

Frequently Used Terms

Advanced Placement (AP)

College credit earned by students while still in high school. These are tests administered in May and can qualify students who score well for advanced standing when they enroll in college. Grades range from 1 to 5 with grades of 4 and 5 almost always receiving college credit.

American College Test (ACT)

Test administered to high school juniors and seniors by the American College Testing Program. Although traditionally used as an admissions criterion primarily by midwestern and western schools, the ACT has become popular with eastern schools and is widely accepted at all colleges and universities. Some colleges and universities that require SAT Subject Tests will take the ACT score in their place.

Arts and Sciences (also called Liberal Arts)

A broad term that encompasses most traditional courses of study including the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, mathematics, and foreign languages. A liberal arts college is also a college of arts and sciences.

Associate Degree (AA)

A degree granted by a college or university after the satisfactory completion of a 2 year full-time program of study, referred to as an AA degree. This can be transferred to a 4-year school for credit towards a bachelor's degree.

Bachelor's, or Baccalaureate, Degree (BA/BS)

The degree received after the satisfactory completion of what is normally a 4-5 year full-time program at a college or university. The bachelor of arts (BA) and bachelor of science (BS) are the most common and there is no difference between the degrees.

Candidate's Reply Date Agreement (CRDA)

The May 1 deadline, observed by most selective colleges, by which the applicant must respond to an offer of admissions, usually with a non-refundable deposit of several hundred dollars. Colleges that require students to respond by May 1 in almost all cases notify acceptances on or before April 15.

Certification of Finances

College Board general form supplied to student from the college. This form certifies the international student's ability to pay and must be supported by a parent's bank statement and is commonly required for all foreign students.

The College Board (CEEB - College Entrance Examination Board)

The organization that sponsors SAT I, SAT II, Advanced Placement, and Financial Aid PROFILE. College Board admissions tests are developed and administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS).

College-Level Examination Program (CLEP)

A program of examinations in undergraduate college courses that provides students with opportunities to demonstrate college-level achievement. They are used by colleges to award credit to entering freshmen.

College Scholarship Service (CSS)

The financial aid division of the College Board.

Common Application

A form produced by a consortium of over 100 colleges (mainly selective liberal arts schools) that may be filled out and sent to member colleges in lieu of each school's individual application.

Community/Junior College

The majority of these two-year institutions are public. They award associate degrees at the completion of the prescribed programs. Students can transfer to four-year or upper-division schools. They are usually open-admission.

Consortium

A group of colleges affiliated in some way. The extent of the association can vary widely. Some consortiums - usually located near one another - offer a range of joint programs that may include cross-registration, inter-library loan, residential exchanges, and coordinate social, cultural, and athletic events.

Cooperative Education

A college program in which a student alternates between periods of full-time study and full-time employment in a related field.

Core Curriculum

A group of courses all students in a college must take in order to graduate.

Credit Load

The total number of credits a student carries for the term or semester. Most colleges require 12 or more credits during the term for full-time status.

Cross Registration

The practice, through agreements between colleges, to allow students enrolled at one to enroll in courses at the other.

Deferral

A college's postponement of the decision to accept or reject an early action or early decision candidate. The applicant's file is entered in with those of Regular Action candidates and is reviewed once again, this time for a final decision.

Distribution Requirements

Rules that require students to take courses in a variety of broad subject areas in order to graduate. Typical categories include the humanities, social sciences, fine arts, natural sciences, foreign languages, and mathematics. Unlike a core curriculum, distribution requirements do not usually mandate specific courses that students must take.

Double Major

Meeting the full requirements for a major in two related or unrelated fields, such as political science and international relations, or mathematics and art history.

Early Action

A program that gives students early notification of a college's admission decision. Like early decision, a student can only apply early action to one school but unlike early decision, it does not require a prior commitment to enroll if accepted. Early action - far less common than early decision - is primarily associated with four Ivy League schools that offer it: Brown, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale. Deadlines for early-action applications are usually in the late fall with notification in December through February. An applicant accepted under early action usually has until May 1, the CDR, to respond to the offer of admission.

Early Decision

A program under which a student receives early notification of a college's admissions decision if the student agrees in advance to enroll if accepted. Students may apply early decision to only one college; it should be a clear first choice. Application deadlines for early decision are usually in November with decision letters mailed by mid-December. If accepted, the student is committed to enroll. This is a binding agreement.

EFC (Expected Family Contribution)

This is the amount of money that the family is expected to contribute to the student's education as determined by the FAFSA. It is assumed that the family is responsible for the student's educational expenses.

Emphasis

An area of concentration within a major or minor. A dance major may have an emphasis in ballet or tap.

External Degree

A system of study whereby a student earns credit toward a degree through independent study, college courses, proficiency examinations, and personal experience.

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

The form used by U.S. citizens to apply for federal aid. There is no fee attached to this application that must be filed after January 1 for aid for the following year. It is best to file this form between January 1 and February 15).

Financial Aid Application (Foreign Student)

College Board form required of foreign students who are applying for financial aid. The college sends the form or it can be obtained in the Guidance Office. The form is submitted directly to the college and can be used for all colleges.

Financial Aid PROFILE

The family financial needs analysis form of the CSS. Must be submitted for U.S. citizens requesting aid to schools using SAT systems. A college will indicate when it is necessary.

Family Contribution

The amount of money that a family can "reasonably" be expected to pay toward a student's education as determined by a standardized needs analysis form.

Family Financial Statement (FFS)

The financial needs analysis form submitted to ACT which, like the FAF, determines the expected family contribution. Schools that use the ACT for admissions purposes usually require a copy of the FFS.

Federal Family Educational Loan Program (FFEL)

A loan program that uses private lender capital with the government offering interest subsidies. The interest rate is variable but capped at 8.25%. There is a 10-year repayment plan.

Federal Pell Grant

This is an entitlement gift award that is awarded by the federal government based upon the documented financial need of the student. Top award is \$4000.

Federal Perkins Loan

This program is supported by the U.S. government for U.S. citizens and provides for low-interest loans (currently 5%) that are obtained through the school rather than a bank. They must be repaid. There is no interest nor repayment while a student.

Federal Plus Loan

Loans that can be taken out by parents for their child's college education through banks or other lending institutions at varying interest rates of around 6%. Repayment is made while a student. Beware of this one – don't borrow more than is needed as repayment begins immediately.

Federal Stafford Loan

Low-interest loans (interest rates vary from about 6-8%) made to students in which the lender is a bank or savings and loan association. These are guaranteed in each state and through the federal government and are for U.S. citizens. They must be repaid. Subsidized Stafford Loan has no interest nor payments while in school and is need-based. Unsubsidized Stafford Loan is non-need based and interest accrues while a student.

Fee Waiver

Permission, often granted upon request, for needy students to apply for admission without having to pay the application fee. Both SAT and ACT have free waivers based upon being registered for free/reduced school lunches.

Financial Aid Package

The combination of loans, grants, and a work study job that a school puts together for a student receiving financial aid.

Foreign Student

A student who is not a U.S. citizen nor U.S. Permanent Resident. Also referred to as "international student".

Four-One-Four

An academic calendar consisting of two regular four-month semesters with a short "January" term in between.

Four-Year/Liberal Arts Colleges

These colleges award a bachelor's degree upon completion of 4 years of full-time study and are also sometimes known as colleges of arts and sciences. The study of liberal arts is intended to develop general knowledge and reasoning ability as opposed to specific preparation for a career. They do not offer as many majors in technical or scientific disciplines as comprehensive colleges or universities.

Freshman Fifteen

A reference to the number of pounds students often gain during the freshman year that is usually caused by a combination of too little exercise, unlimited helpings in the dining hall, too many late-night pizzas, and over-consumption of alcoholic beverages.

FSEOG (Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants)

Campus based programs for student aid funded by the U.S. government and limited to U.S. citizens for up to currently \$4000 per year. Preference is given to those who qualify for Pell Grant.

Grant

Money that is awarded a student that does not have to be repaid.

Greek System

The social fraternities (men) and sororities (women) on a campus.

Humanities

Subjects in which the primary focus is on human culture. Examples include history, philosophy, language, and literature.

Independent Study

A course, usually in a student's major field, in which he/she studies one-on-one with a professor on a topic of their choosing.

Internship

Supervised work related to a field of study and done for a business, government agency, organization, or professor. A student gains work experience and sometimes receives money and/or college credit.

Interdisciplinary Major

A major that combines two complementary subjects from different fields: i.e., biology and psychology. Students completing these majors take courses in each area as well as courses that explicitly join the two.

Intramurals

Athletic leagues informally organized within a college. Students do not have to try out. They play with and against fellow classmates.

Language Requirement

A stipulation that students must study a foreign language before graduation usually including two years of study of the same language.

Legacy

An applicant for admission whose mother or father is an alumna or alumnus of that particular school. Students with legacy status are often given preferential treatment in admissions.

Major

A concentration of related courses in a field of study.

Merit Scholarship

A financial grant usually awarded for academic achievement or special skill in an extracurricular activity and not based upon need.

Minor

A concentration of related courses but with fewer credits required than for a major. A minor may be related or unrelated to a major.

Need-Based Aid

Money awarded solely on the basis of need. Some schools agree to pay the difference between their total fees and the expected family contribution (EFC); others pay only part, leaving some "unmet" need. Most financial aid packages consist of some combination of three components: grants, loan, and work study.

Need-Blind Admissions

A policy in which the applicant's ability to pay does not affect the college's consideration of the application for admission.

Office Hours

A period during which a professor agrees to be available in his/her office for the purpose of talking with students about their course work.

Open Admissions

A policy under which any applicant with a high school diploma is accepted. At state universities that have this policy, open admission is usually limited to state residents.

Pass/Fail or CR/F

An option offered by some schools for some classes. A student may enroll in a class and simply receive credit or failure on the transcript instead of a specific grade.

Prerequisite

A requirement to get into a course such as taking French I before taking more advanced French courses.

Private Schools

Non-profit institutions which are accredited and receive some government aid. Tuition and fees are generally higher than at public schools.

Public Schools

City or state colleges and universities which charge lower tuition to in-state residents. Residency qualifications vary from state to state.

Quad

An abbreviation for "quadrangle"; many dorm complexes are built in squares (quadrangles) with a courtyard in the middle. Quad can also refer to a suite of dorm rooms in which four students live together.

Quarter System

An academic calendar under which the school year is divided into four quarters, three of which constitute a full academic year.

Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)

Programs conducted by certain colleges in cooperation with the U.S. Air Force, Army, and Navy.

Resident Advisor (RA)

A student, usually an upperclassman, who lives in a dorm and helps to maintain regulations and enforce school policy as well as offering advice and support to dorm residents. RA's receive compensation from the school for their services, usually in the form of free room and board.

Rolling Admissions

A policy under which a college considers applications almost immediately after receiving them. Decision letters are mailed with a month after the application is filed. Colleges with rolling admissions continue to accept applicants only until the class is filled so it is best to apply early.

SAR (Student Aid Report)

The report that is processed after the FAFSA is filed and sent to student. Corrections and changes can be made on this form.

SAT Reasoning Test

Test administered to high school juniors and seniors by the College Board with separate scores in Critical Reading, Math, and Writing. It is used as an admission criterion at most colleges. Scores range from 200 to 800 in each section.

SAT Subject Tests

Multiple choice subject tests used to measure knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge. Up to three subject tests can be required and are used for placement purposes as well as admission. Scores range on each from 200-800.

Semester

An academic calendar that divides the year into two equal semesters with a shorter summer term. Two semesters constitute an academic year.

Seminar

A small class with an emphasis on group discussions rather than lecture notes.

Social Sciences

Subjects that deal systematically with institutions of human society, most notably economics and political sciences. The behavioral sciences, which include psychology, sociology, and anthropology, are often included in this group as well.

Teaching Assistant (TA)

A graduate student who assists a professor in the presentation of a course. Usually the professor gives 2-4 lectures a week for all of the students in the class and the TA holds smaller weekly discussions sessions.

Three-Two Program

A program in which students can study three years at one school followed by two at another, more specialized school (very common for combining liberal arts and engineering). Two degrees are awarded.

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) - iTB

This is an internet based test to evaluate the English proficiency of people whose native language is not English. It is a required test for non-native English speakers for more than 2400 colleges and universities in the U.S. as well as by institutions in other countries where the language of instruction is English.

Trimester

An academic calendar that divides the school year into three terms of approximately equal length. Schools on the trimester system generally have one term before the winter break and two after.

Tutorial Major (a.k.a. Self-Designed or Special Major)

A program offered by many schools in which students can plan their own majors, combining the offerings of two or more traditional majors.

Undergraduate Programs

Programs that can be entered directly from high school. These are the programs that lead to Associate and/or Bachelor's degrees.

University

Generally offers a broad range of both undergraduate and graduate degree programs and can vary considerably in size and in the diversity of the programs they offer. Universities are generally larger than other types of colleges.

Upper-Division College

These schools generally offer the last two years of undergraduate study, usually in specialized programs leading to the bachelor's degree.

Wait List

A list of students who are not initially accepted but who may be depending upon the number of accepted students who enroll. Most colleges ultimately accept only a fraction of the students on this list and they are notified during the summer.

Work-Study

On-campus jobs that can be subsidized by the federal government but can also be open for non-U.S. citizens. Students typically work 10-20 hours per week to help finance their education.