

Learn The Lingo

College Planning and Admissions Terms

ACT - A college entrance test (like the SAT). Your scores on this tests will help determine what scholarships you can receive, what classes you will take your first year of college and even which colleges you can attend. They're a big deal, but the good news is (a) you can practice for them, and (b) you can take them more than once to try to get a better score. Many colleges accept scores from either the SAT or the ACT, but some require one or the other.

Admission/Application/Acceptance - You must apply to get into college. The process colleges use to decide who gets in is called admission. Colleges review each application and decide which students to accept. Students receive a letter of acceptance or rejection.

Advanced Placement (AP) - AP courses are classes you can take in high school that offer college-level coursework. Students can get college credit for this work by taking an end-of-the-year exam which covers all of the course material.

Application Deadline - This deadline is the last date to submit your application and be considered for acceptance for a particular term. Application deadlines vary for each college.

Application Fee - Some colleges charge a fee to process your application.

College Entrance Exams - These are standardized tests used to measure skills important for college success; many colleges require applicants to take at least one; most common are the SAT and the ACT.

Extracurricular Activities - Also known as co-curricular, these are activities in which a student participates outside of class, such as athletics, clubs, or music.

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Enrollment - Enrollment is the process a student must complete after they have been accepted in order to become an “official” student at the college. To enroll, students typically must complete all forms required by the college, pay tuition and fees, and sign up for classes.

PSAT - The Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test is designed for juniors and is co-sponsored by the College Board and the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. The PSAT/NMSQT measures critical reading, math problem solving, and writing skills. It does not measure things like creativity and motivation, and does not recognize the special talents that may be important to colleges.

SAT - This is another college entrance test (like the ACT). Your scores on this test will help determine what scholarships you can receive, what classes you will take your first year of college and even which colleges you can attend. They’re a big deal, but the good news is (a) you can practice for them, and (b) you can take them more than once to try to get a better score. Many colleges accept scores from either the SAT or the ACT, but some require one or the other.

Financial Aid Process Terms

Student Aid Index (SAI) - SAI is used to determine a student's ability to pay for college and the amount of financial aid they can receive. SAI has replaced the Expected Family Contribution (EFC), which was previously used to calculate a student's financial need. Information gathered on the FAFSA about a student and their family's financial profile determine the SAI. The index will equal the sum of a family's available income and assets.

FAFSA - The Free Application for Federal Student Aid is the form students use to apply for financial assistance from the federal government.

Financial Aid - A financial aid package is the combination of grants, scholarships, loans, and work-study stipends or funds a student receives to help offset the cost of attending college. The most important step in applying for financial aid is completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

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Financial Need - This is the term for the difference between what your family is expected to contribute and the total cost of attendance for one year of college (cost of attendance). Financial Need equals Cost of Attendance minus Expected Family Contribution.

Grant - A financial award that does not need to be repaid.

Merit-Based Aid - This type of financial assistance is based on a student's academic success.

Need-Based Aid - These are financial aid programs that award funds based on the level of financial need of a particular student.

Work Study - The Federal Work-Study program is a financial assistance program that provides students with jobs, usually on campus.

College Structure Terms

Associate's Degree - An associate's degree is granted after the completion of a two-year program.

Bachelor's Degree - A bachelor's degree is granted after the completion of a four-year program.

Certificate - A certificate is a recognition that a student has completed a program of study in a specialized area.

College - College includes schooling or training programs after high schools.

Community College - Sometimes called a two-year college, students can take classes, and then transfer to a four-year school, or they can earn certificates, diplomas or associate's degrees from these school.

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Credit - A credit is a measure of how much a particular course counts toward completing overall graduation requirements. Credits are typically equal to the approximate number of hours spent in class per week (i.e., 3 credit hours = 3 hours of in-class time).

Full-Time Student - A student is considered full-time if they are enrolled in a minimum of twelve undergraduate credit hours per semester or other comparable period at an institution with a non-traditional calendar. A student seeking to complete a four-year degree in four years or a two-year degree in two years must complete, on average, 15 credit hours per semester.

Internship - An internship is a program that lets students apply their studies in a work setting.

Liberal Arts - The liberal arts include subjects that cover a broad knowledge in a wide variety of subjects. Subjects such as history, literature and social sciences are considered liberal arts subjects.

Major - A student's major is the area of study in which they choose to specialize.

Master's Degree - A master's degree is an advanced degree following a bachelor's degree.

Proprietary or For-Profit Schools - These schools can offer bachelor's and master's degrees, but most offer associate's degrees or certificates in office management, medical assistance, cosmetology, dental hygiene, computer systems engineering, and more.

Private College - A private college is an independent college set up by individuals or organizations.

Postsecondary Education - Education and training beyond high school is called postsecondary education.

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Residence Hall - Also called a dormitory or dorm, a residence hall is a building that houses students who live on a college campus.

Student Level or Rank - Students are ranked as freshmen, sophomores, juniors, or seniors depending on how many credit hours they have earned. Rank can be used to determine when a student is allowed to register for classes or what classes a student may take.

Public College or University - A public college or university is an institution of higher education set up with government support.

Semester - A period of time, usually about fifteen weeks, during which college is in session. In semestered schools, most courses last just one semester and students must register at the school each semester. This is similar to school terms.

Technical Institute - A technical institute is an institution after high school that emphasizes practical career and job skills, especially in technology and applied trades.

Transcript - A student's academic work is summarized in their transcript. This includes a listing of all the classes they took, the number of credits and the grade for each.

Transfer of Credits - Some students attend more than one college during their college careers. When they move or transfer from one college to another, they can transfer certain credit hours or classes from the old college to the new one. The new college determines which courses will count toward its graduation requirements.

Tuition - Tuition is the portion of college costs attributed directly to paying for classes.

Undergraduate - An undergraduate student is a college student who has not yet earned a bachelor's or associate's degree.

University - A university is an institution that usually combines one or more colleges with other schools, such as medical or law.

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