO WHO YOU ARE AFTER ALL, IF WHO YOU WERE EXISTED FOR THE PERSON YOU WERE BEFORE COLLEGE, THAT PERSON MUST BE SOMEONE WHO YOU WANT TO BE**

to the best possible effect in a short amount of time. So it isn't going to be easy. I found that the classes in which I learned a lot from amazing professors ended up being much more valuable to me than the ones in which I already knew half of the content matter coming into the course. In those harder classes, I didn't score as well, but I knew that I had studied hard and tried my best, and that is what matters. Learning is more important than acing. If you come away from a freshman college course with new, more developed knowledge of the subject and a fresher perspective on the world at large, that is what you will treasure when you look back on your education, not the grade letter you received. Of course, it's important to try your best, and if you did just that while learning a lot, then you have nothing to beat yourself up about if your grade is not as good as you might have liked. Truthfully, college is about finding out what you're interested in and what you're good at along with the education itself, and it's important to remember that going forward.

#### **NUMBER 6: Reading is both the easiest and the hardest thing you will have to do.**

I have spent my entire life reading - novels, poems, short stories, nonfiction, plays, classical literature, essays.... Putting it mildly, I enjoy reading. It's one of the things that I have always been good at for the simple reason that I love it. But reading in university is a little different. Now, if you aren't planning on pursuing a liberal arts program, this doesn't really affect you (I suppose that future engineers and mathematicians and biologists have better things to do than read hundreds of pages of dry textbooks.) Putting it gently, university entails a lot of reading. If I were to give a rough estimate of how much I read my first year, the number would probably come to around five to six thousand pages composed of textbooks, novels, biographies, and articles. My first year I spent hours a day with my books and a highlighter in hand, hoping that by coloring over information in my psychology textbook or my Roman history biographies or Greek mythology books, I would be able to remember it all easier. It wasn't so much the reading itself that was difficult; it was just the level of comprehension and

memorization that was required along with the simple act of reading the words. Not all of it was boring; I greatly enjoyed reading Homer and other classical authors, for example. While being a voracious reader as a child helps you prepare for all the required reading in college, it's still a little daunting. And although I really loved learning from all my required readings, I found that I no longer had any time whatsoever for pleasure reading. But that was alright, because soon the sheer volume of raw history that I was absorbing through reading so many textbooks and first-hand accounts managed to outweigh all of the anecdotal historical fiction that I had loved all my life. The novels did prepare me for the real deal.

## NUMBER 7: Learning how to be yourself is one of the most important things you will do.

I've already mentioned how large and diverse the student-body population on a university campus

# YOU ARE. PREVIOUS EIGHTEEN YEARS WORTH KNOWING.

is. I also know first-hand how with such a varied assortment of types of people and the lifestyles they represent, it can be very easy to lose yourself and become an entirely new person, with no one from your past life to judge you. But, I would advise you to stay true to who you are. After all, if who you were existed for the previous eighteen years before college, that person must be someone worth knowing. Don't get too easily caught up in the novelty of recreating yourself despite the numerous outlooks you will be exposed to through new friends and new ideas. While it's important to come out of your comfort zone and try new things, staying true to who you are intuitively will mold the person you are becoming more than inventing an innovative image. College is a new beginning and presents an opportunity for change, but don't forget the background, experiences, and other people in your life that have shaped you into who you are. It's good to be receptive and keep an open mind while still staying true to yourself.

## The 5 Questions

*Five things to ask yourself as you begin your college search:*

### 1. How far away do I want to go? Why?

*It is important to consider traveling time, costs, ease of reaching your home or school, or your comfort level.*

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### 2. What size college do I want to attend?

*The College Board categorizes colleges and universities with less than 2,000 enrolled students as small, schools with between 2,000 and 15,000 students as medium, and schools with 15,000 or more students as large.*

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### 3. What do I want to study? Do the colleges I am considering meet my academic goals?

*Does the college I am applying for have the program or major I want?*

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### 4. How will I participate in my college community?

*Does the college have activities, clubs and sports that meet my interests?*

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### 5. Do my parents have any requirements?

*Do my parents want me to attend a local school, their alma mater, or a place near other family members? What financial considerations do my parents have?*

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# UNPREPARED for COLLEGE



HALF OF ALL COLLEGE STUDENTS DROP OUT BEFORE RECEIVING A DEGREE

COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST COLLEGE ATTAINMENT RATES (AMONG 25-34 YEAR OLDS)

1		CANADA	55.8%
2		S. KOREA	55.5%
3		RUSSIA	55.5%
4		JAPAN	53.7%
5		NEW ZEALAND	47.3%
6		IRELAND	43.9%
12		USA	40%



1 in 4

COLLEGE FRESHMAN  
DONT COMPLETE THEIR  
FIRST YEAR

Over half-a-million  
COLLEGE FRESHMAN  
DROP OUT EVERY YEAR

So what's the  
PROBLEM



## “Give it the ol’ colle

We’ve all heard it. Whether from a coach, a parent or other authority figure, the phrase is often used as encouragement when one is faced with a seemingly insurmountable task. It instructs us to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps and do our best, even in the face of possible, or even likely, defeat. Lately, the phrase seems all too apt as post-secondary students worldwide are dropping out of school at alarming rates. In fact, a recent study found that one in four freshmen in the U.S. do not complete their first year of school, despite giving college a try.

It’s possible that high school students simply do not have a realistic idea of what college is actually like. Although 80% of students graduating high school think they are ready for college once they have their diplomas, the reality does not reflect this confidence. If students base their visions of college on the pop culture representation in movies like *Van Wilder* or *Old School*, they are in for a shock when their first week of classes results in the expectation that they will complete two personal essays, an analysis of the role abolitionists played in the Civil War and 140 pages of background reading over the weekend. Highly motivated individuals are able to navigate the initial adjustment to college by tweaking their study habits. But many are not up to this challenge. This is not solely an American phenomenon, either; studies suggest that up to half of all college students drop out of college for various reasons before earning a degree. To put it in perspective, Canada has a 55.8 percent attainment rate, which measures the percentage of students who complete their degrees, compared to Japan’s 53.7 percent; New Zealand’s 47.3 percent; Ireland’s 43.9 percent; and America’s 40 percent.

Of course, it’s possible that many of these students simply don’t see the point of staying in college. With a record 50 percent of young adults unemployed or underemployed (meaning they either have part-time jobs or jobs for which they are overqualified), more American college graduates are living at home with their parents after school than at any time since 1950.

However, despite such discouraging job statistics, it would be unfair to blame the job market for the ill preparedness displayed by many high school graduates. **Consider the following:**

- At the time of graduation, nine in ten American high school graduates cannot identify Afghanistan on a map of Asia
- Three in ten cannot find China — the biggest country in the world — on a globe
- Roughly half cannot find New York state on a U.S. map

# ge try.”

As a result of these and other findings, more than 2.2 million college freshmen must take remedial courses that teach high school material during their first year in college in order to catch up with their peers. Taxpayers shell out \$5.6 billion for these remedial courses. To put that figure into perspective, if differently allocated, that money could pay for 175,000 students to attend four years of college.

High school achievement aside, some people argue that the point of college is for students to expand their social and mental horizons rather than to scale new academic heights. Still, while strong arguments can be made for the value of experience over formal education, the bachelor's degree has become the new high school diploma in many professional circles. Even if students don't end up pursuing

**Highly motivated individuals are able to navigate the initial adjustment to college by tweaking their study habits. But many are not up to this challenge.**

a career in the same field as their major, completing a degree signals to prospective employers that students are hard workers who can finish their commitments.

Students who are currently struggling with school should know that there are many resources available, from reaching out to on-campus advisors, joining study groups and taking advantage of technology to help them study more efficiently through online classes. College is hard work, despite its sometimes-hazy portrayal in pop culture. But it doesn't have to be impossible, provided students prepare themselves socially and academically for the challenge.

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## College Admissions Checklist

### Junior Year

- Meet with your counselor (once in the fall, and again in the spring).  
Double check your progress on your four-year plan.
- Check your GPA, transcript, and class rank for accuracy.
- Take the PSAT/NMSQT (fall).
- Begin the process of applying to any of the Military Academies, if applicable.
- Write a first draft of your resume (fall).
- Write a first draft of your college essay (winter break).
- Take the SAT, SAT II, and/or the ACT (winter or spring).
- Register with the NCAA clearinghouse as a recruitable athlete, if applicable.
- Request admissions information from colleges and universities.
- Visit colleges, either in person or online.
- Clean up your social media presence.
- Make sure you graduate on time by fulfilling all district requirements.
- Gather any college admissions specific information such as your art or music portfolio, athletic game tapes, or tests.
- Ask teachers, coaches, employers, or other adults for recommendations.

### Senior Year

- If you are male and turn 18, register with the Selective Service.
- Add to, review, and finalize your resume.
- Finalize your college essay.
- Make note of all deadlines for admissions and financial aid.
- Set up a meeting with your counselor to review plan.
- Check GPA, transcript, and class rank for accuracy.
- Review recommendations and ask for additional ones if necessary.
- Take SAT or ACT one more time, if possible.
- Complete and mail college applications (Oct.-Dec.).
- Gather information needed for FAFSA and CSS profile.
- Fill out FAFSA and CSS profile (available January 1).
- Apply for local scholarships (all year).
- Take necessary AP or IB exams.
- Send official transcripts.
- Notify colleges of your decision to accept or decline their offer (May).
- Accept or decline financial aid from the college you plan to attend.

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# L GRADUATING FROM THE SCHOOL OF LIFE:

## *Why Education Matters*

JAMES HARPER  
Senior, Texas A&M University - Central Texas

**The routine is the same** nearly every day. I stroll over the threshold of my Copperas Cove home, remove my shoes, slide the bag off my back, and empty my pockets of their contents. The list of contents is similar to every working adult. There's always a combination of receipts, self-addressed notes and reminders, my wallet and cell phone, and, last but not least, the loose change from the day's exchange of dollars for coffee and meals. I never count the coins; instead, I give a cheerful holler in a sing-song voice, "Aiiiiiiiiiiyyynnnn!," and my 6-year-old daughter replies just as happily, "Daddddyyyyy!" Then my little angel runs into my arms for an incredible hug that I never want to release. But, as is always the case, we let go. I hand her the change and she smiles. "I'm going to put it in my piggy bank!" And then she's off. Ailyn runs full speed taking the tight corners of the walls and hallways as if she were a NASCAR driver; seconds later she returns and says, "Daddy I have so much money for college!" I nearly cry every time.

I didn't graduate high school, and neither did my brother or three sisters. In fact, my mom and dad didn't graduate high school either. It seems that not graduating became the family tradition. Eventually I earned my GED in 2003, enlisted in the U.S. Army in February 2005, and am currently a 30-year-old senior at Texas A&M – Central Texas. To be as close as I am to completing my first diploma is pretty amazing considering I failed out of college three separate times prior to enlisting. I wasn't lazy or dumb. In fact, I consider myself to be intelligent. The scholastic failures were due to my lack of appreciation for what an education can offer. My attitude was a reflected manifestation of the broken dream that was my hometown. A town which I felt exemplified lethargy. It was once a bustling New England textile town, but the factories closed down and moved overseas. After that, our community accepted failure after failure until it was bred into us like an inherent flaw. In fact, my freshman class in 1998 numbered 350 kids, but we graduated about 180. Most dropped out, some passed away and the others, like me, would rather party and "live it up." That meant we would sacrifice school in order to have fun. My senior year I missed 70 days of school, almost half the year and despite having passing grades in all my classes, I didn't receive credit. I was young – and stupid.

Conversely, my wife graduated high school at the top of her class. We met during her junior year of college, and were married later that year. She earned a Bachelor's degree in pre-veterinary from the University of Connecticut and also obtained a Master's degree in education. After my service time ended, she taught for one year, at my old high school no less, and couldn't handle the stress. The town hadn't changed much in the ten years since I left. The majority of her students had the same attitude about school as I once did, "Who cares? What's the difference?" they asked. Katie, my wife, couldn't comprehend the negative perception her students had toward education. She often said, "I don't understand. Don't they know that they can leave that town? Don't they know that they don't have to stay?" She didn't understand because she couldn't. She didn't live there. She didn't know. She wanted to help her students and gave all of herself to the task but it wasn't enough. Most of her students stayed lethargic – perfectly content to accept the status quo. Plagued by stress and doubt, Katie decided to pursue a different path. With large student

loans, she opted to enlist in the U.S. Army, and we got stationed at Fort Hood, Texas. Soon she will leave for San Antonio for Physician Assistant School, where she will earn yet another degree, and be commissioned as an officer in the Army.

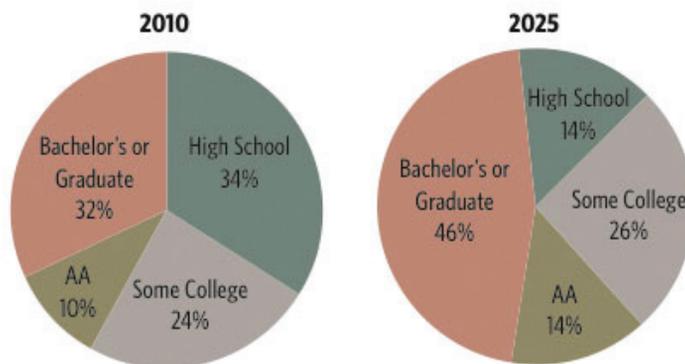
My wife and I have sacrificed so much for the military; separations from training and deployments create many long, lonely days. But as any military spouse knows, there's no time for self-pity when you have to care for a child. The spouse has to become a shape shifter of sorts – one moment you are the mommy, the next you are daddy. Despite the hardships, neither my wife nor I would change a thing. In return for our service and sacrifice, the Army paid her student loans and is paying for her to get her second Master's degree, while the Post-9/11 GI Bill has allowed me to go to college full-time. The advantage it allows me is immeasurable. Due to my monthly stipends, I can focus on school and utilize what little free time I have to improve my career opportunities. In addition to being selected as the Military Child Education Coalition Social Media Intern, I also work as a freelance sports journalist for the Killeen Daily Herald. Neither would be possible if I didn't have the GI Bill's monthly stipend, and both "jobs" offer me invaluable experience that will undoubtedly produce results once I finish college and proceed to the next step in life.

They say kids do what they see. I don't know who "they" are but, in my humble opinion, they are absolutely right. For all its faults, I can honestly say I grew up in a loving home, and as a result I express my undying love for my family on a daily basis. I also grew up in a family that showed no understanding of what a good education can offer; accordingly, I grew to hold education with little regard. I know now that we were so very wrong. My daughter knows it too because she does what she sees – all kids do. She sees her daddy going to school full-time while also pursuing his passion for writing. She sees her mommy give 100 percent effort in every endeavor, and that shows Ailyn that hard work can pay off. Ailyn sees all of this and knows it comes from higher education. She also knows it isn't free. So she saves every penny, nickel, dime and quarter that jingles in my pocket. She knows every penny counts because she sees that a college education is worth every penny.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Those with a four-year degree earn, on average, nearly \$1 million more over a lifetime than those with only a high school degree.

Share of Credentials Among Youth Ages 25-30 in 2010 and Projected 2025



## FACEBOOK, MYSPACE, TWITTER, INSTAGRAM

Like most teens, social media such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and Instagram is a part of your daily life. Many schools look at a prospective student's social media "presence" as part of the admissions process. Although pictures of you at the beach with friends may seem innocent to you, they can be off-putting to an admissions officer.

Your comments and posts can also make a good or bad impression. Refrain from making derogatory, political, or sarcastic comments on your social media because such remarks can be misinterpreted. Sanitize your social media presence and history, and know that in the future, companies that offer college internships and post-college jobs may also be checking out your Facebook page to see who you are. If you are unsure about posting a certain statement or a picture, don't post it. Use the "grandmother" rule: only put things on your social media sites that you wouldn't mind your grandmother reading!

# Evaluating your Essay

Use this essay rubric as a guide for your teacher/counselor to give you feedback as you work through the essay writing process. Copy this page and hand it in with your rough draft to a trusted "editor." Have your editor use the scale to grade each aspect of your essay.

**ORIGINALITY:** Is the writer creative in topic and language? Is the essay detailed and descriptive?

**A      B      C      D**

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**GRAMMAR AND SPELLING:** Is the essay free from error?

**A      B      C      D**

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**CLEAR AND FOCUSED:** Is the essay well-organized and understandable? Does the writer stay on topic and engage the reader?

**A      B      C      D**

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**WRITER'S VOICE:** Does the essay reflect the writer as you know him? Is it an accurate portrayal of the student?

**A      B      C      D**

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**OVERALL GRADE AVERAGE:    A      B      C      D      F**

**WOULD YOU ADMIT AN ACADEMICALLY-QUALIFIED STUDENT BASED ON THIS ESSAY?    Yes    No**

**SCORES: SAT, ACT, AND SUBJECT TESTS**

\_\_\_\_\_  
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# Sample Essay



For all of my life my family have **emphasised** the importance of education. **That's** why I want to go to college to become a veterinarian. Growing up, my parents were always taking in animals. Whether it was dogs, cats, even the occasional bird, my parents instilled in **my** a passion for taking care of all creatures, great and small. When I was 11, my family even got a horse, which was an awesome thing as the horse became one of my best friends and I loved getting to take extra special care of my prized horse. Having the horse was a big responsibility, but I enjoyed going the extra mile to take care of her. I often had to get up hours before school to muck the stable and make sure that she had food for the day. After school, I often missed out on spending time with my friends because of the additional responsibilities like having to exercise her, groom her, **etc.** but the joy I got from building that relationship made it all worthwhile.

*watch spelling!*

*Run-on sentence*

*Don't abbreviate! Think of what you really want to say and be concise.*

*Spell check won't catch errors like this*

The experience of taking care of my horse taught me that the most difficult work usually yields the greatest pay off. I did not come to the decision that I wanted to be a **veterinarians** lightly. I have done a lot of research and **am well aware that it will involve a lot of studying, sacrifice, and that it will take several years to complete, even after most of my friends are finished with school I will still be going to classes, taking tests, and having to study to make my dream come true.** However, just as my work with my horse paid off and rewarded me with one of the most meaningful **relationships** of my life, I know that completing veterinary school will be the realization of a life-long dream to work with animals.

*This would be more coherent if the sentences were separated.*

*Refer to specific university here*

Attending **this** University would give me the strong educational foundation that I will need to transition into the veterinary medicine program. Your program is one of the most competitive in the country, but I **believe** that my dedication to learning, as well as my exceptional academic background, make me an ideal candidate for acceptance.

*Nice work, but **BE SURE** to check your spelling, grammar and sentence structure!*



## What Students Can Do to Develop Their College Readiness

A definition of college readiness must also address the issue of how students combine the various facets of college readiness. For students, the combination is more complex because it includes the elements under the school's control along with those that are not.

In particular, students need to understand what it really means to be college-ready. They need to understand what they must do as well as what the system requires or expects of them. They must, first and foremost, understand that college admission is a reasonable and realistic goal that can be attained through planning and diligent attention to necessary tasks.

Because colleges judge students based on the sum total of their performance in high school (although many omit the freshman year and some functionally ignore the second semester of senior year), it is critical that students begin their journey toward college readiness immediately before they arrive in high school. While this paper will not explore the role of the middle school in making students college-ready, it is worth noting that, at the least, the connection between middle school and high school math and English programs is worth careful scrutiny. Students, for their part, need to be making the right decision as they prepare their very first high school schedule as incoming ninth graders. A wrong decision at this point can have ramifications throughout high school and beyond.

Similarly, they need to construct an overall plan for college preparation that ensures they will develop the necessary skills in a progressively more complex fashion over four years. Ideally, the school's program of

study will be designed so that students cannot make bad decisions. The element of individual student planning is important in the US educational system, where high school and college are not closely or directly connected.

A number of states have instituted what they call "default" high school programs of study into which all students are enrolled unless their parents specifically exempt them from the program. The programs of study are designed to meet the entrance requirements of the state university system. This is a first step in the direction of ensuring that students do not make bad decisions in high school, decisions they quickly come to regret when they are faced with the prospect of life after high school.

Students need to take the responsibility to utilize the information presented to them on college academic and financial requirements and to discuss this information with adults in their lives who may be able to help them. Not all students have supportive family environments, but support can come from other quarters as well, and students need to be encouraged to reach out to and interact with adults who can help them navigate the college readiness gauntlet, whether these adults are relatives, community service staff, or adults at the school who may be paid staff or volunteers. **Young people need personal contact and guidance to know how to become, and believe they are capable of being, college-ready.**

Given the knowledge-intensive system of college readiness, admission, and financial aid that the US has developed, this component of personal support and student initiative cannot be overlooked in the college readiness equation.

*Redefining College Readiness*, Page 28, Educational Policy Improvement Center

# How Americans Pay for College

DREW DESILVER  
Senior Writer, Pew Research Center

A college education, regardless of its future value (which has been the topic of much discussion of late) is without doubt one of the biggest financial challenges American families will face. A new report from Sallie Mae, the student-loan company, shows how families have met that challenge in recent years.

Though there are many sources of funds for college — from loans to work-study jobs to that Series EE savings bond Aunt Millie gave you for your fourth birthday — a useful approach is to divide them into three groups: parents’ and students’ own resources (savings, income), money you have to pay back (loans), and money you don’t have to pay back (grants, scholarships, gifts).

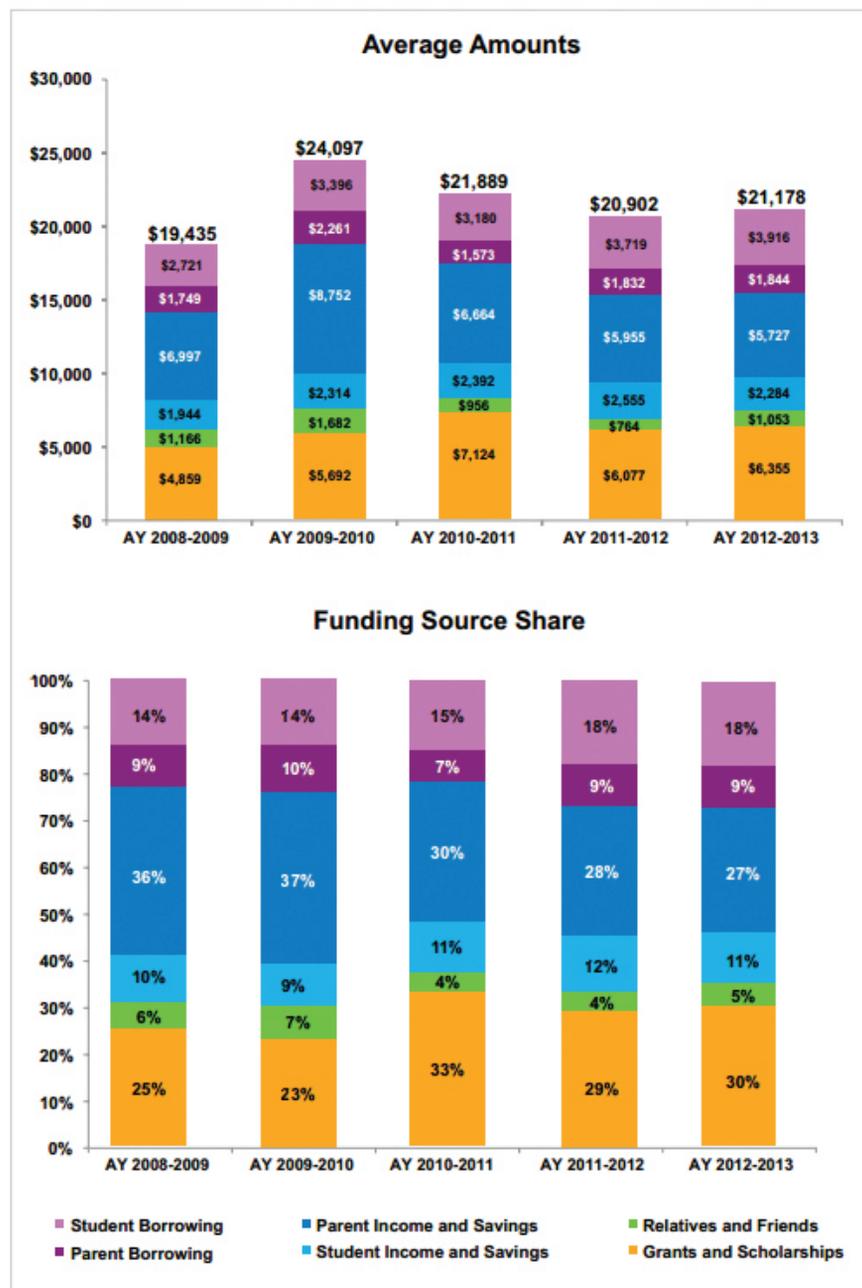
Looked at that way, American families are relying more on outside sources of college money and less on their own resources. In the 2012-13 academic year, parents’ and students’ own money together made up less than 38% of the average family’s college spending, down from 46% in 2008-09. Parents’ contributions in particular fell sharply, leading Sallie Mae to comment that “one outcome of the recession and the slow economic recovery is the stress that it has placed on parents’ ability to pay for college from their income and savings.”

Another outcome has been greater reliance on grants, scholarships and loans. The “money you don’t have to pay back” category grew to 35% of college costs in the most recent academic year, from 31% four years earlier. Loans accounted for 27% of the average family’s college spending,

up from 23% in 2008-09; the average annual total loan amount grew to \$5,760 from \$4,470. (About one out of five U.S. households owed student

debt in 2010, more than double the share two decades earlier, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of government data.)

HOW THE TYPICAL FAMILY PAYS FOR COLLEGE, YEAR-OVER-YEAR



Source: www.pewresearch.org

# College Board Enters Ex

CATHERINE GEWERTZ

The College Board is redesigning four of its testing programs so they reflect the Common Core State Standards and can be used for accountability, a project that adds yet another player to the list of companies seeking to take on new roles in a shifting nationwide assessment landscape.

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The New York City-based nonprofit announced last year that it would align its college-entrance exam, the SAT, to the common standards. But its plans have expanded to include three other products: ReditStep, aimed at 8th and 9th graders; the PSAT, typically taken by 10th and 11th graders; and Accuplacer, used by colleges to determine course placement for incoming students.

Test redesigns are still largely in the discussion stage, according to David Coleman, who took over as the College Board's president last October after serving as a chief writer of the common standards in English/language arts. The organization is talking with policymakers and educators in states at the K-12 and higher education levels, he said.

But the idea is to create a suite of tests that could serve as indicators of how well students are progressing toward mastering the college-readiness skills outlined in the standards in literacy and mathematics. States could use those tests as part of their accountability systems by 2014-15, Mr. Coleman said.

He wants the tests to play other roles, too: as an early-warning system, facilitating interventions for students who are behind; and as door-openers, identifying promising but under-recognized students and connecting them with more-challenging coursework and with supports that will aid them in applying for college.

In revising and repositioning a group of its tests, however, the College Board appears to be working—at least in the upper grades—on some of the same turf as the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, the two big groups of states that are using federal funds to design tests in grades 3-8 and high school for the common standards.

And the College Board isn't the only one working that territory: ACT Inc. announced last year that it would produce a brand-new suite of common core tests that will span elementary through high school, include not only math and literacy but science, and be ready to use a year earlier than the consortium tests, which are slated for debut in 2015.

In that system, called Aspire, the ACT college-entrance

# Expanding Common-Test Market

exam will serve as the capstone, and the new middle and high school tests will replace the current Plan and Explore products, which are being phased out, ACT officials said.

Each new vendor entry into the marketplace for common-core assessments sparks debate. For some common-core skeptics and those opposed to a heavy emphasis on testing, moves like the College Board's confirm their suspicions that the new standards will expand the assessment burden on students and serve as a vehicle to enrich assessment companies.

Proponents of the common standards worry that if private companies carve too many states out of the two consortia, key advantages of the collective work—a high, shared cutoff score and cross-state comparability—could be lost.

**"If we have 10 or 15 different assessments, and states decide they're going to set their own cut scores, we are going to be right back where we were pre-Arne Duncan. I think people are underestimating how important common assessments are to common standards."**

"If we have 10 or 15 different assessments, and states decide they're going to set their own cut scores, we are going to be right back where we were pre-Arne Duncan," said Andy Smarick, a consultant at Bellwether Education Partners, a Washington consulting firm. "I think people are underestimating how important common assessments are to common standards."

The U.S. Department of Education, under Secretary Duncan, has awarded \$360 million to the consortia working on common-core-aligned tests.

Some backers of the standards, though, are starting to argue that multiple tests won't necessarily undermine the common core.

"There's this narrative that somehow when states pull out of [a consortium], it's a chink in the armor of the common core," said Michael J. Petrilli, the executive vice president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a Washington think tank that supports the standards. But if states that leave choose assessments that are truly of high quality and reflective of the standards, then "perhaps we haven't lost much," he said.

## Mission or Competition?

Mr. Coleman of the College Board, in recent public comments, has urged acceptance of multiple players on the common-assessment landscape. At a recent GE Foundation conference in Orlando, Fla., for instance, he encouraged business leaders to embrace the "pluralism" of the evolving marketplace, in which some states will use consortium tests and others will choose different assessments.

"I think it's OK that we may see some variety in assessment, as long as they're coordinated together and put on a common scheme of measurement," he said.

Comments like those, combined with moves by the College Board to lure away top talent from ACT, have prompted some in the field to view the organization's moves as a way to gain

ground in the long-standing competition between the two big purveyors of college-entrance exams, while also gaining market share in the common core world.

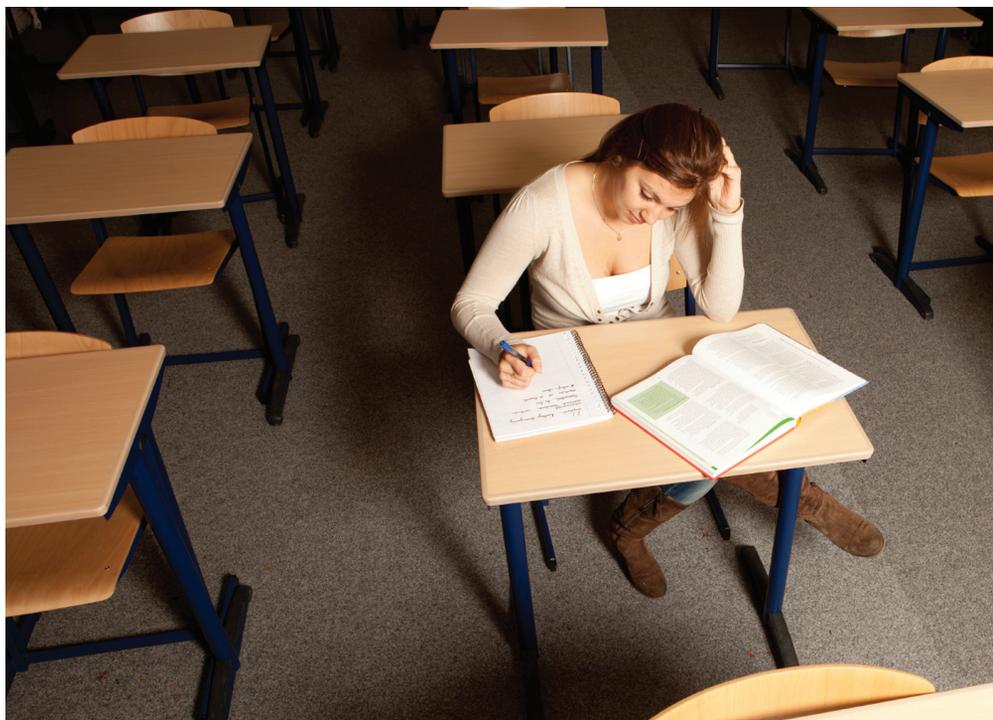
"What you hear a lot is that, like ACT, they are making a play to be the high school common core test," said one Washington education activist.

The College Board hired Cynthia Schmeiser, a former head of ACT's education division, in April to oversee assessment. It has since added other key ACT players to its roster, including Sherri Miller, who was an assistant vice president in ACT's education division and served on both the literacy- and math-writing panels for the common core; Ranjit Sidhu, ACT's former senior vice president for strategic initiatives; and Jim Patterson, who worked on literacy content for the Plan, Explore, and ACT exams and was an influential panelist on the common core literacy-writing panel.

The College Board has also enlisted people with strong education connections in the Midwest, where ACT has traditionally been dominant.

Todd Huston, who now oversees state and district partnerships, is a former chief of staff in the Indiana education department. Jon Gubera, the College Board's new head of state government relations, was Indiana's chief accountability officer and associate commissioner for policy for the state's higher education commission.

What's more, the College Board opened an office a few months ago in Iowa City, Iowa, only a few miles from ACT's headquarters. Many saw that move as a bid to facilitate competition. It's easier to recruit staff members from ACT if they aren't forced to relocate, said one assessment insider, and it's also "a way of slowing down a competitor when they're in heavy development mode."



## "It will take some time to come up with the new assessments. Almost no one is pleased with the current ones."

Like most sources consulted for this article, he would not speak for attribution because of his interests in maintaining working relationships in the field.

One education activist in the Ohio Statehouse said the College Board has stepped up its lobbying efforts in Columbus.

"In my experience, they are really, really pushing their lobbying front here in a way I haven't seen in a decade," the activist said. "They have people reaching out not just to state officials but to districts."

Those efforts appear to be starting to pay off in a strong ACT state. Just recently, Ohio awarded the College Board a one-year contract to administer the PSAT to sophomores in 2014.

Developments like that frustrate the common-assessment consortia, which are working hard to keep states in the fold.

"One of the consortia's problems is we don't have lobbyists to explain the assessments to legislators, and many testing companies do," said one consortium official. "That puts us at a huge disadvantage in state legislatures."

Peggy Lehner is one of the state lawmakers who have heard about the College Board's plans through its outreach. The chairwoman of the education committee in the Ohio senate,

she said that Mr. Gubera stopped by her office a few months ago and had a "fairly casual" conversation with her.

"He certainly did make a strong pitch, but I would hardly say it was a hard sell," Sen. Lehner said. She noted, however, that the state school board, not the legislature, decides which tests will be used.

The board plans to use PARCC exams at grades 3-8, and might use them as high school end-of-course tests, but the board is examining its options at the high school level, said C. Todd Jones, who heads a board committee examining that issue.

"ACT's advantage is they have a name brand that people feel comfortable with," Sen. Lehner said. "But states have had far more opportunity to engage with the development of the PARCC assessment than they ever have with ACT, which is all done behind closed doors. We have a hundred educators working on the PARCC test."

Kentucky Commissioner of Education Terry Holliday said the College Board's products are "certainly" one of the options he is considering, along with PARCC tests, as he looks ahead to assessing the common core.

Oklahoma state Superintendent Janet Barresi said her state will invite both the College Board and ACT to make presentations this fall to a state



Senate committee charged with producing a study of testing options. Oklahoma has announced that while it's still a member of PARCC, it will not use those assessments.

"It's a great time to begin a conversation about where we want to go," Ms. Barresi said. "All of us are looking for high-, high-quality assessments that will assess college and career readiness. Quality is not negotiable."

Oklahoma will issue a request for proposals for tests in grades 3-8, she said, and will modify its current high school tests, too. She invited Mr. Huston of the College Board to Oklahoma for a meeting a few months ago and came away interested in the organization's new emphasis on using its tests as early-warning and diagnostic tools to help students.

"We need designs for good courses," he said, guided both by K-12 and college faculty members. "The hope that assessment alone will shape instruction is wrong. As we think about courses, we may think about middle school as well."

Revisions in the four College Board tests will be guided by emphasizing skills associated with college success, Mr. Coleman said, such as citing evidence when writing and mastery of vocabulary most commonly used in college and good jobs. The revisions are being shaped jointly with college faculty members, admissions officers, K-12 teachers, and guidance counselors, he said.

Mr. Coleman said he wants the kinds of items on the tests to mirror good classroom instruction. The goal of the revised testing system, he said, is not just to gauge students' learning, but also to use test data to provide supports and interventions that help them move ahead.

As an example, he pointed to a new project that sends letters directly to students who scored high enough on the PSAT to make

## most powerful, elegant designs for secondary the current structures."

The prospect of giving up cross-state test-score comparability bothers her, however. Ms. Barresi said the state is looking for a way to get that benefit even as it explores using nonconsortium tests.

### **Opportunity Is Key Goal**

Mr. Coleman disputed the view that business interests are driving the College Board's common core testing plans. The project, he said, is fueled by the nonprofit's social-justice mission, something its board of directors made paramount in hiring him.

"This is about seeing assessment as a starting point for opportunity," he said. "The measures we are watching are things like can we change the number of low-income students going to college. How many students are taking our exams is much less interesting from a mission perspective. Nothing's worse than being a nonprofit without a social return, merely selling tests and not changing students' opportunities."

The hiring, in particular, of Ms. Schmeiser, who has a reputation as a passionate advocate of rigorous coursework, has prompted speculation that the College Board might move into offering middle school courses. Mr. Coleman did not rule that out.

them good candidates for Advanced Placement courses. Previously, such "AP potential" notifications went only to the schools.

The College Board has also begun following up those letters with waivers of college-application fees when those high-achieving PSAT students are juniors in high school, something that takes the support of its higher education members. That move is based on research showing that application fees can be a big deterrent when low-income students are applying to college.

Mr. Coleman sees the College Board's role in the common-assessment world as helping to clarify what achievement measures prove most useful, a process that should culminate not in expanding the number of tests in the field, but reducing it to fewer, top-notch tools.

"It will take some time to come up with the most powerful, elegant designs for secondary assessments," he said. "Almost no one is pleased with the current structures. It's OK if it takes some time to find the best solutions. And I think the College Board needs to be part of that conversation."

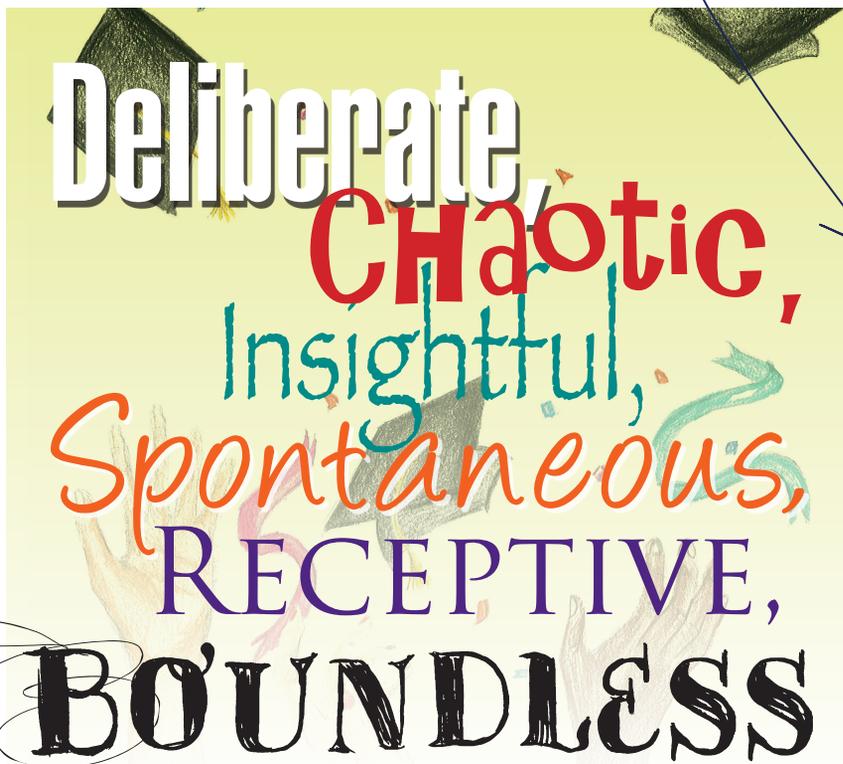
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As first appeared in *Education Week* August 14, 2013. Reprinted with permission from Editorial Projects in Education.

# MCEC Recommended High School Academic Plan

Today many students are taking Algebra I, II, and it is more important

English/ Language Arts <sup>1</sup>	Mathematics	Social Science
<p><b>Recommended Credits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 Credits English</li> <li>• Take pre-AP and honors courses at 9th and 10th grades.</li> <li>• Take courses with a strong base in literature and composition</li> <li>• AP, IB, or concurrent enrollment courses are strongly recommended.<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>	<p><b>Recommended Credits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 Credits Math</li> <li>• Take math every year.</li> <li>• Algebra I should be completed by the end of the 9th grade.<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Geometry is very important and Algebra II is a must.</li> <li>• Pre-calculus and Calculus are recommended.</li> <li>• Statistics may be a good option.</li> <li>• AP, IB, or concurrent enrollment courses are strongly recommended.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Recommended Credits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 Credits Social Studies</li> <li>• U.S. and world histories are a must; government/civics and economics are important.</li> <li>• Humanities courses may be an excellent option.</li> <li>• AP, IB, or concurrent enrollment courses are strongly recommended.</li> </ul>



1 Carnegie unit or credit is the equivalent of one year of course work. Because of alternative scheduling, course credit may be awarded at the end of the semester or term.

2 The "AP" program is the College Board's Advanced Placement program. Information is available at [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org). "IB" refers to the International Baccalaureate program. Information about IB can be found at <http://ib.org>.

3 Algebra I is encouraged in 8th grade if available. Because middle schools are structured in various ways, there is too much inconsistency in program availability or quality, in our opinion, to merit a broad-based recommendation for 8th grade algebra. We do, however, suggest that parents consider this option, if possible.

ABI C, ROSS MS, TEXAS

\*One of the winning entries in S2S

Wordle Challenge describing military life.

complete Pre-AP and Pre-IB classes in middle school, as well as high school credit classes the first year of a foreign language, and even Biology or English I. Couple this with mobility is more important than ever for students to develop a 6-year, Grade 7 through high school academic plan.



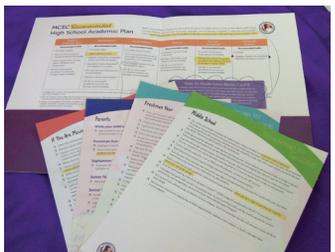
Recommended Credits	Recommended Credits	Recommended Credits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Credits Science (3 lab sciences)</li> <li>Biology, Chemistry, and Physics recommended.</li> <li>AP, IB, or concurrent enrollment courses are strongly recommended.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 Credits of the same language as a minimum</li> <li>Taking more of one language is a good idea; taking a second language is a great idea.</li> <li>AP, IB, or concurrent enrollment courses are strongly recommended.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Credit</li> <li>Caution: There is no standard definition for these courses.</li> </ul>

*Notes for Middle School (Grades 7 and 8)*

Your schedule now will structure the options you have available in high school. To ensure you have many choices, take the most advanced math classes you can, even if high school credit is not an option. Consider taking a foreign language, as well as a computer course if your skills need some improvement. Check out academic competitions – they can be a fun way to learn and also provide experience thinking clearly under pressure, a skill that will serve you well taking the SAT and ACT.



*CYC High School*



*CYC Middle School*

Visit the MCEC store to purchase *Chart Your Course* and *College Admissions* products online!

**CHART YOUR COURSE (CYC)**

A wealth of information to help parents and their children plan a successful journey through middle school, high school, and beyond.

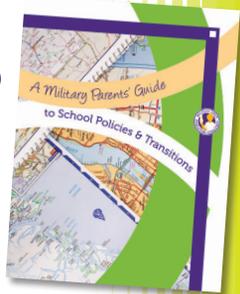
- MIDDLE SCHOOL.....\$3.00
- HIGH SCHOOL (includes *College Admissions Workbook* and *The Total College Solution DVD*).....\$20.80

**COLLEGE ADMISSIONS WORKBOOK** .....\$2.50

Written for the college-bound student, this is a great organization tool to help your student understand the college admissions process, find the “right” college or university, and build a great portfolio.

**A MILITARY PARENT’S GUIDE TO SCHOOL POLICIES & TRANSITIONS** ..... \$3.50

Understanding education policies and legislation can be challenging – especially since some of them vary from state to state. For military families faced with frequent moves, this guide is packed with helpful information: education acronyms defined, policies related to curriculum and requirements explained, and resources for students highlighted.

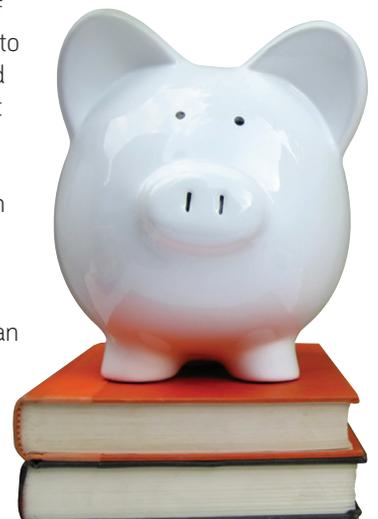


# Getting Ready to Apply for Financial Aid

KERRI BECKERT  
Parent to Parent Trainer

Here are some quick tips for all those parents to help them get through FAFSA season unscathed.

1. Download a FAFSA worksheet from [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). The FAFSA worksheet is a great organizational tool which can help parents identify the information they need to complete the FAFSA online.
2. Know your deadlines. Both states and universities have deadlines for submitting your information to receive financial aid. Knowing these deadlines can help avoid last-minute stress. Plan on filing the FAFSA **at least 10 days before the earliest deadline applicable**. (State deadlines and university deadlines don't always match. Use the earlier of the two.)
3. For returning students, try to complete the FAFSA before your student returns for their spring semester. Having your student around to electronically sign documents or find information can alleviate last-minute scrambling.
4. Don't wait to do the FAFSA until your taxes are done. Using your best estimates is an acceptable practice (and actually suggested by the Department of Education). For military parents, using your end of year LES is an easy way to retrieve much of the necessary information.
5. Don't panic if you are selected for verification. The government selects about 1 in every 25 applications for income and asset verification. Many times military families are selected as their income can fluctuate greatly from year to year depending on COLA, BAH, PCS, and deployment pay. Selection for verification does not hinder your financial aid process or award.
6. Use the IRS Retrieval Tool on the FAFSA on the web. Beginning in 2013, parents who submitted their taxes electronically to the IRS can use the information retrieval tool to help transfer information from their taxes to their FAFSA.
7. Don't be afraid to ask the school's financial aid office for help or information. Financial aid offices are a wealth of information. You can also get help from the Federal Student Aid offices either online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov), or you can call 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243). TTY users (hearing impaired) can call 1-800-730-8913.
8. Remember that the FAFSA stands for FREE Application for Federal Student Aid. Filing your FAFSA costs nothing and is provided by [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). Any other FAFSA websites (as in .com or .net) are NOT part of the Federal Student Aid system and are not authorized by the government.
9. Many private colleges and universities use the CSS Profile as well as the FAFSA. Some schools may even have their own additional financial aid application. Check out the school's website or call their financial aid office to find out exactly which forms and information they need. The CSS profile can be found at <http://student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile>. Know that the profile is managed by the College Board which is a private organization. The information used in the CSS profile may be different than the FAFSA.
10. Lastly, encourage your student to fill out as many scholarship applications as possible over school holidays in November and December. Although many schools count scholarship money against awards, it is normally used to offset student loan amounts. Remind your student that part of their job is to contribute to their own education, and scholarships are a great way of doing so! Look for scholarships in your local community through churches, community organizations like Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Spouses' Clubs, American Legion & VFW Posts, Commissaries and many more.



## Military Child Education Coalition®

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