



November 2024

Seniors—

Submit Early Decision/Early Action applications.

Work on remaining college applications.

Check [College Board](#) and [ACT](#) websites for testing opportunities in your area. Send official test scores to colleges requiring them.

File [CSS Profile](#), if applicable.

Complete [SRAR](#), if applicable.

10th & 11th Graders—

Look for PSAT score release and review the report. Map out plan for test prep with an advisor.

December 2024

Seniors—

Submit any additional college applications before deadline dates.

Look for [FAFSA](#) opening date.

Juniors—

Schedule Spring SAT or ACT testing dates.

Exploring College Websites

Researching colleges can include visiting college campuses, attending information sessions, and meeting college representatives. However, before scheduling a visit, students should begin their research on the college's website.

Start with the college's homepage, and from there, explore sections such as "About Us," "Academics," "Admissions," "Student Life," and "Research." Reading the mission statement provides insights into the college's history and values. When it comes to academics, explore the majors and departments you are interested in. Check for research opportunities, academic facilities, available minors, and study abroad programs. Investigate resources such as subject tutoring or learning disability support, which could be vital during your college years.

The admissions page is another crucial area. Here, you'll find application requirements and deadlines.

Make sure to note whether the school uses the Common Application or another platform. On the admissions page, you should see a way to sign up to receive email notifications about any admissions events. You can also schedule tours and info sessions, both online and in person. Connecting with admission counselors can give you a more personal understanding of the college. You won't be studying 24/7 so it's important to explore what student life at each college looks like. This will be an important part of your college experience, so take the time to review options for clubs, study abroad programs, and volunteer opportunities. Check to see if you can find the link to issues of the student newspaper or other student-run publications. Reading these will give you further insight into the school culture. Look into housing options and how roommate

matching/selection works. If you have a special hobby or interest, see if the college offers living-learning communities.

Health and safety should not be overlooked. Investigate the student health center, counseling services, and campus security. Be sure to ask about dorm security, escort services for late-night walks, and the availability of emergency services. If transportation is a priority, find out whether first-year students are allowed cars and explore campus shuttle options, especially if you'll need transportation off-campus.

On the financial aid page (a sub-page to the admissions page) use the online Net Price Calculator to assess affordability, and reach out to financial aid officers with specific questions. Many schools offer scholarships, so ensure you're aware of all financial aid opportunities. Lastly, don't forget to explore the college's career center. Look for internship programs, job fairs, and alumni connections that support your long-term career goals. Most colleges offer resources such as resume-building workshops and meetings with industry professionals.

In addition to the school websites, you can also find useful information using the [Common Data Set](#) (CDS) which includes class sizes, student-faculty ratios, and graduation rates along with data about acceptance rates, average GPA, test scores, and other useful statistics. This data helps assess whether the college aligns with your profile.

By thoroughly exploring these sections of the college's website, students can make more informed decisions about which schools align with their academic, personal, and financial needs.

Next Step College Admissions Planning

Colleges and Universities with Specialized Undecided Programs

Research Institutions

- *Brown University*
- *University of Chicago*
- *University of Washington*
- *University of Rochester*
- *Northeastern*
- *NYU Gallatin School of Individualized Study*
- *Oregon State University*
- *University of Colorado at Boulder*
- *Georgia State University*

Liberal Arts Colleges

- *Amherst College*
- *Grinnell College*
- *Hamilton College*
- *Smith College*
- *Wesleyan University*



Focus on Majors: Undecided. The Pros and Cons

Feeling unsure about what major to pick for college? You're not alone! Many students, even those interested in STEM, aren't sure which subject to focus on, or they have so many interests they can't choose just one. According to a U.S. Department of Education report, about one-third of students change their major within three years of starting college. Some schools report that 50-75% of students change their major at least once.

For those students who are unsure what major to declare, one popular option is applying as "undecided" or "undeclared." This allows you to take your time discovering what excites you before committing to a major.

Pros of Applying to College Undecided

If you enjoy different subjects—such as physics and history or graphic design and entrepreneurship—applying undecided gives you the freedom to take a wide variety of classes before settling on one major. This flexibility can be ideal for students who want to explore multiple interests.

Deciding on a major can feel overwhelming. Applying as undecided gives you time to experience different subjects and discover what truly interests you. Most schools do not require that students officially declare their major until the end of their sophomore year.

Many colleges provide special advising for undecided students, helping guide them toward the right major. Universities such as Brown, University of Hartford, and Oregon State University offer support through mentorship and career advising for undecided students.

Being undecided keeps your options open for designing your major or choosing interdisciplinary programs. Schools that are part of academic consortiums, such as [The Claremont Colleges](#) and the [Five College Consortium](#) are great for those interested in exploring subjects or taking classes not offered at their home institution.

Some colleges offer exploratory tracks in specific fields, such as business or engineering, without requiring you to declare a major right away.

Cons of Applying to College Undecided

Certain competitive majors—such as business, engineering, or nursing—may be difficult to enter later if you don't apply directly as a freshman. These programs often have strict entry requirements and/or a limited number of spaces, so it's important to check each school's policy before applying undecided. For example, transferring into an engineering program from a university's College of Arts and Sciences can be difficult as there are often requirements in math and sciences that students will not have met yet.

Some colleges offer specific exploratory options to help students figure out the major they want to pursue. Some examples of this include [Ithaca College](#), [Rochester Institute of Technology](#), and [University of Colorado Boulder](#).

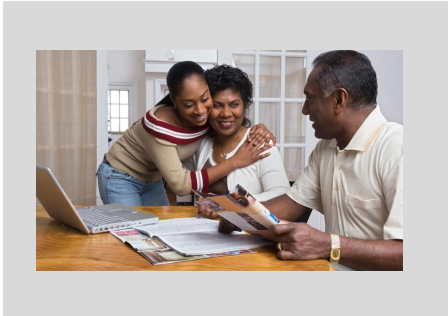
Just because a college allows you to apply undecided doesn't mean it's the best fit for your academic goals. If you have a specific field in mind, it's crucial to choose a school with strong programs in that area, even if you haven't declared your major yet.

If you're thinking about applying undecided, look for schools with flexible curriculums. Be sure to check for major restrictions, especially for competitive fields such as business or engineering. Think about your interests and ensure that the school offers strong programs in areas you may want to explore.

Applying undecided can provide the time and space to discover your academic path. Whether you have multiple interests or are not sure exactly what you want to study it keeps your options open while allowing you to explore.

Next Step College Admissions Planning

Financial Matters: Avoiding Financial Aid and FAFSA Mistakes



As your high schooler prepares for college, navigating financial aid can feel confusing. Here's a guide to avoid common financial aid pitfalls.

One of the biggest mistakes parents make is missing financial aid deadlines. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) opens on December 1st this year, but many families wait too long to file. To avoid this, note both federal and school-specific deadlines. Pay attention to ED, EA, and ED2 financial aid deadlines.

Another common mistake is skipping the FAFSA because parents assume they won't qualify for aid. Even if you don't qualify for need-based aid, submitting the FAFSA is required for federal loans and work-study programs.

Some schools won't consider late financial aid requests, so it's always better to apply upfront if there's any chance you'll need assistance.

Errors on the FAFSA can lead to delays or reduced aid. Mistakes with income figures, confusing parent and student assets, or leaving out required fields are common issues. Double-check everything. Use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool to pull data directly from your tax returns for accuracy, and make sure your most recent tax return is ready when filling out the form.

Overestimating assets is another pitfall. FAFSA doesn't ask for the value of retirement accounts or your primary residence, but some parents mistakenly include these, inflating their Student Aid Index (SAI). Being precise prevents accidentally reducing your child's aid.

If your financial situation changes after submitting the FAFSA, you can appeal for more aid. Many parents mistakenly believe the initial aid package is final. However, if you experience job loss, unexpected medical bills, or other hardships, you can request that the school review your situation. Colleges often have an appeals process to adjust aid.

529 savings plans should be reported as parent assets on the FAFSA, even though your student is the beneficiary. This works in your favor, as parent assets are counted less heavily than student assets. Be aware that student-owned assets are penalized more heavily than parent assets, so talk to a financial advisor about managing these savings to maximize aid eligibility.

Lastly, don't shy away from federal student loans. These loans often come with low interest rates and flexible repayment options, making them safer than private loans. While borrowing should be approached with caution, federal loans can help bridge the gap between what you can afford and the total cost of college. The federal cap on how much a student can borrow over four years of college is \$27,000 (with annual caps from \$5,500 to \$7,500 per year)

By staying organized, meeting deadlines, and avoiding these common missteps, you can help maximize the financial aid your child receives. Take time to understand the process and reach out to financial aid offices for help—they're there to assist you!

What is Demonstrated Interest?

In college admissions, showing genuine interest can significantly impact your chances of acceptance at certain schools. While colleges track common forms of demonstrated interest—such as campus visits and opening emails—going beyond the basics can make a big difference. These strategies not only demonstrate an authentic interest but also help you engage deeply with the university, ensuring it's the right fit for you.

One powerful way to demonstrate interest is by exploring your intended major in depth. Instead of just

browsing the website, sign up for more information and look for opportunities to connect with the specific department. For example, if you're interested in working with children, explore the Department of Early Childhood Development and see if there are chances to meet with academic advisors or visit their daycare center.

Subscribing to newsletters enables you to learn about upcoming presentations or guest lectures. Staying informed about departmental news shows a long-term commitment to your field. Attending webinars,

lectures, and when available, Q&A sessions for prospective students allows you to introduce yourself to faculty and staff. Be sure to follow-up afterward, further demonstrating commitment.

Connecting with admissions representatives can provide valuable insights and show your strong interest in the school. If your interests align with a professor's research, reach out with thoughtful questions or comments. Mention how their work has influenced your decision to pursue this field.

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Demonstrated Interest (continued from page 3)

Some professors may be willing to share their insights with prospective students, but respect their limited time.

Colleges often offer online events that provide additional insight. Participate in webinars or virtual tours to better understand the college's culture, campus life, and academic programs. These are great opportunities to interact with students and faculty.

If you're planning a campus visit, contact admissions to see if you can meet or sit in on a class. Afterward, send a follow-up email with your insights and questions, showing your enthusiasm for the academic environment.

Interviews are also a great way to showcase your interest and personality. Some colleges offer interviews with current students, alumni, or admissions counselors as part of the application process. Use this opportunity to discuss your academic goals, ask thoughtful questions, and highlight why you're a good fit.

Attend college fairs and events at your high school. This is a great opportunity to make personal connections with admissions represen-

tatives who are often the first reviewers of your application and may advocate for you in the admissions office. Don't forget to get their contact information and send a follow-up email.

When communicating with college representatives, ask questions that reflect genuine curiosity. Avoid topics easily answered on the website. Instead, focus on specific programs or research opportunities.

A personalized thank-you note after meetings or interviews can leave a lasting impression. Reference specific parts of your conversation and include a follow-up question or thought to show continued engagement.

By taking these extra steps, you show admissions committees that you're not only interested but also proactive and passionate about your future there. These actions can make a significant impression and demonstrate you're ready to take full advantage of what the college offers.

Remember, the goal is to build meaningful connections and authentically convey your enthusiasm. Your efforts can make a lasting impact and potentially tip the scales in your favor.



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