

Common College Terms Defined

Admission Terms

Early Action (EA) — This is similar to early decision in that the application is due at an earlier date than the regular admission application, except the applicants are not obligated to accept an offer of admission, but must reply by May 1st (non binding).

Early Decision (ED) — Students apply early and are notified of acceptance or rejection well in advance of the usual notification date. If admitted, students must agree to accept an offer of admission and must attend the university (binding contract). Extremely selective colleges may offer this option. The ED deadline is often November 1st.

Regular Decision (RD) — Students apply according to the regular application deadline date set by the university.

Rolling Admission (RA) - The university gives an admission decision to applicants once all the required documents are received, instead of waiting for a specific deadline.

Admit — You're in! You are being offered admission to a college to which you applied. Make sure you pay attention to the date by which you need to respond with your acceptance. Typically, merit/financial aid offers are posted soon after you are admitted.

Defer – The admissions decision is being moved to a later date, usually to the regular decision announcement date.

Deferred acceptance — You applied during the early admission time frame but you were placed on hold to be considered again during the regular admissions time frame and accepted at that point. Can also mean that you are accepted, not to Fall semester, but to 2nd semester Freshman year instead.

Deny — You are not accepted to the university.

Waitlist — You are not in but have been placed on a waiting list in case an opening becomes available. Students typically find out if they are selected from the waitlist by early summer. If you are waitlisted, you are asked to follow up with the college to let them know if you are still interested.

Waitlist/Accepted – You were placed on the waiting list. An opening became available and you have been accepted.

Financial Aid Terms

Award package — Another term for the financial aid/merit aid package which may include grants, loans and work study options.

College Scholarship Service (CSS Profile) — When the federal government changed the FAFSA form several years ago, the College Board created this program to assist postsecondary institutions, state scholarship programs, and other organizations in measuring a family's financial strength and analyzing its ability to contribute to college costs. CSS processes the PROFILE financial form that students may use to apply for non-federal aid. This form is submitted to approx. 300 private colleges and universities along with the FAFSA when seeking financial aid from these institutions. Participating colleges and universities indicate whether they require this form. There is a fee for the [CSS profile](#).

Cost of Education — This includes tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, transportation, and miscellaneous expenses. A student's financial aid eligibility is the difference between the cost of education and the Expected Family Contribution as computed by the federal government using the FAFSA.

Expected Family Contribution (EFC) — The amount of financial support a family is expected to contribute toward a child's college education. This amount is part of the formula used by the federal government to determine financial aid eligibility using the FAFSA form.

Federal Pell Grant Program — This is a federally sponsored and administered program that provides grants based on need to undergraduate students. Congress annually sets the appropriation; award amounts vary based on need. This is "free" money because it does not need to be repaid.

Federal Perkins Loan Program — This is a federally run program based on need and administered by a college's financial aid office. This program offers low-interest loans for undergraduate study. Repayment does not begin until 9 months after the borrower drops to less than half time enrollment status.

Federal Stafford Loan — This federal program provides low-interest loans for undergraduate and graduate students. The maximum annual loan amount depends on the student's grade level. Repayment does not begin until 6 months after the borrower drops to less than half time enrollment status. Several repayment options are available.

Federal Work-Study Program (FSW) — A federally financed program that arranges for students to combine employment and college study; the employment may be an integral part of the academic program (as in cooperative education or internships) or simply a means of paying for college.

FERPA Waiver - The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all high schools and colleges that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education. All colleges will require you to sign a FERPA Waiver as part of the application process.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) — This is the federal government's instrument for calculating need-based aid. It is available at www.fafsa.gov. The form should be completed and mailed as soon after October 1st as possible.

Gap — The difference between the amount of a financial aid package and the cost of attending a college or university. The student and family are expected to fill the gap.

Grants/Scholarships — These are financial awards that are usually dispensed by the financial aid offices of colleges and universities. The awards may be need (financial need) - or merit-based. Most are need-based. Merit-based awards may be awarded on the basis of excellence in academics, leadership, volunteerism, athletic ability, or special talent.

Merit Awards, Merit-Based Scholarships — These awards are based on excellence in academics, leadership, volunteerism, athletic ability, and other areas determined by the granting organization, which can be a college or university, an organization, or an individual. They are not based on financial need.

Need Blind — Admissions decisions made without reference to a student's financial aid request, that is, an applicant's financial need is not known to the committee at the time of decision.

Net Price Calculator— Net price calculators are available on a college's or university's website and allow prospective students to enter information about themselves to find out what students like them paid to attend the institution in the previous year, after taking grants and scholarship aid into account. **Student Aid Report (SAR)** — Report of the government's review of a student's FAFSA. The SAR is sent to the student and released electronically to the schools that the student listed. The SAR does not supply a real money figure for aid but indicates whether the student is eligible.

Subsidized Loan - The U.S. Department of Education pays for any interest accrued while you are in school. To receive this benefit, you must be enrolled at least halftime. You will also get a six-month grace period after graduation, meaning that any interest that accrues during your college career and six months afterward, is paid for. When the grace period ends you are required to make monthly payments of principal and interest. For more information [click here](#).

Unsubsidized Loan - The loan starts accruing interest from the date of your first loan disbursement, though you're not required to pay that interest until you finish school. If you do not pay the interest while you are in school, when you graduate, the amount of money that accrued during your education is simply added to the principal loan amount and you begin paying off that new amount. With an unsubsidized loan you are not required to demonstrate financial need so the amount you can borrow is higher than a subsidized student loan. For more information [click here](#).

College Entrance Testing Terms

Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses — High school courses which may be counted as college credit or allow advanced placement in college courses. For more information, please check the [College Board AP link](#) and the the AP college credit page of the university.

American College Testing (ACT) — A national college admissions exam testing English, mathematics, reading and science reasoning. Most colleges require that you include either ACT or SAT test scores with your college application. For more information, visit the [ACT website](#).

Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), also called the SAT I — A national college admissions exam testing mathematics, critical reading and writing, with a social science and science subscore. Most colleges require either SAT 1 or ACT test scores with the college application. For more information, visit: www.collegeboard.org

SAT Subject Tests (formerly known as SAT II Tests) — These subject-specific exams are given on the same test dates and in the same centers as the SAT I. More emphasis has been placed on these tests in recent years, not only because they are used for admission purposes, but also for placement and exemption decisions. Check with the college that you are applying to to see if [SAT Subject Tests](#) are required or suggested.

College Application Terms

Candidates Reply Date Agreement (College Signing Day) — If admitted to a college, a student usually does not have to reply until May 1. This allows time to hear from all the colleges to which the student applied before having to make a commitment. This is especially important because financial aid packages vary from one school to another. Not applicable for early decision (ED) applicants.

Coalition Application - Like the Common Application, the Coalition College Application provides an online application accepted by member institutions. Over 135 colleges accept the Coalition App. To find out more about this application, [click here](#).

College prep subjects — Courses taken in high school that are viewed by colleges and universities as a strong preparation for college work. The specific courses are usually in the core subject areas of English, History, World Languages, Mathematics, and Science. The courses may be regular, honors-level, AP or IB offerings. Honors, AP, and IP courses often receive a higher weight when calculated in the GPA.

Common Application —The [Common Application](#) is an undergraduate college admission application that applicants may use to apply to any of more than 700 member colleges and universities in 49 states and the District of Columbia, as well as in Canada, China, and many European countries.

Honors Program — Honors programs offer an enriched educational experience that often includes small class sizes, custom-designed courses, mentoring, enriched individualized learning, hands-on research, and publishing opportunities. Faculty guide students through the program. Honors programs are a great way to attend a large school that offers enhanced academic, social and recreational opportunities with a small school feel.

Residency requirement — The term has more than one meaning. It can refer to the fact that a college may require a specific number of courses to be taken on campus to receive a degree from the school, or it can mean the time, by law, that is required for a person to reside in the state to be considered eligible for in-state tuition at one of its public colleges or universities. All North Carolina public universities require students to complete the [NC Residency Determination form](#) in order to receive in state tuition. Other states have similar requirements.

Other Terms

Course Load — The number of course credit hours a college student takes in each semester. Twelve credit hours is the minimum to be considered a full-time student. The average college course load per semester is 15 credit hours.

Credit Hours — The number of hours per week that courses meet are counted as equivalent credits for financial aid and used to determine your status as a full- or part-time student.

Gap Year - Typically this refers to taking a year off after graduating from high school and before beginning college. Students who want to take a gap year should apply to college and be accepted, then request a deferred enrollment.

Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) — Each branch of the military sponsors an [ROTC program](#). In exchange for a certain number of years on active duty, students can have their college education paid for up to a certain amount by the armed forces.