



February 2025

Seniors — Fill out the [FAFSA](#) if applying for financial aid.

Update colleges with new information that may influence admission decisions.

Juniors — Check [College Board](#) and [ACT](#) websites for available test dates and sites in your area. Map out dates and create a test plan for spring SAT or ACT exams.

Begin your college search utilizing college websites, virtual tours and information sessions.

Attend an in-person or virtual [NACAC Fair](#)

March 2025

9th, 10th and 11th grade students—make plans for a productive summer. Investigate summer programs, jobs, and internships.

Juniors — Create an initial list of colleges. If possible, schedule in-person college tours during your spring break.

Choosing the “Best” Test Prep

Most students are anxious about taking standardized tests. Taking a good test prep course or working one-on-one with a tutor can help alleviate some of this anxiety by allowing students to become familiar with the exams and test-taking strategies. Here are some questions to guide you when looking for classes or tutors:

Who will be conducting the test prep? Some independent test prep tutors or those who work for larger companies are recent college graduates with high SAT/ACT scores when they took the exam in high school. Be cautious if this is the case. There is a difference between *scoring* well on an exam and being able to *teach others* how to do well. Be sure to ask the tutor or company about specific training and effective teaching, not just being a strong test taker. The best approach is either to use experienced educators as instructors, or at a minimum, ensure the instructors have had training in effective teaching practices.

Does the tutor or class incorporate anxiety-reducing skills? When evaluating courses or tutors, ask about their experience teaching anxiety management techniques. Look for those who incorporate mindfulness exercises, breathing strategies, and positive visualization alongside content preparation. These stress-reduction skills can significantly improve test-day performance.

What about students with learning differences? If your teen has a diagnosed learning difference or disability, look for test prep providers who have specific experience working with students with similar needs. Ask about the instructor's training and background in working with learning differences, and their familiarity with common testing accommodations such as extended time or separate testing rooms. The best providers will be able to tailor their teaching methods to your teen's

specific learning style and challenges, whether that's breaking down complex problems into smaller steps, using visual aids, or incorporating multisensory learning techniques. They should also be knowledgeable about the documentation required to apply for testing accommodations and be able to help students practice using their approved accommodations effectively during prep sessions.

Will the test prep address the digital SAT and ACT? Ask if the test prep is working with materials adapted to the new digital format of the SAT. Did they revise their test prep strategy in response to the new format of the test? Ask if they are up to date on the upcoming changes ahead for the ACT. How will they be adapting their materials in response to these changes? How are they getting their information? Are tutors taking the new tests? Are they waiting until test information is released officially by the College Board or ACT organizations?

What is the content of the test preparation and how are the sessions administered? Is time equally divided between the different sections of the exams, or are whole sessions devoted to specific sections? Is more time spent on particular sections or particular skills development? Additionally, ask how many full-length practice exams, using real exams, will be given — the more, the better. Also, ask how the practice exams are scored and shared with students. Do they get personal feedback on their strengths and weaknesses? Of course, students should always consider how they learn best and then look for programs that are a good match for their learning style. Some students will do best with private tutoring, while other students can do well in a group setting.

(continued on page 3)

Next Step College Admissions Planning

Careers for Nursing Majors

- Nurse Midwife
- Nurse Practitioner
- Nurse Anesthetist
- Nurse Case Manager
- Emergency Nurse
- Geriatric Nurse
- Travel Nurse
- Health Educator
- Nurse Administrator
- Research Nurse
- Nurse Educator
- Nursing Informatics Specialist

Focus on Majors: Nursing

Imagine saving lives before you've even hit your mid-twenties – that's what a career in nursing could offer you. From helping deliver newborns to supporting patients through their toughest battles, nursing puts you at the heart of healthcare's most meaningful moments.

The nursing profession offers strong job security and competitive pay. According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics' Employment Projections 2022-2032](#), the Registered Nursing (RN) workforce is expected to grow by 6% over the next decade, expanding from 3.1 million to 3.3 million nurses.

The duties of a registered nurse include treatment of patients, education of both patients and the public about medical conditions, and providing advice and support to the families of patients. Some RNs specialize in a specific type of care.

There are three main paths to becoming a registered nurse: a bachelor's degree (BSN), an associate's degree (ADN), and a diploma from an approved nursing program. The BSN offers the most career opportunities and the ability to pursue advanced degrees leading to nurse practitioner roles.

Diploma programs, typically hospital-based, are three-year vocational programs focused on clinical work. ADN programs at community colleges take two to three years, while BSN programs at universities require about four years. Many nurses start with an ADN and later pursue a BSN while working. All three paths qualify graduates to take the national licensing exam NCLEX-RN. Once licensed, a nurse is eligible for employment as an entry-level staff nurse.

RN-to-BSN programs allow practicing nurses to earn their bachelor's degrees, thus making them eligible for higher-level nursing positions. A bachelor's degree would be necessary for administrative and teaching positions, as well as for advanced practice positions such as nurse midwife,

nurse anesthetist, nurse practitioner, and clinical nurse specialist. The advanced nursing practice specialties also require additional study leading to a master's degree.

Nursing education programs include classroom instruction in such areas as anatomy, physiology, chemistry, nutrition, psychology, microbiology, and nursing. Supervised clinical experience is provided in hospital settings and generally involves rotations in pediatrics, surgery, psychiatry, and maternity. Nursing programs have found themselves becoming more and more competitive, with high grades in high school or the first two years of college becoming a necessity. Experience in a healthcare setting also may be considered in the application process.

Healthcare experience can strengthen applications along with test scores. The national average acceptance rate for nursing schools is 66%, though rates vary significantly by institution. Here is a comprehensive list of direct admit programs and the passing rates of the NCLEX exam - [Direct Admit Nursing Programs](#).

High school students determined to pursue a BSN might consider direct-entry nursing programs at schools such as Boston College, Arizona State University or Texas Christian University. These programs allow students to begin pre-nursing classes immediately and start clinical rotations in their second year. Some institutions, such as Regis University, guarantee nursing school admission to pre-nursing students who meet specific academic requirements.

To become a competitive applicant, students should take the most challenging high school curriculum they can manage successfully. With nursing education becoming increasingly selective, strong academic preparation is essential for gaining admission to these programs.



Next Step College Admissions Planning

Financial Matters: Making Private Colleges Affordable



Private colleges across the United States have expanded their merit-based aid programs in response to competition from public institutions and affordability concerns. This strategy has made private education more accessible to middle-income families. According to the [National Association of College and University Business Officers](#), private nonprofit colleges reached a record average tuition discount rate of 56.1% for first-time, full-time students in 2023-24, meaning families typically pay less than half the published tuition rate.

Most highly-selective colleges only provide need-based financial aid. Many other selective private colleges have developed robust merit scholarship programs to attract exceptional students. These programs particularly benefit families who earn too much for substantial need-based aid but struggle with annual college costs exceeding \$70,000. Top-tier institutions like Emory University, USC, and Duke University offer

competitive merit scholarship programs that can cover full tuition and additional expenses. Selection typically requires exceptional academic achievement, leadership experience, and community engagement, often involving interviews and supplemental essays. Less competitive options are the University of Rochester, Fordham University and Southern Methodist University.

Guaranteed scholarship programs have also expanded, offering assured funding based on specific academic criteria, typically combining GPA and standardized test scores. The test-optional movement has led many institutions to create alternative pathways for merit scholarship consideration, including portfolio reviews and comprehensive achievement evaluations. Many schools continue to offer guaranteed scholarships to National Merit Scholarship finalists, with some increasing award amounts to match rising costs.

Private colleges offer distinct advantages beyond financial considerations. Their student-centered learning environment, with smaller class sizes and frequent professor interaction, creates valuable opportunities for mentorship and collaborative research. These institutions have generally maintained strong student support services, including comprehensive academic advising, career counseling, and learn-

ing support services, while many public institutions face resource constraints.

The focus on holistic student development often results in stronger alumni networks and career placement services, offering long-term professional advantages. Additionally, private colleges maintain higher four-year graduation rates compared to public institutions, leading to potential savings through reduced tuition costs and earlier workforce entry.

As families evaluate college options in 2025, looking beyond published tuition rates is essential. Merit scholarships have transformed private colleges' financial accessibility, making them viable for many families who might otherwise dismiss them based on sticker price. The key is thorough research and strategic application, as well as understanding that strong academic performance can unlock significant merit aid opportunities.

For students beginning their college search, the message is clear: don't let initial price tags deter you from considering private colleges. With careful research into merit scholarship opportunities and a strong academic record, a private college education may be more affordable than anticipated when considering the total value of the educational experience and time to graduation. The transformation in college financing through expanded merit aid programs has created new opportunities for students to access private education.

Choosing the "Best" Test Prep (continued from page 1)

What materials will be used? The best test prep classes and tutors will use actual SAT and/or ACT exams for practice rather than create their own exams. While many test prep companies use their own proprietary study books, they should also incorporate the College Board's and the ACT's study guides into the classroom.

For group settings, what is the class size? Look for smaller groups, and be sure to ask how much time is allocated in each class session to answer individual questions.

What is the refund policy? If your child thinks the course isn't helping after a session or two, can you get a refund? What happens if your child gets sick or has a scheduling conflict that requires dropping out of the course?

The best programs provide personalized attention while maintaining high educational standards. They should demonstrate a track record of success without making unrealistic promises about score improvements.

Look for programs that focus on comprehensive test preparation rather than quick fixes or guaranteed results. The goal should be finding a program that aligns with the students learning style and provides the tools needed for success on the first attempt.

Alternative Start Dates for College Freshman

When most families envision the college journey, they picture the classic scene: moving into dorms on a fall day alongside hundreds or thousands of other freshmen. While this traditional path works well for many students, colleges now offer several alternative start dates that might better suit your child's needs and goals.

These alternative starts can provide valuable flexibility for students who want or need a different timeline. Some students benefit from extra preparation time, while others might find that a non-traditional start actually increases their chances of attending their school of choice. Many families are surprised to learn about these options, which often first come up during the application process.

Spring start programs, beginning in January, can be particularly appealing. Universities frequently offer these programs because they know some students will graduate in December, opening spots for new arrivals. A spring start gives students additional time to prepare for college life and often means joining a smaller group of new students, potentially making the transition easier. Some colleges even offer spring admission to waitlisted students, making it a valuable path to eventually attending your preferred school.

Summer start programs offer another excellent option, typically through "bridge programs" that help students adjust to college-level academics.

The quieter summer atmosphere allows students to acclimate to campus life with fewer distractions, and they can spread their first-year coursework more evenly across three semesters instead of two.

Some university systems provide even more creative options, such as starting at a partner institution or different campus before transferring to the main location. Examples include beginning at a local community college or attending specialized freshman campuses such as Boston University College of General Studies, Northeastern University Bound Program, and Middlebury College February Program.

However, families should carefully consider potential trade-offs. Traditional fall starts typically offer the fullest range of social opportunities, campus resources, and course selections. Students joining mid-year might miss some traditional freshman experiences or face more challenging course registration.

When exploring these options, ask colleges specific questions about how they support alternative-start students. Understanding the available resources and potential challenges will help your family make an informed decision that aligns with your student's goals and preferences.

Remember, there's no universal "right way" to begin college. The best choice is the one that sets your student up for success, whether that's a traditional fall start or an alternative path.



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