

College Prep Glossary

College Admissions from A to Z

What in the world is a FAFSA? What's the difference between EA and ED? If you're asking yourself these questions, your child is probably in the middle of the college admissions process. From AP[®] to ROTC, it probably seems to you that the college admissions folks have a language all their own. So, if you're wondering whether the NMSQT is a test or a furry animal, this glossary is for you.

Accreditation

Official recognition that a college, university, or trade school has met the standards of a regional or national association.

Advanced Placement Program[®] (AP[®])

Gives motivated high school students the opportunity to take college-level courses in a high school setting. Thousands of colleges worldwide award credit, advanced placement or both to students with a qualifying score on AP Exams. AP Exams are scored 1 to 5, with 5 as the highest.

[Read about AP.](#)

American College Test (ACT)

The ACT is a college entrance exam administered by the American College Testing Corporation that measures educational development in English, mathematics, social studies, and the natural sciences. Scores are reported as 1 to 36, with 36 as the highest. Most colleges accept scores from either the ACT or SAT[®].

Articulation

An agreement between a two-year and four-year college within the same state that allows a two-year college student automatic admission to a four-year college if she completes required courses.

Arts and Sciences

A college course of study that includes the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, mathematics, foreign languages, and fine arts.

Associate Degree

Awarded by a college or university after satisfactory completion of a two-year program of study.

Award Letter

A document issued to a student financial aid recipient that indicates the type, amount, and disbursement dates of the funds awarded for various financial aid programs.

Bachelor's Degree

Awarded by a four-year college or university after satisfactory completion of a program of study.

Campus-Based Aid

Financial assistance for students and their families administered by a college. Funds, regardless of their source, are awarded to students by the college's financial aid office, and not by a state, federal, or private agency.

Candidates Reply Date Agreement (CRDA)

Allows a student to defer attendance decisions at participating colleges until May 1. This agreement gives students time to get responses from most of the colleges they have applied to before making a decision on one.

College Board

A national nonprofit membership association whose mission is to prepare, inspire, and connect students to college and opportunity. The College Board administers the PSAT/NMSQT[®], SAT[®], SAT Subject Tests[™], Advanced Placement Program[®] (AP[®]), CLEP[®], College Scholarship Service[®] (CSS[®]), and CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE[®].

College-Level Examination Program[®] (CLEP[®])

A credit-by-examination program that helps students of all ages earn college degrees faster by getting credit for what they already know. By receiving a satisfactory score, a student can earn from 3 to 12 college credits toward a college degree for each CLEP she takes, depending on the exam subject.

[Read about CLEP.](#)

College Scholarship Service[®] (CSS[®])

A service of the College Board that assists postsecondary institutions, state scholarship programs, and other organizations in the equitable distribution of student financial aid funds by measuring a family's financial strength and analyzing its ability to contribute to college costs.

Common Application

A standard application form accepted by approximately 400 colleges in lieu of their own form. Available in high school guidance offices and online.

[Go to www.commonapp.org.](http://www.commonapp.org)

Consortium

A group of colleges or universities that offer joint programs that allow students to share facilities and course offerings at member campuses. Consortia are generally made up of neighboring schools.

Cooperative Work-Study Education

A full-time paid employment related to a student's field of study. The student alternates between work and full-time study. As a result, the bachelor's program usually takes five years to complete.

CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE[®]

A financial aid form produced by the College Board required for students seeking aid at approximately 10 percent of the nation's four-year colleges (including the most highly selective institutions).

[Go to PROFILE Online.](#)

Deferral

When a student's application for early decision or early action is postponed, and will be considered with the regular applicant pool.

Deferred Admission

Allows an accepted student to postpone admission for one year.

Demonstrated Need

The difference between the family contribution as established on the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and the total cost of attending college.

Early Action (EA)

A program that gives special consideration to a student who applies for admission by a specified date, usually in early fall. Students are not obligated to enroll if admitted (also known as early notification).

[Read about early action.](#)

Early Decision (ED)

A program that gives special consideration to a student who applies for admission by a specified date, usually in early fall. Students are obligated to enroll if admitted, and to withdraw applications from other institutions.

[Read about early decision.](#)

Educational Testing Service (ETS)

A nonprofit organization that develops college entrance tests, including the SAT and SAT Subject Tests, for the College Board.

Expected Family Contribution (EFC)

The amount a family can reasonably be expected to pay for one year of college.

[Read about your EFC.](#)

529 Savings Plans

A state-operated investment plan that gives families a federal tax-free way to save money for college. Officially known as qualified tuition programs (QTPs).

[Read about 529 savings plans.](#)

4-1-4 System

An academic calendar consisting of two semesters made up of four months each, with a short winter term of one month in between.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

The need analysis form produced by the U.S. Department of Education that is required for students seeking aid by nearly all colleges and universities.

[Read about the FAFSA.](#)

[Complete the FAFSA online at www.fafsa.ed.gov.](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Indicates a student's overall scholastic performance. It is computed by assigning a point value to each grade.

Greek System

Fraternities and sororities on campus, whose names originate from letters in the Greek alphabet.

Humanities

Courses focusing on human culture, including philosophy, foreign language, religion, and literature.

Independent Study

Allows a student to earn credit through self-designed coursework, which is usually planned and evaluated by a faculty member.

Legacy

An applicant whose parents or grandparents are graduates of the college or university to which she is applying.

Liberal Arts

A course of study that includes humanities, social science, natural sciences, mathematics, foreign languages, and fine arts.

Major

Area of concentration in a particular field of study. Usually students specialize in their majors during their junior and senior years at college.

National Merit Scholarship Program

A scholarship program based mostly on scores from the PSAT/NMSQT. Each year, National Merit students receive scholarships ranging from several hundred dollars to full costs of attendance.

[Read about the PSAT/NMSQT.](#)

Need-Blind Admissions

A policy in which colleges make admissions decisions without taking into account an applicant's financial circumstances. Schools that subscribe to this policy do not necessarily offer aid to meet the full need of an accepted applicant.

Open Admissions

Schools that take any high school graduate until all the openings are filled. Almost all two-year colleges have an open admissions policy.

Preferential Packaging

A policy in which the most desirable applicants get the best financial aid packages.

PROFILE

A financial aid form produced by the College Board required for students seeking aid at approximately 10 percent of the nation's four-year colleges (including the most highly selective institutions).

[Go to PROFILE Online.](#)

PSAT/NMSQT®

The Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test is a standardized test that provides firsthand practice for the SAT® and SAT Subject Tests™. It also gives students a chance to qualify for National Merit Scholarship Corporation's (NMSC) scholarship programs.

[Read about the PSAT/NMSQT.](#)

Quarter System

Divides the nine-month academic calendar into three equal parts of approximately 12 weeks each. Summer sessions, if any, are usually the same length.

Registrar

College official who registers students and collects fees. The registrar may also be responsible for keeping permanent records, maintaining student files, and forwarding copies of students' transcripts to employers and schools.

Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)

Combines military education with college study leading to the bachelor's degree. For students who commit themselves to future service in the Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines, there is usually an offer of financial aid. Not all schools offer ROTC.

Residency Requirements

Length of time stipulated by colleges or universities that students must spend on campus taking courses. The term also refers to time families or students must reside in a state before being considered eligible for state aid.

Rolling Admissions

Admissions procedure by which the college considers each student's application as soon as all the required credentials have been received (e.g., school record, test scores). The college usually notifies applicants of its decision without delay.

SAT[®] (SAT Reasoning Test[™])

A 3 hour and 45 minute exam that measures the critical thinking skills needed for academic success in college. It measures skills in three areas: critical reading, mathematics, and writing.

[Read about the SAT.](#)

SAT Subject Tests[™]

One hour, primarily multiple-choice tests that measure achievement in specific subject areas.

[Read about SAT Subject Tests.](#)

Semester System

Divides the academic year into two equal segments of approximately 18 weeks each. Summer sessions are shorter, but require more intensive study.

Student Aid Report (SAR)

The form sent to families in response to submission of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) indicating the Expected Family Contribution (EFC).

Student Search Service[®] (SSS[®])

A free information service for students who take the PSAT/NMSQT, SAT, or AP Exams. By participating in Student Search Service, students let colleges, universities, and scholarship programs know they are interested in hearing from them.

[Read about Student Search Service.](#)

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

An exam required by almost all U.S. colleges and universities for students whose principal language is not English. The test is made up of three multiple choice sections: listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension.

3-2 Program

A program offering students three years of study in a liberal arts field followed by two years of professional or specialized study (e.g., engineering, teaching, nursing, business administration). The student is awarded two degrees upon successful completion of the program.

Transcript

Official record of a student's coursework at a school or college. A high school transcript is generally required as part of the college application process.

Trimesters

An academic calendar that is divided into three equal terms or semesters.

Tuition Tax Credits

Allow you to subtract, on a dollar-for-dollar basis, the amount of the credit from your total federal income tax bill.

[Read about Tuition Tax Credits.](#)

Undergraduate

A college student earning a bachelor's degree.

Waitlist

A list of applicants who may be considered for acceptance if there is still space after admitted students have decided whether or not they'll attend.

Work-Study

A federally funded program in which students take campus jobs as part of their financial aid package. To participate in a work-study program, students must complete the FAFSA.

Yield

Percentage of accepted applicants who enroll at a college.