

Glossary of Terms for College-Bound Students

APPLYING

ACT: The ACT is a standards and curriculum based exam that functions as an educational and career planning tool for college-bound students. It assesses students' academic readiness for college and consists of four multiple-choice tests: English, Mathematics, Reading, Science, with an optional Writing exam.

Applicant: Any student who has completed the college application process at a particular institution.

Application: A college application is part of the competitive college admissions system. Admissions departments usually require students to complete an application for admission that typically consists of academic records, personal essays, letters of recommendation, and a list of extracurricular activities. Some schools require the SAT or ACT. Deadlines for admission applications are established and published by each college or university.

Application Deadline: The date set by college admissions offices, after which applications for admission will not be accepted.

Application Fee: The application fee is a one-time fee that a student must submit with their written or online application to a college or university. The amount varies between schools.

"Best Fit": No one school is best for all students. Some students do best at large public universities; others excel in small liberal arts colleges. Still others want to study far from home. If you want to make the most of college, don't apply just to the big-name schools or the ones your friends are excited about. Apply to the college or university that is the "best fit" for you.

Class Rank: The ordered ranking of students in a graduating class based on academic performance and/or grade point average. Rankings may be expressed in numerical order or by percentile depending on the school and class size.

College Rankings: Collection of certain data from all colleges and universities nationwide that then turns into an objective guide to help parents and students compare the quality of schools.

Common Application: The Common Application (informally known as the Common App) makes it possible for students to use one admissions application to apply to any of the 500+ member colleges and universities. There is a Common Application for First-Year Admission and a Common Application for Transfer Admission. Both versions allow students to fill out one application online and submit it to participating schools.

EFC: Expected Family Contribution is a measure of a student's family's financial strength and what they can contribute to your college finances. It is calculated through a formula that includes taxed and untaxed income, assets, family size, etc. The EFC is important because schools use it to determine a student's federal student aid eligibility and financial aid award.

Extracurricular: Extracurricular activities are simply anything you do that is not a high school course or paid employment (note that paid work experience is of interest to colleges and can substitute for some extracurricular activities). You should define your extracurricular activities in broad terms—many applicants make the mistake of thinking of them solely as school-sponsored groups such as yearbook, band, or football. Not so; most community and family activities are also "extracurricular."

Financial Aid: Any grant, scholarship, loan, or work-study offered to a student to help pay for college expenses. Aid can come from a variety of sources such as: federal agencies, state agencies, colleges, high schools and high school communities, foundations, etc.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): The FAFSA is a form that each current and prospective undergraduate or graduate college student must fill out in order to determine or renew his or her eligibility for student financial aid.

Grade Point Average (GPA): The total number of points a student has achieved over a period of time divided by the number of credits a student took over the same period of time. It is an indication of a student's academic achievement at a college or university for a semester or overall.

Grant: A grant is a sum of money given to student for the purposes of their college expenses. It is typically given by an organization, government, or private sources to the student without the burden to pay the donor back.

In-State (Resident) Student: A student whose permanent residence is in the same state as the college or university he or she attends or hopes to attend. In-state students generally pay lower tuition than do out-of-state students.

Intended Start Date: The date indicating which semester an applicant plans to enroll. Most students enroll in the fall.

Merit-Based Financial Aid: Financial aid awarded to students based on their academic achievements and strength of their application. The award is in the form of a reduction of tuition and can be renewed each year under certain circumstances.

Need-Based Financial Aid: Financial aid awarded to candidates based on his or her family's financial circumstances. Need based grants are renewable each year but can change depending on the changes in the financial situation of a family.

Out-of-State (Non-Resident) Student: Student whose permanent residence is in a different state than that of the college or university that he or she attends or hopes to attend. Out-of-state students generally pay higher tuition than do in-state students.

Prospective Student: Any student who is a potential applicant for admission, particularly those who have shown interest in attending the institution or in which the institution has shown interest.

SAT: The SAT is a college admissions exam that tests students' knowledge of reading, writing, and math. The purpose of the tests is to have a way to comparatively measure college and university applicants. Students typically take the SAT during their junior and/or senior year of high school and it can be taken multiple times. Most colleges and universities require SAT scores as part of the application process.

SAT Subject Tests: The SAT subject tests are content-specific exams that students can take in courses that they feel they have excelled in. Students have the choice to take subject tests although some schools do require them as part of the admissions process. The purpose of the test is to help students differentiate themselves in the college admissions process by showing schools courses they have excelled in.

Scholarship: Type of grant awarded to a student usually for academic merit or high accomplishments. Scholarships do not need to be repaid and can also be awarded based on need as well. Students typically receive scholarships from organizations, companies,

communities, college or university, and many more

Student Loans: Unlike grants and scholarships, loans are offered to students in order to pay for education expenses with the promise that they will be paid back in the future. Students must apply and be accepted in order for student loans to be awarded. Typically, the interest rate on student loans is lower than most other loans. Additionally, students do not have to pay back their loans until they have completed their education.

Transcript: A transcript is a copy of a student's permanent academic record that is kept throughout his or her time at high school. It is to be sent to the university or college with an application. It is also the academic record kept throughout a student's time at university.

Work-Study: This is a program that allows students to work part-time while attending college. It is federally funded and assists students with college-related expenses while attending school.

COLLEGE ACCEPTANCE TERMS

Acceptance: The decision by an admissions officer or committee to offer the opportunity for enrollment as a student at a particular institution.

College Selection: The act of choosing and making the decision to enroll in and attend a particular higher-education program.

Deferred Enrollment: This is a category of admission available at some institutions for fully accepted students who wish—for a justifiable reason—to take a semester or year off before enrolling in college.

Denial: The decision by an institution to not offer a student admission to a particular institution.

Early Action: Early action is when a prospective student applies for admission by an early deadline (before the regular admission deadline) and receives notice of acceptance, denial, or deferment with no obligation to the university to enroll, if accepted for admission.

Early Decision: Through this program offered by many post-secondary schools, students willing to commit to a school if accepted submit their application by a date well before the general admission deadline. If accepted, the student must enroll in that school, so students should only apply early decision to their first-choice school.

Financial Aid Package: The amount of federal aid, state aid, and college aid that the colleges and universities a student has been accepted to are willing to offer toward college expenses. Colleges typically send out their offering with the acceptance letter. The amount varies per student and per school but the package will explain what exactly the school will offer.

Notification Date: The date by which applicants who are accepted for admission are expected to notify the institutions of their intent to enroll and make enrollment deposits. That date is often on or around May 1.

Open Admissions: Unselective and non-competitive college admissions process where a high school diploma or a G.E.D. is the only requirement.

Rolling Admissions: This is a practice used by some institutions to review and complete applications as they arrive, rather than according to a set deadline.

Waitlist: An applicant is put on the waitlist when an institution decides to offer the applicant the opportunity to enroll in the institution only if there is space available in the incoming class after fully admitted students have responded to their offers to enroll.

TYPES OF POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Art School (College, Institute, Conservatory): An institution specializing in the visual, performing, and/or creative arts.

College: An institution of higher learning often referred to as a “four-year” institution, which grants the bachelor's degree in liberal arts or science or both.

Community College: Community colleges, sometimes called junior colleges, technical colleges, or city colleges, are primarily two-year public institutions providing higher education and lower-level courses, granting certificates, diplomas, and associate's degrees. Many also offer continuing and adult education. After graduating from a community college, some students transfer to a four-year liberal arts college or university for two to three years to complete a bachelor's degree.

Graduate School: Within universities, these schools offer degree programs beyond the bachelor's degree.

Liberal Arts College: A degree-granting institution where the academic focus is on developing the intellect and instruction in the humanities and sciences, rather than on training for a particular vocational, technical, or professional pursuit.

Private Institution: This is a college or university funded by private sources without any control by a government agency. The cost of attending a private institution is generally higher than the cost at a public institution.

Public Institution: A college or university that receives public funding, primarily from a local, state, or national government that oversees and regulates the school's operations is considered a public institution.

University: A “post-secondary institution” that consists of a liberal arts college, a diverse graduate program, and usually two or more professional schools or faculties that is empowered to confer degrees in various fields of study.

Vocational or Technical School: This type of institution is similar to a community college in that it offers specific career-oriented programs that last from a few months to a couple of years. Most are specialized and offer intense training in one specific skill area.

TYPES OF POST-SECONDARY DEGREES

AA: This stands for an “associate in arts” degree, which can be earned at most two-year colleges.

AAS: This refers to an “associate in applied science” degree, which can be earned at some two-year colleges.

BA or BS: BA stands for “bachelor of arts,” and BS stands for “bachelor of science.” Both degrees can be earned at four-year colleges.

Graduate Degrees: These degrees are earned beyond the bachelor's degree when the student completes graduate school curriculum requirements. Common examples include the MA (master's degree), PhD (doctoral degree), MBA (master's degree in business administration), and MD (medical doctor).

Certificates: In an economy that increasingly rewards specialization, more institutions are offering certification programs, typically a package of five or six courses, for credit or not, taken over 3 to 18 months. Some cost a few thousand dollars, others cost more.