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## College Planning & Financial Aid Guide



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# Why College?



Earning a college degree is one of the best things you can do for your future.

Not only does a college education give you more career options, college also exposes you to new ideas, teaches you new ways to think, and helps you develop a better understanding of the world around you. As a college graduate, you'll be able to contribute more to your family and your community.

## Learn More, Earn More

It is becoming increasingly difficult to get hired without a college degree. Competition for good jobs is tough, and if you don't have an education, you will be at a disadvantage. If you plan to have a career when you're ready to enter the workforce, you need an education first.

A college education is an investment in your future. The more time you invest in school, the more money you'll be able to make.

<p>Young adults with an <b>associate's degree</b> earn an average of</p> <p><b>\$6,000</b></p> <p>more per year than workers with only a high school diploma</p>	<p>Young adults with a <b>bachelor's degree</b> earn an average of</p> <p><b>\$16,000</b></p> <p>more per year than workers with only a high school diploma</p>	<p>Young adults with an <b>advanced degree</b> earn an average of</p> <p><b>\$25,000</b></p> <p>more per year than workers with only a high school diploma</p>
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Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2010). The Condition of Education 2010 (NCES 2010-028), Indicator 17.



# Make A Plan For Higher Education



## Your High School Curriculum

Taking the right classes in high school can help you be more successful when you get to college. And now, many financial aid programs require students to demonstrate academic proficiency and a willingness to challenge themselves in high school.

## Make A Plan for Higher Education

### Recommended High School Program

The Recommended High School Program is designed to make sure that you will be ready for college-level work when you graduate. Graduating under the Recommended High School Program is an admissions requirement for Texas public 4-year universities as well as minimum eligibility requirement for many financial aid benefits such as the TEXAS Grant, the B-On-Time Loan, and the Top 10% Scholarship Program.

#### English, Language Arts, 4 credits

*English I, II, III, IV*

#### Mathematics, 4 credits

*Three of the credits must be Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry. After successful completion of these three courses, a student may select the fourth required credit from a list of state-approved Mathematics courses. Please check with your counselor on the availability of courses*

#### Science, 4 credits

*Biology, Chemistry, Physics, or Principles of Technology I*

#### Social Studies, 4 credits

*World History; World Geography; U.S. History since Reconstruction; U.S. Government (0.5 credit), Economics (0.5 credit)*

#### Language other than English, 2 credits (same language)

#### Physical Education, 1 credit

#### Fine Arts, 1 credit

#### Speech, 0.5 credit

#### Electives, 5.5 credits

*\*All students entering the ninth grade at a Texas public high school are automatically enrolled in the Recommended High School Program.*

### Distinguished Achievement Program

Instead of the Recommended High School Program, some students may choose to follow the Distinguished Achievement Program. The Distinguished Achievement Program requires all of the courses in the Recommended High School Program plus a third year of foreign language. In addition, students must fulfill four of the following requirements:

**Score 3 or above** on a College Board Advanced Placement (AP) exam.

**Score 4 or above** on an International Baccalaureate (IB) exam. Each exam qualifies as a requirement.

**Complete original research or project** under the direction of a mentor(s), judged by qualified professionals and reported to a qualified audience.

**Earn a Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT) score that qualifies as a “Com-mended Scholar”** or higher.

**Earn a grade of 3.0 or higher** on courses that count for college credit (dual or concurrent credit, TechPrep).

## Make A Plan for Higher Education

### Challenge Yourself Academically

Many state financial aid programs now give higher priority to students who meet certain academic requirements or achieved recognition in high school. For example, the Top 10% Scholarship Program provides scholarships to students who enroll in a public university or community college in Texas and earned a place in his/her high school's top 10% of the graduating class.

Beginning in fall 2013, students eligible for the TEXAS Grant Program (the state's largest need-based financial aid program) will earn priority for an award at Texas public universities if they meet criteria in at least two of the following four categories:

#### Advanced Academic Programs

- ✓ Graduate under the Distinguished Achievement Program
- ✓ Graduate under the International Baccalaureate Program; or
- ✓ Earn 12 hours of college credit (e.g. dual credit, AP)

#### Class Standing

- ✓ Graduate in the top 1/3 of high school class; or
- ✓ Graduate with a B average

#### Satisfy Texas Success Initiative (college readiness assessment) requirements

#### Complete a math course beyond Algebra II

Challenging yourself with rigorous classes in high school may also help you avoid having to take developmental or remedial classes in college. These classes do not count toward your degree, and can negatively affect your eligibility for financial aid. Work hard in high school and save yourself money and time in college.

### Earn College Credit in High School

You don't have to wait for college to start taking college classes. In fact, the more college credits you earn now, the less time you'll spend in college, which can save you a lot of money. Taking college-level courses also prepares you for the harder courses you'll be taking in college. You can earn college credit with Tech Prep, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and dual credit courses.

### Extracurricular Activities

Colleges look at more than just grades. Though there's no substitute for earning good grades in high school, don't overlook the importance of your activities outside of the classroom. The activity you choose isn't as important as your ability to stick with it and show improvement, so choose something you love and can commit to. Your activity might be community service (volunteering, tutoring, mentoring, activism, etc.), sports, theater, music (choir, orchestra, band, etc.), Boy/Girl Scouts, etc. Keep in mind that it is usually better to master one activity than to dabble in many.

### Create A Brag Sheet

When you write your college application, you may choose to include a brag sheet or résumé that lists all your relevant extracurricular activities beginning with your freshman year. The purpose is to demonstrate your progress, dedication, and achievements over time. Start your brag sheet now and record new accomplishments while they're still fresh in your mind. Update your brag sheet regularly so you don't forget important milestones.



# Choose a Path



## Earning a college education is the best way to prepare yourself for a successful career.

But “college” doesn’t have to mean a four-year university: technical schools, community colleges, and universities are all good choices depending on your career goals and aspirations. Understanding the differences between these schools will help you choose a path that makes sense for your life.



**Community colleges** offer two-year degree programs that result in associate’s degrees, and often the curriculum is focused on career training. Because community colleges are much cheaper than public universities, many students choose to begin their studies at a community college and later transfer to a four-year school to earn their bachelor’s degrees.



**Technical schools** are smart choices for students who are sure about their career paths and want to earn a certification before entering the workforce. These schools offer specialized training for a specific trade or industry, such as becoming an electrician or a real estate broker.



**Four-year public colleges or universities** offer programs that result in a bachelor’s degree in arts or sciences. Texas offers a wide range of wonderful public and private universities, and the tuition for Texas residents is usually much more affordable than tuition for out-of-state schools.

You have a lot of options. Explore them all, and then make a smart decision about the career you want and the education you’ll need to get there. Having a plan for the future is the first step.



# Applying to College



## The 10 Percent Rule in Texas

Each university sets its own admissions standards, but all Texas public colleges or universities automatically admit applicants who rank in the top 10 percent of their high school class. Some also automatically admit those who graduate in the top 25 percent of their high school class. All students must submit an application for admission and have a high school diploma or its equivalent.

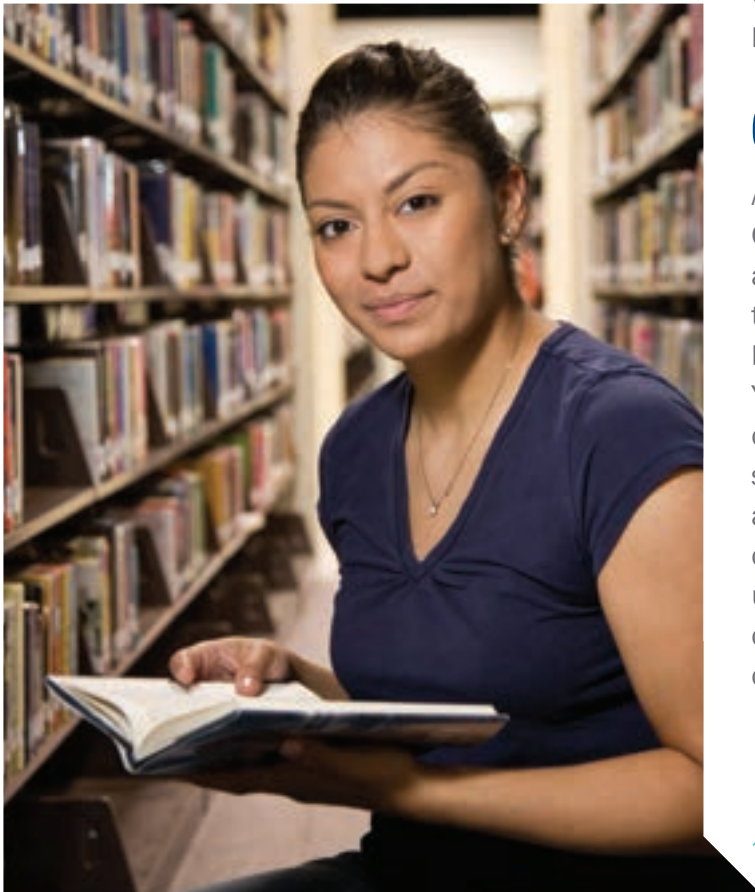


## Admissions Tests: SAT and ACT

If you apply to a four-year college or university, you will need to take a standardized test. Most universities accept scores from both the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and the American College Testing program (ACT). It's your choice whether to take the SAT or the ACT. The registration deadline for these tests is usually a month before the test date, so be sure to plan ahead. You can register for both tests online or by mail. Learn more about the tests on their websites.

[SAT.collegeboard.com](http://SAT.collegeboard.com)

[www.ACT.org](http://www.ACT.org)



## College Applications

If you are applying to a public two-year or four-year institution in Texas, you will need to complete the ApplyTexas application. This application is available online at [www.ApplyTexas.org](http://www.ApplyTexas.org). Once completed, you can use this one application to apply to many schools across Texas.

If you are applying out of state or to private schools, you will need to check with the individual schools to determine their application process. Many universities across the country use the Common Application, available at [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org).

All qualified applicants are admitted to Texas public community and technical colleges. Contact community and technical colleges directly for their applications. If you are like many students who go to a community college before transferring to a university, be sure and check the transfer requirements for the university you plan to attend.

## College Readiness

All students, except those who score at or above the College Readiness Standard on the required state-approved exit test or meet the equivalent cut scores on the ACT or SAT, must take a Texas Success Initiative test before enrolling at a Texas public college or university. Your college advisor will use your results to help you choose your college courses. If you need to strengthen skills, your college advisor will recommend appropriate assistance such as developmental education courses, computer-based instruction, or tutoring. Each college or university determines when students are ready for college-level work. Ask your high school counselor or college admissions office for more information.

# Paying for College



The cost of college is a concern for many students and their families.

But don't let the cost of college get in the way of education. College is an investment in yourself, your family, and your future. You have many options, and financial aid is available.

## The Cost of Attendance

The cost of college attendance depends on where you go, where you live, the degree you earn, and how long it takes you to complete your degree. In Texas, average tuition and fees for a 15-hour semester range from \$1100 at a public community college to \$10,900 at a private college or university. In addition to tuition and fees, you will also need to pay for

books and other supplies. You may also need to consider the cost of room and board if you plan to live away from home. Other costs include transportation and personal living expenses.

**Average Cost to Take 30 Hours While Attending Higher Education Institutions in Texas, Fall and Spring Semesters (2011–2012)**

	Tuition & Fees	TOTAL
Public Community Colleges	\$2,173	\$14,178
Public Universities	\$7,185	\$20,610
Public Technical Colleges	\$4,304	\$15,397
Public State Colleges (Lamar)	\$4,182	\$14,498
Public Health-Related Institutions	\$6,363	\$26,277
Independent Universities	\$21,780	\$32,663
Independent Community Colleges	\$11,018	\$18,858

## Expected Family Contribution

Parents are usually responsible for paying for their children's college

education. Most families use a combination of savings, current income, student earnings, and financial aid to pay for college.

The amount of money that you and your parents are expected to pay for one year of your education is called the expected family contribution, or EFC. The difference between the actual cost for you to attend college and your EFC is your financial need.

**Financial need = Cost of Attendance – EFC**

Most families cannot pay the entire cost of attendance without some kind of financial assistance. Financial aid is available through government, college, or private sources to help families pay for college.

## Applying for Financial Aid

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the only form you need to apply for most financial aid. (Scholarships usually have a separate application process.) If you are unable to use the FAFSA due to citizenship, check with your college to see if they will accept the Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA). Certain students can use the TASFA to apply for state (not federal) aid. Use the following guideline to apply for financial aid:

- 1 Complete and submit the FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1. The earlier your form is received the better your chances of receiving funds. You will need your parents' income tax information to complete the form. You will find the FAFSA at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) or you can get a copy from your high school counselor or any college or university financial aid office. It will be processed more quickly if you submit it online (FAFSA on the Web). The website section entitled "About Us" has a lot of helpful information.
- 2 You will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) within four to six weeks of mailing a FAFSA, or within two to four weeks of completing FAFSA on the Web. The SAR will indicate your EFC and your eligibility for a Pell Grant. Read the report carefully. If corrections are needed, just follow the directions on the report.
- 3 The SAR is sent to the colleges and universities that you listed on the FAFSA. The financial aid office at each institution will use this information to calculate your financial need.
- 4 The financial aid office will figure out which programs you may qualify for and develop a financial aid package.
- 5 You will receive an award letter explaining the amounts and types of aid that institution will offer you. You may accept part or all of the aid, but you will need to notify your college or university of your decision.

Institutions set their own deadlines. Make sure you complete and submit your FAFSA by the college's or university's Priority Application Deadline. If you apply late, some of the aid will already be gone and the school will only be able to offer you what is left over.

## Types of Financial Aid

Several different kinds of financial aid are available, from scholarships and grants to work-study and loans. Many financial aid packages include a combination of loans, scholarships, and grants.

**Scholarships and grants** do not have to be paid back. Scholarships are usually awarded based on grades or some special talent; grants are usually awarded based on financial need.

**Loans** are borrowed funds that must be paid back, usually with interest. Borrow only what you can afford. Remember that if an institution offers you a loan as part of a financial aid package, you do not have to accept the full amount of the loan.

**Work-study** is a part-time job awarded by the college or university.

**Tuition/Fee exemptions** lower the tuition and/or fee charges for students that meet certain requirements.

**Waivers** allow some out-of-state students to pay the lower, in-state tuition rate at a Texas public institution.

**Loan repayment programs** allow students to repay loans through some type of service—working as a teacher, nurse, or doctor, or by finishing a degree in a set amount of time.



## Loans

Families use loans to pay the cost of college over a long period of time—the same way they pay for things like homes and cars. Several different kinds of loans are available from both federal and private sources. Ask the financial aid office at the college you plan to attend how its loan process works. Some schools offer loans with zero interest or that don't have to be paid back if the student earns a bachelor's degree in four years or less, or performs certain work or services after completing college. Other loans are available to students planning on certain careers, like those in medicine and allied health.

## Exemptions and Waivers

The state uses exemptions to lower some students' tuition and fee charges and waivers to reduce college tuition and fees for out-of-state students. For more information on programs and requirements, contact the Admissions Office or the Registrar's Office at the public college or university you plan to attend, or go to [www.collegeforalltexas.com](http://www.collegeforalltexas.com).

## Tax Advantages

College students and their families can reduce their federal income taxes through the following programs:

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Receive a tax credit of up to \$1,500 per year with the **Hope Tax Credit** or \$2,000 per year with the **Lifetime Learning Tax Credit**.

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Deduct up to \$3,000 per year for tuition and fees and up to \$2,500 per year for interest paid on educational loans.

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For more information, contact a tax preparer, look up Publication 970 at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov), or call the IRS at 1-800-827-1040.

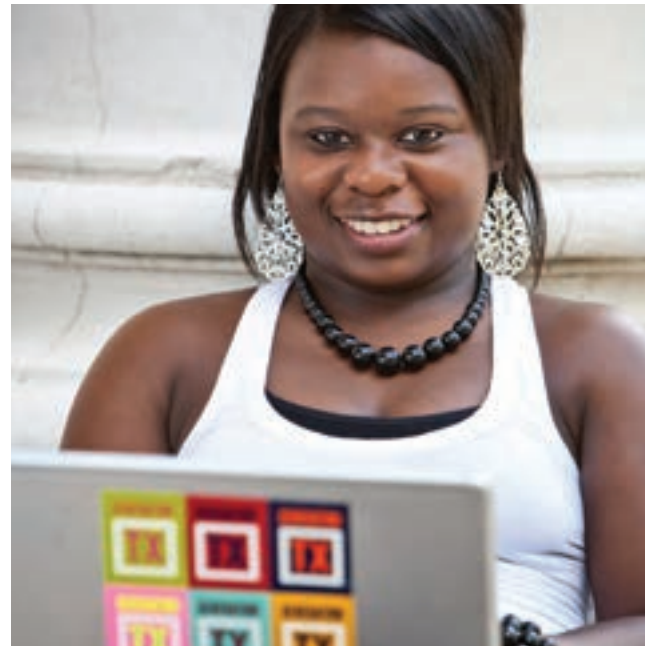
## College Savings Plans

Families have several options for saving for college. Texas offers both guaranteed tuition plans and qualified 529 savings plan. For more information, call 1-800-445-GRAD (1-800-445-4723) or visit [www.texastomorrowfunds.org](http://www.texastomorrowfunds.org).

## Tuition Rebate for Undergraduate Students

If you complete a bachelor's degree within 4 calendar years and with no more than 3 semester credit hours beyond the requirements of your degree, you may be able to claim a tuition rebate of up to \$1,000.\* You must apply for the tuition rebate before you receive your bachelor's degree. See your business office or financial aid office for an application and more information.

\* Up to 9 hours of college credit by examination are excluded from the semester credit hour limit, as are hours for ROTC courses that are not required for ROTC candidates' degrees.



## Tips for Reducing College Costs

**Take college-level courses in high school.** TechPrep, dual credit, Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses allow you to earn college credit in high school and are much cheaper than their equivalent classes in college.

**Earn college credit** for what you already know by taking a College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) exam.

**Plan for your college experience.** Explore career options early to avoid changing majors and spending extra time in college.

**Start at a community college.** Tuition and fees at community colleges are less than at universities, and the credits you earn often transfer to four-year universities. Many students also save money by living at home while they attend community college.

## Things to Remember

The FAFSA is the only application you need to complete for most financial aid. If you're not a US citizen, fill out the FAFSA paper form or the TASFA and take it to the college you plan to attend. You can't get federal aid, but you could receive state financial aid.

Colleges and universities usually count scholarships you bring with you to the school when calculating the amount of aid you will receive.

Most financial aid is based on need. Your Expected Family Contribution (EFC) is the same whatever school you go to, but your financial need will be higher or lower depending upon the cost of the institution you attend.

You must reapply for financial aid each year.

Contact all institutions you'd like to attend to learn about financial aid deadlines.

This is the most important investment you can make in your future. Take time to learn about your options before you make any decisions.

# Resources



## Financial Aid

### Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

1-800-4-FED-AID  
1-800-433-3243  
[www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

### Texas Financial Aid Information Center

1-888-311-8881  
[www.tgslc.org/borrowers/tfaic/](http://www.tgslc.org/borrowers/tfaic/)

### Generation TX

#### Financial Aid Information

[gentx.org/make-it-happen/apply-for-financial-aid/](http://gentx.org/make-it-happen/apply-for-financial-aid/)

## Applications and Admissions

### ApplyTexas

[www.applytexas.org](http://www.applytexas.org)

### Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

[sat.collegeboard.com](http://sat.collegeboard.com)

### American College Testing Program (ACT)

[www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)

## Scholarships

### FastWeb

[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)

### Scholarships.com

[www.scholarships.com](http://www.scholarships.com)

### Zinch

[www.zinch.com](http://www.zinch.com)

### Texas Comptroller

[www.everychanceeverytexan.org/funding](http://www.everychanceeverytexan.org/funding)

To learn more about these and other college-related topics, visit [www.GenTX.org](http://www.GenTX.org)