

College Terminology



COLLEGE TYPES

Liberal Arts Colleges focus on the education of undergraduate students. Classes are generally taught by professors who see teaching as their primary responsibility. Because most liberal arts colleges are smaller than universities, classes tend to be smaller and more personal attention is available. Students who attend liberal arts colleges are exposed to a broad base of courses in the humanities, social sciences and sciences. In addition, they select at least one area of in-depth study which is their college “major”. Many employers look for graduates of liberal arts programs, valuing their well-rounded preparation.

Universities are generally larger and include a liberal arts college as well as some graduate programs. At many large universities class size will reflect institutional size, with most introductory classes being taught in a lecture format with class sizes in the hundreds. Some classes will be taught by graduate students. Professors at major universities will be involved in research which may draw energy, focus, and resources away from undergraduate teaching.

Ivy League – term used to refer to a group of 8 universities in the northeast known for academic excellence. All of the Ivy League schools place within the top 15 of the U.S. News & World Report College and University Rankings. They include Brown University, Columbia University, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Harvard University, Princeton University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale University.

Little Ivies – term used to refer to a group of liberal arts colleges in the northeast known for their academic excellence. They include Amherst College, Williams College, and Wesleyan University along with over 10 other institutions.

Women’s Colleges, with their larger numbers of female faculty and administrators, offer college women confidence-building role models, greater opportunities to serve in a full range of student leadership positions, and a heightened awareness of career possibilities for women. Women’s colleges graduate a high number of science majors, as well as students who continue on to graduate school and/or professional studies.

Community or Junior Colleges generally offer the first two years of a liberal arts education, in addition to vocational training. An associate degree is awarded at the end of a two-year program of study.

For-Profit “Colleges/Universities” are educational institutions that are run by private, profit-seeking companies or organizations. They operate as businesses, receiving fees from each student they enroll, and offer vocational, career, or technical programs. Many 4-year colleges and universities will not accept transfer credits earned at a for-profit institution.

COLLEGE & GRADUATE DEGREES

Associate’s Degree (AA) – degree granted after completing a two-year program of study. Usually conferred at a community college. It is the lowest in the hierarchy of academic degrees offered in the U.S.

Bachelor’s Degree (BA, BS, BFA, BN) – degree granted after completing a four-year program of study.

Master’s Degree (MS, MBA, MFA) – a degree earned after a Bachelor’s degree in a specific area of study. Usually takes 2 academic years.

Doctoral Degree (Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D., J.D.) – the highest in the hierarchy of academic degrees offered in the U.S. The mean number of years to complete a doctoral degree in the U.S. is 7 years. Doctoral study can be undertaken after earning a Bachelor’s degree or a Master’s degree.

APPLICATION & ADMISSIONS

Common Application – a standard on-line college admission application designed to help the application process for students. Over 400 colleges and universities accept the Common Application, including most top-ranked liberal arts colleges.

Regular Decision – the regular admissions process at colleges and universities. Application deadline is often January 1 of a student’s senior year. Students are notified of the school’s decision by April 1. Application deadlines vary between schools so students should check in with each college/university to confirm their deadlines.

Early Action – a type of early admissions to colleges and universities. Early action requires students to submit an application by Nov. 1 of their senior year in high school. Students are notified of the school’s decision by mid-December. Students can decline the offer if accepted and leave their options open for other universities.

Early Decision – a type of early admissions to colleges and universities. Candidates submit their applications by the end of October of their senior year in high school and receive a decision in mid-December. Early decision is a binding commitment to enroll. If accepted under an early decision program, the applicant must withdraw all other applications and enroll at that institution. Early decision does not allow applicants to apply to more than one early decision school simultaneously.

FINANCIAL AID

FAFSA – Free Application for Federal Student Aid – a free on-line form for students to apply for federal financial aid (Pell Grants, college-based scholarships, and student loans). Federal aid obtained by filling out the FAFSA is the largest source of financial aid available to college students. Forms available on line January 1 of student’s senior year.

CSS PROFILE - the College Scholarship Service Profile – a financial aid application utilized by many private colleges/universities and filled out in addition to the FAFSA. It is more detailed than the FAFSA and costs a small fee to fill out. Generally, colleges with early acceptance programs use the CSS PROFILE to make preliminary financial aid decisions. Then after student completes the FAFSA (the official financial aid application) colleges may then make adjustments to their financial aid awards if necessary.

Major Sources of Financial Aid:

- **Grants and scholarships:** Also called “gift aid,” grants are based on financial need and do not need to be repaid. Scholarships are most-often awarded on the basis of strong academic achievement or a special talent or ability.
- **Work-study:** This option gives students the opportunity for part-time employment on campus to help them meet their financial need.
- **Loans:** These are offered to students or parents and must be repaid. Loans that are awarded based on financial need are low-interest loans, usually sponsored by the federal government. Repayment does not begin until 6 months after completion of the college program and may be deferred until a later date under some special circumstances.

Federal Grants (Do NOT need to be repaid)

- **Pell Grant** – a gift-aid program sponsored by the government that does not have to be repaid. Granted through the FAFSA.
- **Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG)** – federally funded gift for students with great need. Granted through the FAFSA.

Loans (Need to be repaid)

- **Perkins Loan** – low-interest, federal student loan available to students of low-income families. Administered by colleges. Perkins Loans are awarded based on exceptional financial need. You have 9 months after you graduate, leave school, or drop below half-time status before you must begin to repay the loan. Granted through the FAFSA.
- **Federal Stafford Student Loan** – low-interest federal loan made to college students. No payments are due until 6 months after graduation or 3 months after the borrower becomes a less-than-full-time student without graduating. Granted through the FAFSA. Stafford Loans may be subsidized or unsubsidized.
 - Subsidized Stafford Loan –Interest does not accumulate while attending school.
 - Unsubsidized Stafford Loan – Interest accumulates while attending school.
- **PLUS – Parent Loan for Undergraduate Students** – available to the parents of students at participating colleges/universities. PLUS loans differ from other federal student loans in that they have higher interest rates and the commitment is undertaken by the parent, rather than the student. Not a need based loan. Granted through the FAFSA.

STANDARDIZED TESTING – PSAT, SAT, ACT

College Board – the agency that administers the SAT, SAT II, and Advanced Placement exams.

PSAT/NMSQT – Preliminary Scholastic Achievement Assessment Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test – a test usually taken by high school 10th or 11th graders. Serves as a practice for the SAT. Scores are used to determine eligibility for the National Merit Scholarship and National Hispanic Scholar Awards.

SAT – Scholastic Assessment Test – a standardized test for high school students used by college admissions offices to help make acceptance decisions. Test contains three 800-point sections (Math, Critical Reading, and Writing). The highest score possible is 2400.

SAT II – subject tests used to measure academic achievement and used in college admissions at highly selective schools. Many subject areas to choose from including Physics, Calculus, Spanish, Writing, etc. Highest score is 800.

ACT – American College Test – test taken by high school students and used by college admissions officers for acceptance and placement purposes. This test has 4 components: English, Math, Science, and Reading. The highest score is 36; national average is usually 21.

MISC.

Undergraduate – a college/university student who is studying towards a bachelor's degree.

Advanced Placement – College-level courses taken in high school. Students become more competitive in the college application process when they have taken AP courses in high school.

Class Rank – your position in your graduating class, calculated by grade point average at each semester.

Grade Point Average (GPA) – a system that converts letter grades into a number. Un-weighted GPAs are on a 4.0 scale (A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1).