



## December 2024

### Seniors—

File any additional college applications before the deadlines

Continue to check your email and portals for messages from colleges.

File the [FAFSA](#) or the [CSS Profile](#), if required

### 10th & 11th Graders—

Review PSAT report and map out a plan for test preparation with an advisor.

Schedule spring SAT/ACT testing (if applicable).

Enjoy the Holidays!

## January 2025

### Seniors—

Search and apply for scholarships that match your qualifications.

File any additional college applications.

### Juniors—

Check College Board and ACT websites for available test dates and sites in your area.

## Planning for Summer in Winter

Although it is winter, now is the perfect time for high school students to start planning their summer. These months offer college-bound teens a valuable opportunity to explore pre-college programs. Don't underestimate the value of volunteering or even getting a paid job. Here are a few options:

### Academic Summer Programs

Many take place on a college campus and provide students with a real on-campus living experience. Note that many programs open their registration in December, pay attention to age requirements, any academic criteria, and application deadlines as programs can fill up. Explore new subjects of interest or ones for which you already have a passion. Some examples of programs with early application dates:

[MIT Women's Technology Program](#) is a four-week, hands-on program to introduce rising senior girls who excel in math and science to explore the world of engineering.

Students at The Rockefeller University [Summer Science Research Program](#) (SSRP) will participate in research guided by scientific trainees from the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, and Weill Cornell Medical Center. SSRP teams mirror the structure of a research laboratory, where there are 1-3 team leads who are supported by additional scientists. Each team will have its own space and resources in one of the dedicated RockEDU laboratories.

[The Michigan Ross Summer Business Academy](#) allows rising high school seniors to discover business from the inside out. Explore how companies run, and understand how leaders solve problems.

[Yale Young Global Scholars](#) is a two-week academic program. The curriculum is collaborative, exposing participants to innovative topics while facilitating student discussions shaped by international perspectives. Students have the opportunity to participate in a STEM, social sciences, humanities, or cross-disciplinary track.

[Lehigh University Iacocca Global Entrepreneurship Intensive](#) is a four-week summer program at Lehigh University, designed for high school students to develop skills in entrepreneurship, business, leadership, and intercultural understanding. Through immersive, hands-on learning, participants tackle complex global challenges in collaborative teams, learning to innovate and problem-solve in diverse cultural contexts. Open to U.S. and international students aged 15-17, IGEI fosters globally-minded leaders ready to drive meaningful change.

[Iowa Young Writers Studio](#) allows promising high school-age creative writers to share their writing with teachers and peers, receive constructive critique, and develop their craft. Students are also allowed to participate in writing exercises and activities and attend readings and other literary events.

For those students interested in art, [Summer Pre-College Programs](#) is a great resource for programs around the country. Other university-based programs that may provide attendees with transferable college credit:

[Georgetown University Summer High School Sessions](#), [Harvard Summer School](#), [Stanford Summer Session](#), [Susquehanna Pre-College Program](#), and [Stevens Pre-College Program](#).

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# Next Step College Admissions Planning

## Careers for Fire Science Majors

- *Fire Inspector*
- *Wildland Fire Specialist*
- *Safety Engineer*
- *Compliance Manager*
- *Forest Fire Inspectors and Prevention Specialist*
- *Fire Ecologist*
- *Prescribed Fire Burn Boss*
- *Habitat Restoration Specialist*
- *Battalion Chief*
- *Water Resource Analyst*
- *Arson Investigator*
- *Fire Suppression System Designer*



## Focus on Majors: Fire Sciences

Fires are a powerful force of nature, and their impact is felt in communities across the country. In 2022 alone, U.S. fire departments responded to approximately 1.5 million fires, tragically resulting in nearly 3,790 civilian deaths, over 13,250 injuries, and an estimated \$18 billion in property damage, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). On a larger scale, wildfires have become a growing concern, with an average of 70,000 wildfires occurring each year since the 1980s. These fires, exacerbated by climate change, now burn longer, spread faster, and cause greater devastation than ever before.

For high school students interested in tackling these challenges, fire science offers a variety of paths to make a difference. From studying fire behavior and investigating causes to designing fire-resistant materials or working on environmental restoration after wildfires, the field provides many opportunities to protect lives, property, and ecosystems. With majors like fire protection engineering, wildfire management, fire investigation, and fire ecology, students can turn their passion for safety and the environment into a meaningful and impactful career.

Fire science degree programs go beyond traditional firefighting or forestry to include post-fire environmental restoration, fire-resistant construction materials, fire mitigation measures, and the development of fire and building codes. These interdisciplinary programs often combine fire science, engineering, environmental science, and public policy.

When looking for programs that cater to your interests, consider majors that have an interdisciplinary focus. Programs that combine fire science with engineering, ecology, and environmental sciences often have broader applications. Also, look for programs with research facilities for fire testing and environmental restoration.

**BS in Fire and Arson Investigation-** Eastern Kentucky University offers a major in Fire, Arson, and Explosion. Classes can include fire, arson, and explosion investigation, chemistry, and crime scene investigation. CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice offers classes in Building Construction and Life Safety Systems, Fire Protection Systems, and fire investigations.

**BS in Fire Protection Engineering-** Many schools tailor their fire engineering curriculum to arm students with current knowledge in fire prevention and structural science. The University of Maryland and Worcester Polytechnic Institute offer classes such as Life Safety Analysis, Risk-Informed Performance-Based Design, and Computational Methods in Fire Protection. Students will learn to identify fire-resistant materials, develop fire alarm technology, and consult on applications of fire safety codes.

**BS in Fire Administration and Technology-** California State Los Angeles offers classes in fire defense planning, hazardous material, and fire cause investigation. This program integrates theory, research, and practical application that develops and advances leadership, management, and administrative skills.

**BS in Fire Management-** At the University of Florida, Fire Management is housed in the School of Construction Management. Courses can include Principles of Fire and Emergency Services Management, Applications of Fire Research, and disaster planning and control. Cal Poly Humboldt offers a similar major. Classes offered at this institution range from Fundamentals of Fuel and Fire, and Fire Behavior to Applied Fire Use and Policy.

**BS in Forestry-** Is offered at Oregon State and Cal Poly Humboldt where you can focus on forest restoration and fire. Classes can include forest biology, soil science, and wildland fire and science management.

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# Next Step College Admissions Planning

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## Financial Matters: Return on Investment



Deciding on the “right” college can feel overwhelming. There’s so much to think about: location, academic programs, extracurricular opportunities, career preparation, but all of that is secondary if a college isn’t affordable. Just like when making a big purchase, such as a car or house, families need to weigh the costs of college against the expected benefits. The goal is to ensure the investment in college pays off without creating an overwhelming financial burden.

Many students graduate with significant debt, only to find that their starting salary doesn’t match the amount they owe. That’s why it’s so important to think critically about both the total cost of attending college and the potential career outcomes.

To get a clear picture of the total cost of attending a school, look beyond just tuition. Include room, board, fees, transportation, and everyday expenses such as cell phone bills,

textbooks, and trips home. Keep in mind that costs like tuition and fees are likely to rise each year, so plan for increases when calculating the total cost over four or more years.

Once you know the full cost, it’s time to consider what the return on your investment might look like. Research whether the school provides strong career support, including internships, networking opportunities, and job placement services. Look into the average starting salaries for graduates in your chosen field and consider whether your potential earnings will justify the cost of your degree.

Financial aid can play a major role in determining whether a college is affordable. Start by submitting the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) as early as possible to maximize your chances of receiving federal and institutional aid. Some colleges also require the CSS Profile for scholarships and grants, so be sure to check your school’s requirements.

Carefully review your financial aid packages to understand what you’re being offered. Are there scholarships or grants (which you don’t have to repay), or are you mostly being offered loans? Compare offers from different colleges to see which provides the most aid and aligns with your budget. If you haven’t yet received a financial aid package, you can complete the

Net Price Calculator for each of your colleges for an estimate of financial aid.

A common rule of thumb is to avoid borrowing more than your expected first-year salary after graduation. If the total cost of a school exceeds that guideline, it may be worth exploring ways to reduce costs.

**Earn college credits in high school:** Many students take Advanced Placement (AP) exams or enroll in dual-credit classes at local community colleges, which can reduce the time and money needed to complete a degree.

**Consider in-state colleges:** Public universities often offer lower tuition rates for in-state students, making them a more affordable option.

**Work during college:** A part-time job or work-study position can help cover expenses and reduce the need for loans.

While college is undoubtedly a significant investment, it’s important for families to carefully weigh the costs against their financial realities. Taking on some level of debt can be a reasonable choice if it aligns with future earning potential and doesn’t create an unmanageable financial strain. Ultimately, college remains a worthwhile investment, but families must strike a balance that ensures they’re not overburdened while still supporting the long-term benefits of higher education.

## Planning for Summer In Winter (continued from page 1)

If you want to stay home don’t forget that your local community college may offer interesting classes. For other affordable options, students should check out [Value Summer Programs for High School Students](#) and [Snow Day](#).

### Community Service

Spend the summer doing some community service or volunteer work. Colleges love to see applicants who have engaged in something bigger than themselves. There are a wide

variety of formal opportunities both locally and abroad. You can also find local organizations that need help. Check out your local library, animal shelter, or a non-profit.

### Get a job!

College is an expensive commodity and your family will always appreciate your ability to work over the summer and start putting money away. You might even be able to save enough money to buy some of your college textbooks! Colleges will always honor

an applicant’s dedication and determination, and a job shows both responsibility and reliability – great qualities in a college student.

Keep your eyes on the prize! Take the dark days of winter as the perfect time to plan your summer activities because it all matters. If it matters to you, it matters to your colleges, so plan on engaging in activities that will make your application shine and tell your story authentically.

## Why Teens Should Make Reading a Habit

For many teens, reading feels like a school chore rather than something enjoyable. But what if we reframed reading as a workout for the brain? Reading can improve focus, creativity, academic performance, and even mental well-being. Professor Barbara Sahakian from the University of Cambridge highlights that “reading isn’t just a pleasurable experience – it inspires thinking and creativity, increases empathy, and reduces stress.” Here are some reasons why teens should make reading a habit.

In a world full of digital distractions, reading offers a rare opportunity to unwind. Opening a book for pleasure is like stepping into another world, allowing teens to escape daily pressures. Even a few minutes of reading can significantly reduce stress levels, helping teens find a sense of calm amid the demands of school and social life.

Reading also builds academic success by exposing teens to new vocabulary and complex language. This helps students become more comfortable with challenging words, which can boost performance on standardized tests and make exams feel less intimidating. It’s a valuable skill in interviews as well, where being able to discuss a recent book demonstrates curiosity and intellectual engagement, as well as strengthens critical thinking skills.

Whether reading a mystery novel that encourages piecing together clues or a non-fiction book that invites reflection on the author’s arguments, reading promotes active mental engagement that goes beyond passive activities such as watching television. Developing these critical thinking skills helps teens make better decisions in daily life.

Additionally, reading expands horizons and builds empathy by introducing readers to different cultures, perspectives, and ways of life. This helps teens see situations from others’ viewpoints, fostering empathy and compassion—qualities that are essential for building strong relationships and personal growth.

Reading also improves writing skills. Exposure to different writing styles, techniques, and vocabulary can inspire teens to improve their writing, an invaluable skill in both school and future careers.

Finally, reading strengthens focus and concentration. Unlike social media, which divides attention, reading requires a sustained focus on a single story. This skill translates to other areas of life, helping teens become more productive and centered.

In short, reading isn’t just a pastime—it’s an investment in mental, academic, and emotional growth that can lead to greater success and fulfillment throughout life. The [American Library Association](#) provides a great list of books for young adults.



**NEXT STEP**  
COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PLANNING

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