

Glossary of Admission Terms

Academic advisor — This is a senior faculty member in your area of concentration who is assigned to advise you on course selections and requirements. Before you declare your major, you will be assigned a temporary faculty adviser.

Accelerated study — This program allows you to graduate in less time than is usually required. For instance, by taking summer terms and extra courses during the academic year, you could finish a bachelor's degree in three years instead of four.

Admissions decisions

Admit — You're in! You are being offered admissions to the college to which you applied. Your high school will receive notification, too.

Admit/deny — You have been admitted but denied any financial aid. It is up to you to figure out how you are going to pay for school.

Deny — You are not in. The decision is made by the college or university admissions committee and is forwarded to you and your high school.

Wait list — You are not in yet but have been placed on a waiting list in case an opening becomes available. Schools rank their wait list in order of priority, and unfortunately, the more competitive schools have years when they never draw from their wait lists. After a certain time, a rejection notice is sent.

Defer --- You have applied under an early admission program and your application was deferred for review with the regular admission pool of applicants. Colleges and Universities will often do this in order to consider updated academic information about the applicant.

Advanced Placement (AP) courses — High-level, quality courses in any of twenty subjects. The program is administered through the College Board to offer high school course descriptions equated to college courses and correlated to AP examinations in those subjects. High schools provide the courses as part of their curriculum to eligible students. Based on the composite score on an AP test, which ranges from 0 to 5, a college may award college credit or advanced placement to a participating student. A score of a 4 or 5 on the AP test is usually required by colleges for credit or advanced placement in college courses. A 3 is sometimes acceptable in foreign languages and some other subject areas. Some colleges limit the number of AP credits that they will recognize. Check schools' policies on AP credits.

Alternative assessment — This method personalizes the admissions process and offers students an opportunity to be viewed more individually and holistically. Less emphasis is placed on standardized test scores and more on the interview, portfolio, recommendations, and essay.

American College Testing (ACT) Program Assessment — An alternative to the SAT, this test has gained wide acceptance by a broad range of institutions in recent years and is given during the school year at test centers. The ACT tests English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning. These subject test scores can be used in lieu of SAT II subject tests, which are required for admission to some of the more competitive colleges. The score is the average of all four tests; the maximum score is 36.

Associate degree — A degree granted by a college or university after the satisfactory completion of a two-year full-time program of study or its part-time equivalent. Types of degrees include the Associate of Arts (A.A.) or Associate of Science (A.S.), usually granted after the equivalent of the first two years of a four-year college curriculum, and the Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.), awarded upon completion of a technical or vocational program of study.

Award package — This is the way colleges and universities deliver their news about student eligibility for financial aid or grants. The most common packages include Pell Grants, Stafford Loans, and Work Study (see below).

Bachelor's or baccalaureate degree — The degree received after the satisfactory completion of a full-time program of study or its part-time equivalent at a college or university. The Bachelor of Arts (B.A) and the Bachelor of Science (B.S.) are the most common baccalaureates.

Branch campus — A campus connected to, or part of, a large institution. Generally, a student spends the first two years at a branch campus and then transfers to the main campus to complete the baccalaureate degree. A branch campus provides a smaller and more personal environment that may help a student mature personally and academically before moving to a larger and more impersonal environment. A branch campus experience may be a good idea for a student who wants to remain close to home or for an adult learner who wishes to work and attend college classes on a part-time basis.

Candidates Reply Date Agreement (CRDA) — If admitted to a college, a student does not have to reply until May 1. This allows time to hear from all the colleges to which the student applied before having to make a commitment to any of them. This is especially important because financial aid packages vary from one school to another, and the CRDA allows time to compare packages before deciding.

College-preparatory subjects — Courses taken in high school that are viewed by colleges and universities as a strong preparation for college work. The specific courses are usually in the five majors area of English, history, world languages, mathematics, and science. The courses may be regular, honors-level, or AP offerings, and the latter two categories are often weighted when calculated in the GPA.

College Scholarship Service (CSS) — When the federal government changed the FAFSA form several years ago, the College Board created this program to assist postsecondary institutions, state scholarship programs, and other organizations in measuring a family's financial strength and analyzing its ability to contribute to college costs. CSS processes the PROFILE financial form that students may use to apply for nonfederal aid. This form is submitted to some 300 private colleges and universities along with the FAFSA when seeking financial aid from these institutions. Participating colleges and universities indicate whether they require this form.

Common and Universal Applications — These college application forms can save students hours of work. The Common Application is presently accepted by about 190 independent colleges, while the Universal is used by about 1,000 schools. The colleges and universities that accept these standardized forms give them equal weight with their own application forms. Students complete the information on the standardized form and then submit it to any of the schools listed as accepting it. Some schools will return a supplementary form to be completed by the applicant, but most schools base their decisions on these documents alone. The Common Application is available on disk or as a hard copy and can be obtained from your guidance department. The Universal Application is available on the Web.

Control — A college or university can be under public or private control. Publicly controlled universities are dependent on state legislatures for their funding, and their policies are set by the agencies that govern them. Private colleges and universities are responsible to a board of directors or trustees. They usually have higher tuition and fees to protect the institutions' endowment.

Cooperative education — A college program that alternates between periods of full-time study and full-time employment in a related field. Students are paid for their work and gain practical experience in their major, which helps them apply for positions after graduation. It can take five years to obtain a baccalaureate degree through a co-op program.

Cost of education — This includes tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, transportation, and miscellaneous expenses. A student's financial aid eligibility is the difference between the cost of education and the Expected Family Contribution as computed by the federal government using the FAFSA.

Course load — The number of course credit hours a student takes in each semester. Twelve credit hours is the minimum to be considered a full-time student. The average course load per semester is 16 credit hours.

Credit hours — The number of hours per week that courses meet are counted as equivalent credits for financial aid and used to determine you status as a full- or part-time student.

Cross-registration — The practice, through agreements between colleges, of permitting students enrolled at one college or university to enroll in courses at another institution without formally applying for admission to the second institution. This can be an advantage for students in a smaller college who might like to expand options or experience another learning environment.

Deferred acceptance — the admissions decision is being moved to a later date.

Double major — Available at most schools, the double major allows a student to complete all the requirements to simultaneously earn a major in two fields.

Dual enrollment — This policy allows a student to earn college credit while still in high school. Many of these course credits can be transferred to a degree-granting institution, especially if the student maintains a minimum B average. A college, however, may disallow courses taken in the major field of concentration at another institution because its policy dictates that all courses in the major must be taken at the college. When considering dual enrollment, students should talk with admissions offices at the colleges they are considering enrolling in to make sure that they will accept credit transfers.

Early Action (EA) — A student applies to a school early in the senior year, between October 30 and January 15, and requests an early application review and notification of admission. The answer usually takes three to four weeks after application. If accepted, the student is not obligated to attend that institution but can bank this admission and still apply to other colleges during the regular admission cycle.

Early admission — Some colleges will admit certain students who have not completed high school, usually exceptional juniors. The students are enrolled full-time and do not complete their senior year of high school. Colleges usually award high school diplomas to these students after they have completed a certain number of college-level courses.

Early Decision (ED) — Sometimes confused with Early Action, the Early Decision plan allows students to apply to an institution early in the senior year, also between October 30 and January 15, and request an early notification of admission. The student and guidance counselor sign a contract with the school at the time of application that indicates that if accepted, the student is obligated to attend that institution. Some colleges and universities offer both ED and EA options.

Emphasis — An area of concentration within a major or minor; for example, an English major may have an emphasis in creative writing.

Expected Family Contribution (EFC) — The amount of financial support a family is expected to contribute toward a child's college education. This amount is part of the formula used by the federal government to determine financial aid eligibility using the FAFSA form.

External degree program — A program of study whereby a student can earn credit through independent study, college courses, proficiency examinations, distance learning, or personal experience. External degree colleges generally have no campus or classroom facilities. They are sometimes referred to as "colleges without walls."

Federal Pell Grant Program — This is a federally sponsored and administered program that provides grants based on need to undergraduate students. Congress annually sets the appropriation; amounts range from \$400 to \$3,000 annually. This is "free" money because it does not need to be repaid.

Federal Perkins Loan Program — This is a federally run program based on need and administered by a college's financial aid office. This program offers low-interest loans for undergraduate study. Repayment does not begin until a student graduates. The maximum loan amount is \$3,000 per year.

Federal Stafford Loan — Another federal program based on need that allows a student to borrow money for educational expenses directly from banks and other lending institutions (sometimes from the colleges themselves). These loans may be either subsidized or unsubsidized. Repayment begins six months after a student's course load drops to less than halftime. Currently the interest rate is 0 percent while in school and then is variable up to 8.25 percent. The loan must be repaid within ten years.

Federal Work-Study Program (FSW) — A federally financed program that arranges for students to combine employment and college study; the employment may be an integral part of the academic program (as in cooperative education or internships) or simply a means of paying for college.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) — This is the federal government's instrument for calculating need-based aid. It is available from high school guidance departments, college financial aid offices, and the Internet (www.fafsa.ed.gov). The form should be completed and mailed as soon after January 2 as possible.

Gap — The difference between the amount of a financial aid package and the cost of attending a college or university. The student and his/her family are expected to fill the gap.

Grants/scholarships — These are financial awards that are usually dispensed by the financial aid offices of colleges and universities. The awards may be need- or merit-based. Most are need-based. Merit-based awards may be awarded on the basis of excellence in academics, leadership, volunteerism, athletic ability, or special talent.

Greek life — This phrase refers to sororities and fraternities. These organizations often have great impact on the campus social life of a college or university.

Honors program — Honors programs offer an enriched, top-quality educational experience that often includes small class size, custom-designed courses, mentoring, enriched individualized learning, hands-on research, and publishing opportunities. A handpicked faculty guides students through the program. Honors programs are a great way to attend a large school that offers enhanced social and recreational opportunities while receiving an Ivy League-like education at a reduced cost.

Independent study — This option allows students to complete some of their credit requirements by studying on their own. A student and his or her faculty adviser agree in advance on the topic and approach of the study program and meet periodically to discuss the student's progress. A final report is handed in for a grade at the end of the term.

Interdisciplinary — Faculty members from several disciplines contribute to the development of the course of study and may co-teach the course.

Internship — This is an experience-based opportunity, most often scheduled during breaks in the academic calendar, whereby a student receives credit for a supervised work experience related to his or her major.

Major — The concentration of a number of credit hours in a specific subject. Colleges and universities often specify the number of credits needed to receive a major, the sequence of courses, and the level of course necessary to complete the requirements.

Merit awards, merit-based scholarships — More “free” money, these awards are based on excellence in academics, leadership, volunteerism, athletic ability, and other areas determined by the granting organization, which can be a college or university, an organization, or an individual. They are not based on financial need.

Minor — An area of concentration with fewer credits than a major. The minor can be related to the major area of concentration or not; for example, an English major may have a minor in theater.

Need blind — Admissions decisions made without reference to a student’s financial aid request, that is, an applicant’s financial need is not known to the committee at the time of decision.

Nonmatriculated — A student who has either not been admitted yet but is taking classes or has been academically dismissed. Under this category, a student may neither receive financial aid nor participate in an athletic program at that school.

Open admissions — A policy of admission that does not subject applicants to a review of their academic qualifications. Many public junior/community colleges admit students under this guideline, that is, any student with a high school diploma or its equivalent is admitted.

Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT)/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test — This test, given in October, duplicates the kinds of questions asked on the SAT but is shorter and takes less time. Usually taken in the junior year, the test also acts as a qualifying instrument for the National Merit Scholarship Awards Program and is helpful for early college guidance.

Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) — Each branch of the military sponsors an ROTC program. In exchange for a certain number of years on active duty, students can have their college education paid for up to a certain amount by the armed forces.

Residency requirement — The term has more than one meaning. It can refer to the fact that a college may require a specific number of course to be taken on campus to receive a degree from the school, or the phrase can mean the time, by law, that is required for a person to reside in the state to be considered eligible for in-state tuition at one of its public colleges or universities.

Retention rate — The number and percentage of students returning for the sophomore year.

Rolling admissions — There is no deadline for filing a college application. This concept is used most often by state universities. Responses are received within three to four weeks. If admitted, a student is not required to confirm, in most cases, until May 1. Out-of-state residents applying to state universities should apply as early as possible.

SAT I: Reasoning Test — Also known as “board scores” because the test was developed by the College Board. This test concentrates on verbal and mathematical reasoning abilities and is given throughout the academic year at test centers. The maximum combined score for both sections is 1600.

SAT II Subject Tests — These subject-specific exams are given on the same test dates and in the same centers as the SAT I. More emphasis has been placed on these tests in recent years, not only because they are used for admission purposes, but also for placement and exemption decisions.

Seminar — A class that has a group discussion format rather than a lecture format.

Silent scores — The term is applied to PSAT scores because only the student and his or her guidance counselor see the scores. They are not reported to colleges. It is the “practice without penalty” feature of the test.

Standby — If a student registers for an SAT or ACT testing date and there are no seats available, the student may accept a standby position; that is, if a seat becomes available the day of the test, the student will take the test. The student must go to the testing center and wait to see if there is an open seat. A fee is attached to standby.

Student Aid Report (SAR) — Report of the government's review of a student's FAFSA. The SAR is sent to the student and released electronically to the schools that the student listed. The SAR does not supply a real money figure for aid but indicates whether the student is eligible.

Student-designed major — Students design their own majors under this policy. It offers students the opportunity to develop nontraditional options not available in the existing catalog of majors.

Student Rights and Responsibilities --- Statement developed by NACAC that outlines students' duties in the college admission process and describes what treatment students may rightfully expect from the colleges and universities to which they have applied.

Transfer program — This program is usually found in a two-year college or in a four-year college that offers associate degrees. It allows a student to continue his or her studies in a four-year college by maintaining designated criteria set down at acceptance to the two-year program. It is not necessary to earn an associate degree to transfer.

Transfer student — A student who transfers from one college or university to another. Credits applied toward the transfer will be evaluated by the receiving school to determine the number it will accept. Each school sets different policies for transfers, so anyone considering this option should seek guidance.

Upper division — This term refers to the junior and senior years of study. Some colleges offer only upper-division study. The lower divisions must be completed at another institution before entering these programs to earn a bachelor's degree.

Virtual visit — This is the use of the Internet to investigate various colleges by looking at their home pages. A student can "tour" the college, ask questions via e-mail, read school newspapers, and explore course offerings and major requirements on line. It is not a substitute for a live visit.

Waiver to view recommendations — The form many high schools ask their students to sign by which they agree not to review their teachers' recommendation letters before they are sent to the colleges or universities to which they are applying.

Yield — The percentage of accepted students who will enter a college or university in the freshman class; these students have received formal acceptance notices and must respond by May 1 with their intention to enroll. The more competitive the school, the higher the yield percentage.

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