

# College Is Possible for You!



welcome

**Are you thinking about education after high school? With the information in this booklet, you can become more confident that College Is Possible for you!** We have learned that many Americans feel that higher education is very important but far too expensive. Sometimes they give up on the idea of education after high school before they investigate the possibilities.

This booklet brings you useful information on preparing for college, the tools to search for the best college, and some ideas about how to make higher education affordable and possible. Our message is simple: “College costs less than you think it does; aid is available; there are choices. Plan now and we will help.”

## Where Do I Start?

If you feel that you are in the dark about college costs, don’t be discouraged. You are not alone. We have learned that:

- People don’t know what it costs to attend college—and most “guess high” when estimating college costs.
- The public doesn’t know how much financial aid is available, where it comes from, or how to get it.
- Most people feel higher education is extremely important, high priced, but still a good value for the money.
- Many people are worried about the price of a college education.

If you fall into any of the above categories, we will help you get the facts!

## How Do I Learn About College Costs?

Knowing about the number and types of colleges available to you can be helpful. Here are some facts to keep in mind as you start thinking about college:

- 1) There are 3,885 colleges and universities in the United States.
- 2) Seven out of 10 students at four-year schools have an annual tuition bill of less than \$8,000 and this is before any financial aid is subtracted!
- 3) The average cost of tuition and fees at typical schools in 2000–2001 was as follows:
  - 4-year public institution — \$3,362
  - 4-year private institution — \$16,332
  - 2-year public institution — \$1,705
  - 2-year private institution — \$7,458
  - Students living on campus in 1999–2000 paid \$6,209 for room and board at a four-year private institution; \$4,960 at a four-year public school; and \$4,736 at a two-year private.
- 4) \$68 billion was available in 1999–2000 in financial aid.
- 5) \$47 billion was available in federal aid and \$21 billion was available from states and institutions to assist students with college tuition.
- 6) Trained financial advisors are available at all colleges and universities.
- 7) All institutions have a standard approach to determine a student's need for financial aid.

### **Why Do I Need a College Education?**

The importance of higher education is often stressed in high school, on TV programs, and in magazine articles. Yet, when it comes down to it, it's a very personal question each of us has to ask ourselves: Why do I need a college education? The most common reason is that higher education leads to higher salaries and better careers. People with a bachelor's degree earn almost twice as much annually as people with a high school diploma (\$27,240 vs. \$47,325). But there are other reasons as well, including:

- College can help an individual improve him- or herself, by making the most of one's talents.
- College can be a place where one gets to know people of different backgrounds and interests; this helps us understand one another better, and makes for a better society.

## SOME COMMON TERMS

*In talking about higher education, people often use the following terms:*

- **College** – an institution that grants undergraduate (AA, BA, BS) degrees after a certain number of courses.
- **University** – an institution that grants both undergraduate degrees and graduate (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, JD) degrees as well.
- **Public institution** – a college or university that is funded primarily by the state. There are 1,657 public colleges and universities in the United States.
- **Private institution** – a college or university that is supported by private funds. There are 2,228 private colleges and universities in the United States.
- **Two-year school** – a school that grants an associate degree after two years of study. Some of these types of schools are “junior” colleges or community colleges that help prepare students to continue studies at a four-year school.
- **Four-year school** – a college or university that grants undergraduate degrees to students who successfully complete four years of study.
- **Proprietary/vocational school** – a for-profit, non-degree-granting institution that teaches a trade, occupation, or vocation.
- **Financial aid** – money offered to help pay for college; aid comes in the form of scholarships or grants (free aid from government and private sources and college funds), loans (many with interest paid by the government while a student is in school), and work-study employment for students on campus.

- Students often have a particular interest or field of study; college gives them an opportunity to conduct research in their field.
- Parents are often a prime motivator for a college education; some parents feel that college was an opportunity they missed and most want the best for their children.

## What Type of Students Attend College?

You may find it surprising to know that administrators at colleges and universities often recruit a “balanced” incoming class of freshmen, so that they can make education available to all kinds of students with all kinds of backgrounds and interests.

Also, in government studies, we have found that among first-year college students:

- 34% come from lower-income homes.
- 51% are the first in their family to pursue a college degree.
- 30% are minorities.
- 60% receive some sort of financial aid to help them pay for college.

*Don't count yourself out—College Is Possible for you.*

### **What's My Next Step?**

Once you've decided that College Is Possible for you, it's time to plan. The following sections will help you learn how to prepare for college and choose a school, as well as think about ways to pay for your education. College is within your grasp—you need to believe in yourself and your ability to achieve your goal of a college degree and a better life.

# Making Sure College Is Possible



## Preparing for College and Choosing a School

### Think About Your Goals

Students who are thinking about college need to spend a little time deciding why they want to go—and what they expect to get from a college education. While money and a better job are good reasons to choose to go to college, you need to think about what kind of an education you want as well. Do you want to study business or a technical subject? Do you want a career that involves writing or public speaking? Thinking about your final career goal can help you prepare for the college selection process.

### STEP 1: Start Early!

The most successful college students are the ones who started thinking about college early—even in middle school—and took their studies seriously. Throughout junior high and high school, you should keep this checklist in mind:

- **Pick the right courses.** Don't get sidetracked—make sure you're on the college track. See the sidebars (pages 8-9) for recommended classes by year.
- **Work hard.** Take your responsibility as a student seriously. Your performance in middle school and high school can help convince college admissions people later that you are likely to succeed in college. It's also good practice for the harder work you'll face in college.
- **Be a well-rounded student.** Take the time to participate in school and community activities and sports. Not only do they help you grow as a person, they may open up opportunities for scholarships later.

- **Take standardized tests early;** repeat as necessary. Colleges require certain performance levels in the SAT or ACT tests. If you don't do well at first, keep trying!
- **Go to college fairs,** and use the resources available (Internet, books, library). You can learn about the many choices you have by gathering information on many schools.
- **Talk to the guidance counselor at your school** for advice about what classes to take and how to prepare for college.

It's important to keep an open mind. Don't focus in on one school too early. There are many schools that want you; you need to be open to what *they* have to offer *you* academically and financially.

## STEP 2: Narrowing Your Choices

Once it's time to get serious about applying to college, you'll find plenty of information available. Use the following to learn more about the schools that you are considering:

- **Catalogs from schools.** These booklets give you some information about the campus, the classes, and the school's overall "feel."
- **Reference sources,** like *www.petersons.com*, guidebooks, and college websites. Use these resources to get information that may be important to you, like overall size and location, areas of study, student/faculty ratio, tuition, etc.
- **Campus visits.** Visiting the colleges you are considering is an important step. Sometimes all of the research in the world won't prepare you for your feeling of belonging—or not belonging—on a particular campus. While campus visits are a good part of the decision process before you apply, they are most important before you accept a school's offer of admission. You need to know that you'll feel comfortable and happy on the campus you choose—you need to know that you'll "fit."
- **Conversations with current students and alumni.** Often, this is a way to get a feel for the types of students who succeed at a particular school. Find out how hard the courses are, what is expected of students in terms of study and class participation, and how well prepared a graduate feels for the work force. By making a personal connection with someone who has attended the college, you can decide if it is the best place for you to study.

- **Advice from a Guidance Professional.** If your school has a formal college guidance program, contact a counselor and get some information on the schools you are considering. If your school does not have such a program, contact your local college or visit websites listed in this booklet.

When you are in the “investigation” phase, make a list of what’s important to you in a college such as size, location, religious affiliation, number of majors, on-campus housing, etc. Use the resources mentioned above to see what schools best fit your list.

### STEP 3: Time to Apply

Many high school seniors find that fall is a busy time—mostly spent in filling out applications for college. Many colleges have specific application deadlines; you can get this information on the school’s application or from its website. Others have “rolling admissions,” which means that applications are accepted and admissions decisions are made all year. When you decide to apply, make sure you:

- Know the college’s application deadline.
- Fill out all application forms fully, honestly, and clearly. Remember, careless handwriting may be sending the wrong signal to the school you want to attend.
- Take the essay questions seriously—it’s a way that the admissions committee at a college can get to know the “real you.”
- Give your school enough time to get transcripts and recommendations ready. This is the time when all of your hard work and study can pay off—with a good record of grades to show a prospective college admissions department.
- Fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms necessary to help you get an offer of financial aid.
- Look for additional scholarship opportunities through employers, community groups, church groups, etc. Make sure you notify the school you pick of any additional scholarships you may have won. Do a web search for free scholarship services ([www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)).
- Keep track of when you mailed your forms—and when the college expects to make a decision.

By the time application season rolls around, most students have one or two “first choice” schools; they also have some “safety schools” selected. These are schools that will likely accept the student, but may not be the first choice.

#### STEP 4: Making Your Decision

The most important part of the decision process is your belief that you will do well at a particular college. Often students applying to college have a lot of “help” from relatives and friends who want to influence the decision. Remember, it’s *your* choice. You need to be sure that you will “fit in” at a particular school—and that you will find the courses you need to reach your goals.

The other important part of deciding which school is best for you is the financial aid available from the institution. Compare the offers you get from your top choice schools. Make sure you and your family can handle the cost—and if you are required to work during school, make sure you’re ready for that responsibility. You will find that institutions will work with you to make your education affordable. You still need to do the work—but colleges will help you succeed by making the opportunity for higher education available to you.

#### **COURSES STUDENTS SHOULD TAKE IN MIDDLE SCHOOL OR JUNIOR HIGH TO PREPARE FOR COLLEGE**

*The courses you take in middle school dictate and prepare you for the courses you will need to take in high school. Set yourself up for success by taking the following courses:*

##### **Math**

Every year, including Algebra I in the 8th grade and Geometry in the 9th grade. Algebra and Geometry are the foundation for all college math and science courses.

##### **English, Science, History or Geography**

Every year. Along with math, these subjects form the core of academic preparation for college.

##### **Foreign Language, Computer Science, and the Arts**

Most colleges expect students to have taken some classes in art and foreign language and all colleges expect that they will know how to use a computer. Students should take advantage of every opportunity to learn about these subjects.



## COURSES STUDENTS SHOULD TAKE IN HIGH SCHOOL TO PREPARE FOR COLLEGE

Subject	Minimum Years	Types of Classes
English	Four	Composition American Literature English Literature World Literature
Mathematics	Three to four	Algebra I ( <i>if not completed in 8th grade</i> ) Geometry Algebra II Trigonometry Pre-calculus Calculus
History and Geography	Two to three	Geography U.S. History U.S. Government World History World Cultures Civics
Laboratory Science	Two to three	Biology Earth Science Chemistry Physics
Foreign Language	Two to three	French, Spanish German, Latin Russian, Japanese
Visual and Performing Arts	One	Art Drama Dance Music
Electives	One to three	Economics Psychology Statistics Computer Science Communications

Source: U.S. Department of Education website, [www.ed.gov/thinkcollege/early](http://www.ed.gov/thinkcollege/early).

Note: These lists of courses provide only a general guideline. School graduation and college entrance requirements vary. Students and parents should consult their school guidance office and college admissions offices.

Blank Page

# How to Pay for Higher Education



Even though many Americans think a college education is out of reach financially, now you know that's not true. With College Is Possible information, we hope you are convinced that college costs less than you think, aid is available, there are choices. It's up to you to find the colleges that will fit in with your education and career goals. Once you have selected your top schools, it's time to think about financial aid. With just a little effort and research, you can make college affordable. Aid is available—and college financial aid offices will work as your partners in putting together a package of aid that will work for you and your family.

## How Much Does College Really Cost?

The first step on the road to financial aid is to figure out how much college costs. When you have a short list of schools, it's time to do a little research and compare prices. You can find many of these numbers in resources like a college's website or brochure, the school's financial aid office, or education websites like [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com), [www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/students](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/students), [www.studentloan.com](http://www.studentloan.com), or [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com). When you add up costs, make sure you include the following:

- Tuition and fees
- Room and board charges (or off-campus rent and utility charges)
- Cost of books and other necessities
- Two round-trip visits home per year
- General spending money

Remember, don't be discouraged by these costs. You should not rule out a school or make a decision when you add up these numbers. Wait for information about financial aid. Sometimes, a school with a

higher “sticker price” can wind up costing you less—because the amount of financial aid available varies from school to school.

When schools put together a financial aid package for you, they try to work as your partner. It’s important to share as much information as possible, so that the college financial aid officer has a clear view of what is called your “financial need.” Don’t think that you hurt your chances to be accepted by a school because you request financial aid—at most colleges, financial aid doesn’t have anything to do with acceptance decisions. Consider yourself a smart shopper, trying to get the most for your educational investment.

### What Do Colleges Need to Know?

With \$68 billion available in federal, state, and private funds for college education, it’s important for you to know how to get your fair share! To make intelligent and fair decisions, college financial aid offices need information about your family’s finances.

### How Do I Apply?

Start with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form. You can get this form from your guidance office, public library, or on the web at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>. You should fill out this form as soon after January 1 of your senior year as possible; you’re not required to wait for tax returns, you can estimate tax information and update it later.

Colleges use the information you submit on the FAFSA to estimate how much you and your family can pay for your college education. This is called the “Expected Family Contribution” and takes into account:

- Income
- Assets
- Number of family members
- Number attending college
- Other facts that might help them understand a family’s financial strength or weakness

The contribution is calculated according to rules set by the federal government. These rules also consider federal and state tax

burdens, basic living expenses, and the need to save for retirement. Some people think that the college wants a family to use all of its savings before offering financial aid—this simply is not true. By working with the college financial aid office to help them understand your family’s situation, you’ll increase your chances of getting a package that will make college possible for you.

## The Financial Aid Package

Once a college has the necessary information, they prepare an “award letter” that lays out an aid package. Typical award letters include:

- **Scholarships or grants:** This is gift aid based on need or merit and will not be repaid. The federal government, states, and colleges have scholarship funds, and there are also many opportunities for scholarships from private sources, including corporations, unions, civic organizations, religious groups, etc. You can search for private scholarships using one of the free scholarship search services at [www.CollegeIsPossible.org](http://www.CollegeIsPossible.org). Sometimes students are required to maintain a certain grade point average in their studies to keep a scholarship.
- **Loans:** This is money that needs to be repaid either after a student completes college, or while he/she is in school. A large number of government-supported loans are available.
- **Work-Study Job:** Often government subsidized, a work-study assignment will assist a student with employment and earnings. Work-study is guaranteed employment, usually on campus, that requires a student to work a specified number of hours a week.
- **Your rights and responsibilities related to the aid in the award letter:** For example, what you have to do to keep the money you’ve been awarded.
- **Family Contribution:** This is the amount the college expects the family to pay toward the student’s education.

After receiving award letters from your top schools, you are ready to make your college choice. If during this process you think the college has misunderstood your financial need, you can call and make an appointment with a financial aid administrator. Institutions do not like to “wheel and deal” when it comes to financial aid, but

## IMPORTANT SOURCES OF FINANCIAL AID

The following are some of the programs that offer aid to college students. Do your homework and apply for as many of these aid opportunities as you can! Many are based on financial need.

- **Federal Pell Grant:** 4 million students receive these need-based grant awards annually. Amounts range from \$400 to \$3,300.
- **Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG):** need-based grant money with awards ranging up to \$4,000. A certain amount is given to each college every year; the college decides which students receive the aid.
- **Federal Perkins Loan:** low-interest (5 percent) student loan for students with need; maximum of \$3,000 per year. This loan can be repaid after graduation, for a period of up to 10 years.
- **Federal Family Education Loan Programs (FFELP):** three types of loans supported by government funds but available from banks or other financial institutions:
  - **Subsidized Federal Stafford Student Loans:** federal government pays the interest on this loan while you are in college.
  - **Unsubsidized Federal Stafford Student Loans:** not based on financial need, this is a low-interest loan with payments that can be put off until after graduation.
  - **PLUS Loans:** not related to financial need, this loan allows parents to borrow up to the full cost of college.
- **William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan:** a family of loans like the FFELP, but offered directly from the federal government, not through banks.
- **Federal Work-Study:** The government pays up to 100 percent of the salary of these on-campus or community service jobs offered to students with need.
- **State Aid:** All states offer some type of need-based money for education. Contact your state's Office of Higher Education for more details.
- **Institutional Grants and Scholarships:** More than \$12 billion a year in aid is given to students by colleges and universities themselves. Some is based on need, and some is merit-based (based on a student's academic performance or specific talent).
- **Private Sources of Grants and Scholarships:** Many organizations, employers, unions, and foundations offer aid to students who want to go to college. Spend some time at the library, in the guidance office, or on the web and find what additional sources of aid may be available to you.

*For more information, check out the website [www.CollegelsPossible.org](http://www.CollegelsPossible.org) under "Paying For College" and "Best Sites and Books."*

## EXAMPLES OF TYPICAL AID PACKAGES THAT SHOW HOW COLLEGES OFFER AID

### Case A: A Lower-Income Family

In this family, there is one wage earner with an annual income of \$25,000. The older of the two children has been admitted as a freshman for 2000-01. The family has modest savings of \$5,000, in addition to a pension. They list no unusual expenses, such as medical or dental bills or private elementary school costs. The student has \$700 in savings. The financial aid office estimates that the parents can contribute \$750 per year toward college expenses. The student can contribute \$1,450 from savings. Assuming a cost of attendance (including personal expenses) of \$25,350, the student needs financial aid of \$23,150. The student receives an aid package for the year that includes:

- \$1,700 campus work-study job,
- \$2,625 student loan, and
- \$18,750 in grants and scholarships (the scholarships include a \$1,900 Pell Grant, a \$1,500 state scholarship, and a \$15,350 college scholarship).

### Case B: A Middle-Income Family

In this family, both parents work, and their gross income is \$50,000. The oldest of three children is a freshman in 2000-01. The parents have savings and investments worth \$50,000. The student has \$1,000 in savings.

Besides the normal deductions that are subtracted from family income and assets, an additional allowance is included because both the mother and father are employed. The resulting parental contribution, \$4,000, is somewhat less than if only one parent was working. The student is expected to provide \$1,700 from savings and a summer job.

Subtracting this total of \$5,700 in family resources from expenses of \$25,350 yields a "need" of \$19,650. The student is awarded a \$3,000 loan and \$10,000 in outright grant assistance. After this aid is deducted, the student has \$6,650 in "unmet need." The student may make up this amount by working during the academic year, by contributing more from savings, or the student's parents may take out a PLUS loan.

they don't want to lose you as a student if there is a concern about financial aid that could be resolved.

Do not sign or agree to a financial aid package until you fully understand and agree to the repayment schedule of loans. It is important to understand your obligations—how much and when payment is due (to the school and creditors)—and what happens when a payment is missed.

## Summing It All Up

By now, we hope you have learned that as a student you have many choices available to you for higher education. With hard work and dedication to your studies, you can attract the attention of many colleges and universities. It's important to keep in mind that financial aid is available to help you achieve your goals.

If you are interested in more information on any of the topics mentioned in this booklet, please visit the College Is Possible website, [www.CollegeIsPossible.org](http://www.CollegeIsPossible.org), and review the list of resources as well as the financial information under “paying for college.” This resource booklet is also available on the College Is Possible website.

*Remember, College Is Possible!  
It's up to you to make it happen.*