



College Planning Guide

Navigate your way to college.



WHY COLLEGE?

By now, you've probably heard the same question over and over:

“Where are you going to college?”

Before you settle on where, there are a few questions to answer first! This guide helps you identify what's most important ... and it all starts with your WHY.

Why do you want to go to college?

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?

These questions can help you gain clarity about career aspirations and guide you in making informed decisions about the future.

What are your interests, hobbies, and passions?

What subjects do you enjoy the most in school?

What activities make you lose track of time?

What skills do you excel at naturally?

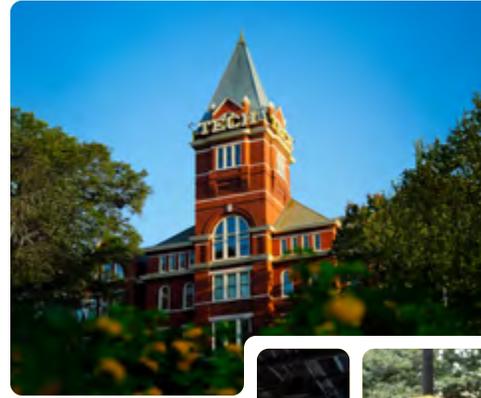
Think about what your life looks like now.

What do you want to keep, and how would you like for it to change in 10 years?

What careers seem interesting to you and why?

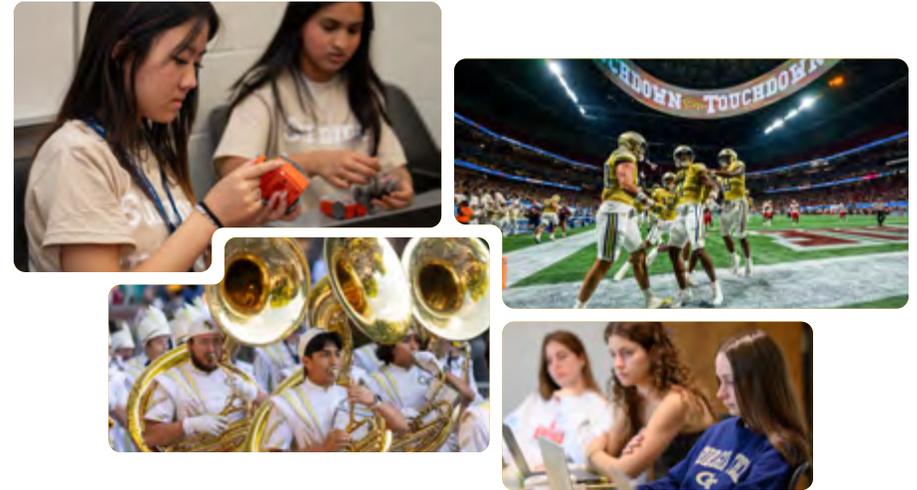
What careers might you consider as backup options?

What values are most important to you in a career?



WHERE DO YOU WANT TO BE?

Where you go to college isn't just about the school — it's about the environment you'll live in for the next few years. Location can shape your experience, from the weather you wake up to, to the culture and opportunities around you. Think about what feels exciting yet comfortable to you. These questions will help you start imagining what your ideal setting looks like.



Circle your location choices.

You would like to live in the:

**Northeast Southeast Southwest West Midwest
Doesn't Matter**

You would like to live in a location that is:

Rural Small Town City Big City Doesn't Matter

You would like to be surrounded by:

Beach Flat Land Mountains Doesn't Matter

You prefer weather that is:

Dry Wet Warm Cold Doesn't Matter

You want to be this far from home:

**30-Minute Drive 2- to 3-Hour Drive 1/2-Day Drive
1-Day Drive I Want to Fly to Get Home Doesn't Matter**

College isn't one-size-fits-all. The degree you choose, the size of the campus, and the services available can all shape your experience and future opportunities. Think about what matters most to you — what you want to study, the kind of community you'll thrive in, and the support you'll need along the way.

Circle your college type.

You would prefer a college that is:

2-Year 4-Year Public Private Doesn't Matter

You want a college that is:

**Large (15,000+) Medium (5,000 - 15,000) Small (less than 5,000)
Doesn't Matter**

Ultimately, you want to obtain:

Associate Degree Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree Doctorate

You are interested in these campus services:

**First-Year Housing On-Campus Dining Health Services
Counseling Services Accessibility Services Campus Recreation
Campus Safety**

You would like these academic services:

**Academic Advising Distance Learning Honors College
Tutoring/Writing Center Career Services**

Below is a list of common extracurricular activities found at most colleges. Circle the ones of most interest to you, and add to the list anything you don't see but want to pursue.

**Academic / Professional
Clubs**

Campus Media

Club / Intramural Sports

**Community Service
Organizations**

Civic Engagement Groups

Entrepreneurial Projects

Greek Life

International Opportunities

Internships / Co-ops

Performing Arts

Performing / Visual Arts

Religious Programs

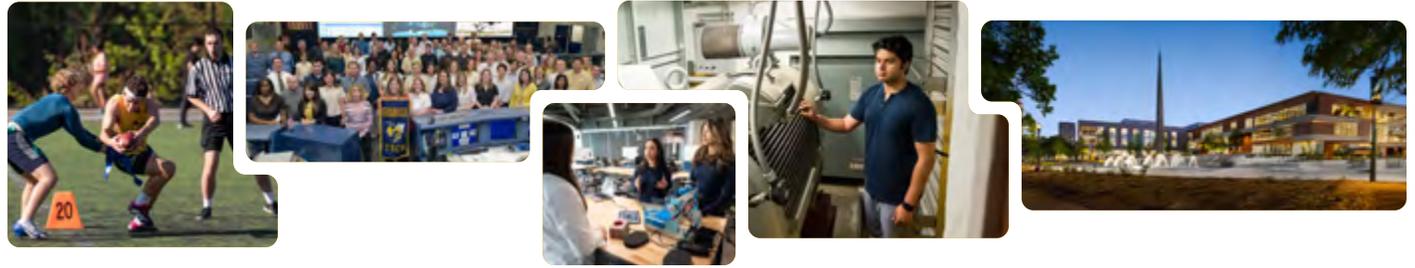
Research

ROTC

Student Government Association

Include additional interests below.

PAYING FOR COLLEGE.



A college education is a significant investment, and you should always weigh tuition, fees, and other expenses against future earning potential.

Costs include:

- Tuition and Fees.
- Housing Allowance.
- Food Service Plan.
- Books and Supplies.
- Personal Expenses.

When you calculate this number, don't let it scare you!

College is an investment you're making in yourself. And at many schools, you'll pay less than the "sticker price" listed online.

Look out for Net Price Calculators, which can be found on most schools' admission and/or financial aid websites.

There are a lot of creative ways to pay your way through college.

Scholarships – often offered by the prospective college, but be sure to talk to your high school counselor and search online to find outside scholarships offered by local businesses and community organizations.

Grants – similar to scholarships, this is money you don't have to pay back.

Work Study – on-campus jobs where your pay applies directly to your bill.

Loans – offered to both students and parents, these help you delay making payments until after you graduate. Loans must be repaid by the borrower, usually with interest.

Check out additional financial aid resources:

Federal Student Aid Information
studentaid.gov

Budget Calculator
mappingyourfuture.org/money/budgetcalculator.cfm

NEXT STEPS.

You've made your list and narrowed it down. Now ...

Connect – Visit the school's website and fill out an interest form. Getting on the mailing list will keep you in the loop about important details such as deadlines and upcoming events.

Develop your Questions – Before you hit the road to visit campus, think about the questions YOU want to ask!

Visit – Schedule a campus visit. You won't really know if a college fits you until you step on campus. Take a look around – can you see yourself going to classes and living life on this campus?



Junior Year

Plan Ahead:

- Meet with your high school counselor to begin college planning.
- Create a binder for college/career information.
- Build a list of activities and achievements and update it as needed.
- Talk about financial aid with your family.
- Research scholarship opportunities.
- Seek out internships or job shadowing opportunities for careers that interest you.
- Engage in summer activities related to your major/career goals.

Schedule Testing:

- Take the PSAT and/or PLAN to practice for the SAT and/or ACT.
- Register and take the ACT and/or SAT.

Research Colleges:

- Attend a college fair or attend a session with colleges that visit your school.
- Use online resources to search for and compare colleges.
- Develop a list of likely, target, and reach schools.
- Schedule campus visits to colleges of interest.
- Check admission requirements for schools. Make sure your courses align and maintain a competitive GPA.

Senior Year

Fall Semester

Get Organized:

- Meet with your school counselor to ensure you're on track for graduation and discuss your college choices and the application process.
- Create a master calendar of dates, including tests, events, and admission and financial aid deadlines.
- Register for the SAT or ACT if needed.
- Keep working hard! Senior year grades can affect admission and scholarship eligibility.

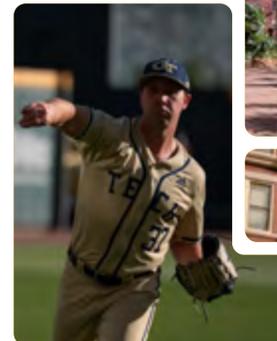
Apply to Colleges:

- Complete applications with Early Action or Early Decision deadlines.
- Request transcripts from your school to send to colleges.
- Send official score reports to colleges that require it. Self-report test scores if that is an option.
- Request recommendations from teachers and counselors at least two weeks prior to the due date.
- Submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- Complete scholarship applications.

Spring Semester

Stay Focused:

- Continue to maintain your GPA.
- Complete all Financial Aid documents requested by schools to which you are applying.
- Continue to look for and apply to scholarship opportunities.
- Compare financial aid offers from each of the schools who offered you admission.
- Decide which college you want to attend and submit your admission deposit (if required).
- Send final transcript to the college you have selected.



COLLEGE APPLICATION TERMS TO KNOW.



Application Components:

Common Application – An online application platform used by many colleges that allows students to apply to multiple schools with a single application. Some schools may require school-specific supplemental materials.

GPA (Grade Point Average) – A numeric measure of your academic performance in high school. Some schools may add weight to the GPA for higher-difficulty courses.

Personal Statement/Essay – A writing sample that allows admission officers to learn more about your personality or experiences. Not required on all applications.

Recommendation Letter – A letter from a counselor, teacher, or another individual that provides an outside perspective on your abilities and character.

Transcript – An official record of your high school courses and grades.

Decisions and Deadlines:

Deferred Admission – Deferred admission permits a student, once accepted, to postpone matriculation for one year in order to pursue other plans.

Deferred Decision – The college or university determines more information is needed to make a final decision about an application. Often the decision is delayed until the spring.

Early Action – Early Action is an admission plan that invites early applications, but does not require the student to attend if accepted.

Early Decision – Early decision allows a student to apply in the fall for early admission. If accepted, the student is obligated to enroll.

Open Admissions – Students are notified of acceptance after application completion (usually community colleges).

Regular Decision – Common, non-binding application plan with a later deadline.

Rolling Admissions – The college will notify the applicant as soon as the application has been processed (usually four to six weeks) and the file is complete. Decisions are released continuously, rather than on a single day after a deadline.

Waitlist – Students are not admitted immediately, but may be offered a spot if admitted students decline their offers.

Testing:

Test-blind – The college does not consider standardized test scores, even if submitted.

Test-optional – The college does not require test scores, so you may choose whether to submit standardized test scores with your application.

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