



## College Terminology

**US colleges and universities use terms that are unfamiliar to many of us. Use this glossary to better understand these terms!**

**College Application Process: Below are important terms associated with the college application process.**

**ACT and SAT:** These letters are acronyms for the American College Test and the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Both tests are designed to measure a student's level of knowledge in basic areas such as math, science, English, reading and social sciences. Colleges may require the results of either the ACT or SAT before granting admission.

**Admissions Officer:** A professional staff member in the admissions or enrollment services office who provides information and advice for prospective applicants, parents, counselors and others.

**Applying for Admission:** Applying for admission is the process by which a student submits the required forms to his/her chosen colleges and universities. In order to apply for admission, the student generally needs to provide one or more of the following: previous academic records, test scores, interviews, and letters of recommendation.

**Coalition Application:** A standard application form accepted by members of the Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success. You can use this application to apply to any of the more than 90 colleges and universities that are members of the Coalition.

**College Application Essay:** An essay that a school requires students to write and submit as part of their application. Some colleges ask applicants to answer specific questions, while others simply ask applicants to write about themselves. This may also be called a "personal statement".

**Common Application:** An application form accepted by all colleges that are members of the Common Application Association. You can submit this application to any of the 700 schools that accept it.

**Early Action vs. Early Decision:** Early decision plans are binding, a student who is accepted as an ED applicant must attend the college. Early action plans are non binding, students receive an early response to their application but do not have to commit to the college until the normal reply date of May 1.

**Letter of Recommendation (LOR):** Nearly all colleges and universities require that potential students include one or more LORs with their applications. Good sources for LORs include guidance counselors, teachers, coaches, military officers, public officials, top executives of major corporations, and officials from charitable organizations that the student has volunteered with.

**Open Admissions:** A school with an open admissions policy admits almost all high school graduates without taking grades or test scores into account.

**PSAT:** Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test. The PSAT is usually taken in 10th or 11th grade, and is part of a student's preparation for the SAT.

**Priority Date or Deadline:** The date by which your application for college admission, student housing, or financial aid must be received to be given the strongest consideration.

**Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL):** An English language proficiency examination for students whose first language is not English that is often required for admission.

**Universal College Application:** A form accepted by all colleges that are Universal College Application members. You can fill out this application and submit it to any of the 3,044 colleges that accept it.

**Financial Aid: Below are important financial aid terms.**

**ASSET:** The Colorado ASSET law allows eligible undocumented students to pay in-state tuition and receive the College Opportunity Fund stipend at Colorado public colleges.

**College Opportunity Fund (COF):** The College Opportunity Fund, created by the Colorado Legislature, provides a stipend to eligible undergraduate students. Eligible undergraduate students must apply, be admitted and enroll at a participating Colorado institution. Both new and continuing students are eligible for the stipend. Students who do not apply will be responsible for the full amount of in-state tuition.

**Cost of Attendance (COA):** Expenses, including tuition and fees, books and supplies, and living expenses while the student attends college. The cost of attendance is compared with the student's expected family contribution to determine the student's financial need.

**Expected Family Contribution (EFC):** The amount students and their families are expected to pay toward college costs, usually based on income and assets.

**Financial Aid:** Any grant, scholarship, loan or paid employment offered to help a student meet his or her college expenses. See "Grants", "Loans", and "Scholarships" to learn more about financial aid.

**Financial Aid Package:** The combination of scholarships, loans, grants, and work-study offered to a student who has submitted the FAFSA (see FAFSA for additional information).

**Free Application for Federal Student AID (FAFSA):** A free form that must be completed by all those who wish to be considered for federal and many forms of state financial aid.

**Grants:** A form of financial aid from a non-profit organization (such as the federal government) that you do not have to repay. Grants are often based on financial need.

**Loans:** A form of financial aid that you must repay once you graduate from college and/or stop attending school.

**Scholarship:** A form of financial aid that you do not have to repay. You usually have to apply for scholarships. Scholarships are awarded based on your GPA, extracurricular activities, and financial situation.

**Student Aid Report:** The information you will receive approximately 2-4 weeks after your FAFSA has been processed. It will report your Expected Family Contribution (EFC).

**Subsidized Loan:** A loan based on financial need in which the federal government pays the interest during the time the student is in school, thereby subsidizing the loan.

**Unsubsidized Loan:** An unsubsidized loan is a federal loan for undergraduate students who need help paying for tuition and related expenses. You are also responsible for paying the interest on this loan.

**Verification:** A random selection of FAFSA forms that are selected to be verified by a college or the federal government. If you've been asked to verify your documents, you will usually need to supply tax documents and information about your family's assets.

**Work-study Jobs:** The portion of a financial aid package that a student can earn through an on-campus job. These jobs are based on need. Students usually apply for work-study jobs once they arrive on-campus.

**Campus Types:** Below are descriptions of the schools you can attend in the United States.

**College:** A college is an institution of higher education that grants degrees and certificates.

**Community/Junior College:** A postsecondary institution that offers associate degree programs, as well as technical and vocational programs. Some also offer bachelor's degrees.

**Private university:** A university that is privately-funded. Tuition for a private college or university (before scholarships and grants) is the same for all students.

**Public university:** A university that is funded by the government. Public colleges and universities are less expensive for residents of the state where they are located.

**University:** A university is composed of undergraduate, graduate, and professional colleges and offers degrees in each.

**University Transfer Program:** Students complete the first two years of a four-year degree program at a two-year college, and then transfer to a four-year college for the last two years of the degree program.

**Vocational School:** Vocational school offers programs that prepare students for specific careers, trades or vocations.

**Degree Types:** Below is a list of degrees you can earn while in college. This is not an exhaustive list.

**Degree:** A diploma or title conferred by a college, university, or professional school upon completion of a prescribed program of studies.

**Associate's Degree:** A type of degree awarded to students at community colleges, usually after completing two years of full-time study.

**Bachelor's Degree:** A type of degree awarded to students at colleges and universities, usually after completing four years of full-time study.

**Master's Degree:** A degree awarded to graduate students. The awarding of a master's degree requires at least one year of study (and often more, depending on the field) after a student earns a bachelor's degree.

**Campus Terms:** Below are terms you will want to know once you arrive on campus.

**Academic Advisor:** School official who helps choose your classes and makes sure you are taking the right courses to graduate.

**Alumni:** People who have already graduated from your college or university.

**College Catalog:** An official publication giving information about a school's academic programs, facilities, entrance requirements, and student life.

**Commuter:** A commuter is a student who lives off-campus and drives to class, or commutes.

**Course Number:** The number your college or university uses to classify a course. You usually need this number in order to register for a class.

**Credit Hour:** The number of hours assigned to a specific class. This is usually the number of hours per week you are in the class. The number of credit hours you enroll in determines whether you are a full-time student or a part-time student.

**Degrees:** Degrees are rewards for the successful completion of a program of study.

**Degree Requirements:** Those requirements prescribed by other institutions for completion of a program of study are generally termed degree requirements. Requirements may include a minimum number of hours, required GPA, prerequisite and elective courses within the specified major, and/or minor areas of study.

**Dining Hall:** A large room where meals are served to students with a meal plan.

**Faculty:** The faculty is composed of all professors who teach classes for a school.

**First-generation Student:** Students whose parents or guardians have not attended college.

**Full-time Student:** A student who enrolls in at least a minimum number (determined by your college or university) of credit hours or courses. A student usually needs to be full-time to live on campus and to receive most financial aid.

**Matriculation:** The process whereby a student is accepted, pays fees and enrolls in class, officially becoming a student at the college.

**Meal Plan:** A meal plan is a number of meals that a student prepays for. They generally eat these meals in the dining hall or at local restaurants. Students generally select their meal plan before the beginning of the semester.

**Non-resident Student:** A student who isn't an official resident of the state where a public university is located. Tuition at public universities is less expensive for residents.

**Online/Distance Learning:** A general term describing academic programs and courses taught using web technologies.

**Orientation:** Events planned by the college to help students adjust to college life.

**Part-time Student:** A student who doesn't enroll in enough credit hours to become a full-time student, as defined by your college or university. Part-time students often take only one or two classes at one time.

**Prerequisite:** A class that must be taken before you can take a different class. (For example, Astronomy 100 may be a prerequisite for Astronomy 200.)

**Professor:** The individual who teaches your college classes. This person may also be referred to as an instructor.

**Resident Student:** A student who lives in and meets the residency requirements for the state where a public university is located. Tuition at public universities often is more expensive for non-residents.

**Resident Assistant:** Student employees who are responsible for managing the experience and behavior of students living in the residence halls.

**Residence Hall:** A building where students live on-campus. This is also called a dormitory.

**Syllabus:** An outline of topics covered in an academic course. The deadlines for projects, readings, and exam dates are also listed in the syllabus.

**Teaching Assistant:** A Teaching Assistant (TA) assists with teaching a college class.

**Textbooks:** Books required of students enrolled in college classes. Professors notify students which books they must purchase (and sometimes additional, optional textbooks) at the beginning of each semester/class. Students can purchase new or used textbooks, or rent textbooks.

**Tuition:** Tuition is the amount paid for each credit hour of enrollment. Tuition does not include the cost of books, fees, or room and board. Tuition charges vary from college to college and are dependent on factors such as resident or out-of-state status, and whether the institution is publicly or privately financed.

**Undergraduate:** A student who is working towards an associates or bachelor's degree.

**Components of a College Degree:** Below are the general requirements for a Bachelor's degree. Your degree requirements may vary.

**General Education Classes:** Courses that give students a basic knowledge of a variety of topics. Students usually have to take general education courses in order to graduate. Your college or university may have another name for the general education

classes. Examples of general education classes include: writing, math, science, and history.

**Major:** Your primary area of study during college. Your college major is the field you plan on working in after you graduate (examples: business, nursing, and psychology).

**Minor:** Your secondary area of study during college. Fewer classes are required for a college minor than for a major. Colleges and universities may not require students to have a minor. Some students may have more than one minor.

**Elective:** A class you can take that is not specifically required for your major or minor. Most students will take electives in order to complete their degree requirements.



Adapted from: <http://www.nycolleges.org/glossary-college-terms>, <https://www.universitylanguage.com/guides/college-terms-and-phrases-to-know/>,  
<http://www.collegeprep101.com/college-terminology.html>, <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/applying-101/college-admission-glossary>,  
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