

# THE COLLEGE CONNECTION NEWSLETTER

FOR HIGH SCHOOL JUNIORS & SENIORS

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## WHERE ARE YOU AT YOUR STRONGEST?

([collegewise.com](http://collegewise.com))

Marcus Buckingham, the author of *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, pioneered the Gallup Organization's approach to leverage a person's strengths as opposed to fixing their weaknesses. And this [short video](#) shares his three recommendations for success in your career, all of which apply to high school students hoping to succeed as college applicants.

*"Your strengths are not what you're good at, and your weaknesses are not what you're bad at. If you're good at something, but it drains you, that's not a strength, that's a weakness. A strength is an activity that makes you feel strong, just as a weakness is an activity that makes you feel weak. A strength draws you in, and you know better than anyone else what your strengths are. And if you don't, then it's time to learn."*

As you think about where to put your efforts this year, please make sure you prioritize maximizing your strengths over fixing your weaknesses (strengths improve more than weaknesses do). And you might start that focus by asking not, "What am I good at?" but rather, "What makes me feel strong?"

## HOW AVERAGE AMERICAN TAXPAYERS SAVED \$2,238 ON COLLEGE COSTS

([Fool.com](http://Fool.com))

The IRS offers several tax breaks to help lessen the burden of educational expenses for millions of families. In particular, one lucrative credit can provide as much as \$10,000 per child over the four years that a typical college education entails, and millions of families routinely take advantage of that credit every year.

The **American Opportunity Tax Credit** is designed to help students who are enrolled at regular undergraduate colleges and universities, as well as the parents who often help subsidize educational expenses. Each year for up to four years of your undergraduate education, you get a 100% credit on all of your qualifying educational expenses, up to a maximum of \$2,000. Above \$2,000, a more modest 25% credit applies to expenses between \$2,000 and \$4,000, adding up to another \$500. All told, if your college expenses add up to \$4,000 or more, the credit maxes out at \$2,500 per year.

However, it's important to understand that only a limited set of expenses is eligible for the credit. Tuition, mandatory school fees, and required materials for courses can all figure toward the expenses against which you claim the credit. But key items like transportation as well as room and board don't count.

A student must be enrolled in a program that will end in your getting a degree, certificate, or other educational credential after you've completed your studies. If you don't attend school at least half time, then you're not allowed to claim the credit.

(continued on page 2)

## 2019-2020 COMMON APP ESSAY PROMPTS

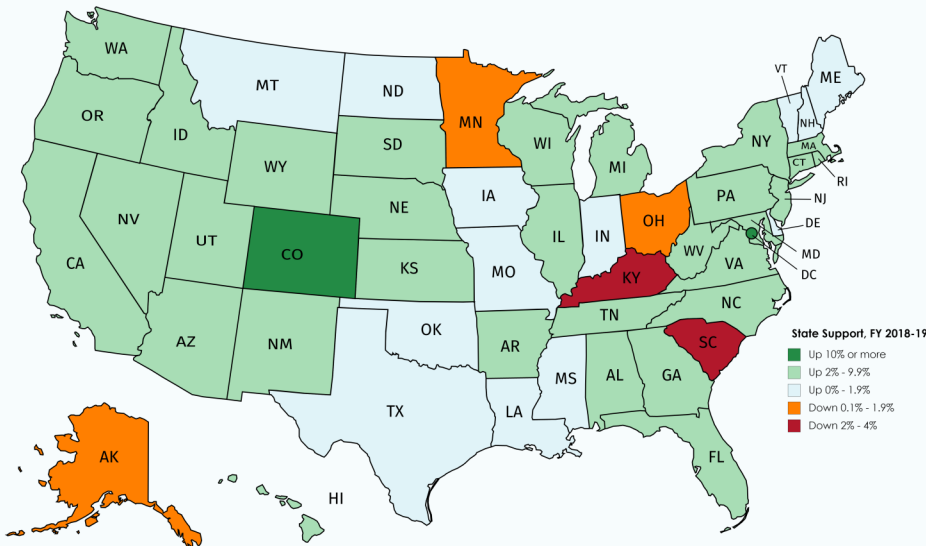
([Commonapp.org](http://Commonapp.org))

The Common Application has announced that the 2019-2020 essay prompts will remain the same as the 2018-2019 essay prompts. Based on extensive counselor feedback, the existing essay prompts provide great flexibility for applicants to tell their unique stories in their own voice.

(continued on page 3)

## 'A MARGINALLY BETTER YEAR' FOR STATE FUNDING

(Insidehighered.com)



Created with mapchart.net ©

Public higher education leaders may have reason to be cautiously optimistic this spring: an early indicator of states' fiscal health shows modest, if uneven, improvements.

States spent 3.7 percent more supporting higher education in fiscal year 2018-19 than in the previous year. The small rise continued a five-year trend of upward support that this year totals about \$91.5 billion.

The data show that more than two-thirds of the growth nationwide -- nearly 70 percent -- can be attributed to gains in just nine large states: California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New York, North Carolina, Virginia and Washington. Together, these states increased funding for their higher ed systems by 5.4 percent, while the remaining 41 states saw a much smaller 2.1 growth. While California's state support grew by just 6.6 percent, the state is so large that it accounts for 29.3 percent of the total increase nationwide, the survey found. California is among the states where a growing population creates more demand for public higher education.

*How Average American Taxpayers Saved \$2,238 on College Costs (continued from page 1)*

### How income affects the credit

The American Opportunity Tax Credit is useful even for low-income earners, who often don't have enough taxable income to owe a big income tax bill. Because up to 40% of the credit amount is available as a refundable credit, even someone with no tax liability could get up to \$1,000 annually as a result of the provision.

At the other end of the spectrum, though, there are income limits for claiming the credit. For 2018, if you're single and make more than \$90,000 in modified adjusted gross income, you can't claim the credit at all. Those who make \$80,000 to \$90,000 get to take a partial credit. For joint filers, credit reductions start at \$160,000 in income, and the credit is disallowed above \$180,000.

Finally, one thing every family with multiple children should keep in mind is that the American Opportunity Tax Credit applies to each child. There's no limit of one child per family at any given time, so people can receive multiple credits in the same year if they have two or more kids in college simultaneously.

A viral outbreak at the **University of Maryland, College Park**, campus that resulted in the death of a student has prompted university officials to disinfect every residence hall while most students are away for winter break, a laborious effort far beyond a typical cleaning. This deep clean coincides with questions of whether mold either caused or exacerbated student illnesses, though the university said that there is no connection between the adenovirus and mold exposure. Adenoviruses are prevalent year-round and usually are the cause of common colds. But tests conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show at least 10 College Park students contracted a strain, adenovirus 7, that causes much more severe sickness. University health centers typically don't test for adenovirus because it is so common, and College Park officials weren't aware that the virulent strain was spreading until a student died in November.

## LOS ANGELES' SCHOOL COUNSELORS STRIKE BACK

*(Hechingerreport.org)*

The strike of United Teachers Los Angeles' (UTLA) 33,000 members across some 1,200 schools, the first since 1989, began on January 14. It was, like most work stoppages, about pay and benefits and an expired collective bargaining agreement. It was also about unteachably large class sizes (of 40, sometimes 50 students) and similarly burdensome ratios for nurses, social workers, librarians, and counselors. The union's demand for more counselors emerged more strongly than in other recent teacher strikes — because of the increasingly acute needs of LA's majority brown and working-class student population. Counselors are essential mentors to new immigrants and first-generation college-goers. They connect students and parents to social services and help them integrate into the community. In this sense, the strike was as much about an ideological question as a labor dispute: Who is the public being served by public education?

California ranks 47th in the nation when it comes to counselor access: there's an average of one counselor for every 682 students, far exceeding the recommended ratio of one to 250. The lack of counselors, nurses, and social workers in the city feeds the school-to-prison pipeline, Amir Whitaker, a staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California said.

**What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals.**

*- Henry David Thoreau*

*2019-2020 Common App Essay Prompts  
(continued from page 1)*

### The Common Application Essay Prompts:

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience? *(This was the third most popular topic choice during the 2018-2019 application year; 21.1%)*
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.
5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others. *(This was the second most popular topic choice during the 2018-2019 application year; 23.7%)*
6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design. *(This was the most popular topic choice during the 2018-2019 application year; 24.1%)*

## SCHOLARSHIPS

### MAUREEN HOWARD N. BLITMAN ENGINEERING SCHOLARSHIP

This non-renewable \$5000 scholarship to Promote Diversity in Engineering is awarded annually to a high school senior from an ethnic minority who has been accepted into an ABET-accredited engineering program at a four-year college or university. Deadline Mar. 1, 2019 [Apply here](#)

### SEG SCHOLARSHIPS

Society of Geophysicists Foundation offers merit scholarships ranging from \$500 to \$10,000 per academic year. Average awards are approximately \$3,700 for HS seniors intending to pursue a career in applied geophysics, geosciences, physics, geology or earth and environmental sciences. Requires a 200 word essay describing how you will use geophysics or geo science in your future career. Deadline: Mar. 1, 2019. [Apply here](#)

## HOW TO BE SMARTER ABOUT ONLINE SCHOLARSHIP SEARCHES

(Teenlife.com)

There are thousands upon thousands of scholarship opportunities available to students, but unfortunately a great majority of them are drawings or contests designed to gather personal information and use it to promote student loans and sell student data.

**Here's how to find quality awards using online scholarship matching websites:** First, ignore the thought that signing-up at as many sites as possible will give them the best possible chance of winning more scholarships. This simply isn't true. Instead, students need to pick two or three scholarship matching sites to sign-up for, such as Fastweb or Scholarships360, and create a new email dedicated to their scholarship search and college correspondence.

This email should include their first and last name (and possibly a number if their own name is unavailable) and that's it. No cute nicknames, funny references, or questionable words are necessary or needed. In fact, students need to realize that their email address is often the first thing that is seen when they are communicating with college admission reps or scholarship judges. Once students have created a dedicated scholarship email address and signed-up for a few scholarship matching sites, they need to make sure they have filled out their entire profiles on each site.

To determine if an award offer is a traditional scholarship, students need to answer these quick questions:

- Does the link click through to a reputable company or organization?
- Is there an essay component to the application?
- Are there guidelines and qualifications for which students are eligible to apply?
- Do the requirements include extra materials, such as school transcripts and/or letters of recommendation?

Students should be able to answer YES to these questions. If the answer is NO, the scholarship is most likely a contest or drawing. Also, watch for the words "sponsored" or "promoted" near the titles of scholarship drawings and contests.

Once an award has been determined to be a traditional award, students can then add it to their scholarship list (if they meet the qualifications) and apply well before the published deadline.

A **Princeton University** graduate applying to medical school has sued the school after applying as a white person and being rejected. The plaintiff, who is white, says she was advised by an admissions officer to take a DNA test, and that if she discovered Native American and African American lineage, her chances of getting in would go up significantly. She is charging racial discrimination, and a federal judge ruled that her case could proceed, rejecting requests to dismiss it.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

### FIRST GENERATION CIVIL RIGHTS FELLOWSHIP

The FirstGEN Fellowship Committee seeks bright undergraduate students, who are first generation college students, dedicated to pursuing careers in the social justice field for a \$3,000 stipend. Applications for Summer 2019 are accepted through February 8, 2019. Fellows will be selected in March 2019. [Apply here](#)

### DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION SCHOLARSHIPS

Each year, the DAR awards more than \$150,000 through more than 25 different scholarships. Deadline: Feb. 15, 2019. [Apply here](#)

### SWEET AND SIMPLE SCHOLARSHIP

Think back to when you received a special gift that made a huge impact. Write 250 words or less and you could win a \$1,500 scholarship. Deadline February 28, 2019 [Apply here](#)

### NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HISPANIC JOURNALISTS

Offers a variety of scholarships for those wishing to pursue a degree in English or Spanish print, digital or photo journalism. Deadline: February 28, 2019 [Apply here](#)

### THE AMERICAN LEGION LEGACY SCHOLARSHIP

Need-based scholarships for eligible children of veterans. Provides up to \$20,000 in aid for undergraduate or post graduate college. Deadline: Apr. 20, 2019. [Apply here](#)

## SENIOR CHECKLIST

- Start planning your college visits for spring break
- Touch base with your guidance counselor
- Complete the [FAFSA](#)
- Stay on top of scholarship applications
- Confirm that your grades, transcripts, letters of recommendation and test scores have been submitted to your colleges
- Send an email or make a phone call to each college to confirm they received everything
- If you were admitted early, be sure to pay attention to housing deadlines

## WHEN YOU TURN 18

The California Bar Foundation is proud to partner with the State Bar of California to educate young adults about their rights and responsibilities under the law.

## WORKING AND TAXES

At age 18, you no longer need a special work permit to get a job. And with some exceptions, your employer must give you regular breaks, overtime pay, workers' compensation insurance and unemployment insurance.

**Will I get back any of the tax that I pay?** Maybe. You (or your accountant) must complete an income tax return each year and mail it to the Internal Revenue Service and the California Franchise Tax Board no later than April 15. If it turns out that you paid too much tax for your level of income, you would be entitled to a refund.

## 7 Things Teens Need to Know Before They Leave For College

([www.scarymommy.com](http://www.scarymommy.com))

Here's a small checklist of what kids need to know before they head off on their own to college.

**1. How To Self-Advocate** It's hard to ask for help—we all want to be competent and confident, but there will be times when, for whatever reason, we need help. Make sure your teens know how to ask for what they need. Maybe the math is too hard, or they really want to get in to a closed class; or maybe they have an issue with a roommate or anxiety. Colleges have many places they can go for help, but they have to ask. Along with standing up for themselves and asking for help, teach them to listen well and communicate calmly. To self-advocate, they need to be comfortable speaking to authority figures and to admitting they want or need something.

**2. How To Travel Alone** They should be able to plan a local outing and get there by themselves. That could mean walking, taking a bus, subway or a train. If your kid is lucky enough to have a car, they should know how to change a tire, and get and use roadside assistance. If their college has shuttles or uses Zip Car, they should know that and research how to utilize them effectively.

**3. How to Be Safe and Healthy** Campus safety and sexual assault are significant issues on college campuses. Your teens can't be prepared for everything, but they can be careful and mindful of their surroundings, and they can research the safety of their school before they go. Talk to them about watching out for others, making a safe community themselves, and knowing how to get help on campus. They should walk with others at night, know where the blue lights (or whatever system the college uses) are and try to avoid getting super drunk.

**4. Do Laundry** If you haven't actually taught them how to do laundry and watched them do it, you have no clue. So show them the ropes, make sure they leave for school with laundry detergent and let 'em run!

**5. Cook a Meal** A few meals, really. They may not have to in college, thanks to meal plans, but they sure should know their way around a kitchen. Fry or scramble some eggs, make some toast; throw a sandwich together and at least boil ramen—a staple for college age kids.

**6. Manage Money** Make sure your college kid already knows how to handle money before they actually are far away and in control of it. That means they can make and stick to a budget and can prioritize strategically. Discuss ahead of time what, if anything you will be paying for day to day.

**7. Persevere** No one gets through college without failing at something. Period. Let them know that, so they don't end up feeling embarrassed or defeated. Make sure they have the resilience to handle what gets thrown at them. Perseverance is a really great word—teach them that.

## COLLEGE NEWS

Melissa Harris-Perry, journalist and professor of political science and director of the Anna Julia Cooper Center at **Wake Forest University**, said on Twitter that the institution invited her to leave after she criticized it during [a speech](#) honoring Martin Luther King Jr. In her off-campus talk, Harris-Perry discussed the challenges facing black residents of local Winston-Salem, N.C., said the university benefited from slavery and other racist policies throughout its history, and argued that Wake Forest's food service workers are not assured year-round employment.

The **University of South Florida at St. Petersburg** admitted nearly 700 applicants in recent days, but human error is being blamed for more than 400 of those admissions offers having been sent out incorrectly. They have since been revoked. The university issued this statement: "We were dismayed to learn about the acceptance emails that were mistakenly sent due to human error. All of us work in higher education because we care about students, and we understand the confusion and distress a mistake like this can cause. As soon as we found out about the situation, we immediately reviewed our process for communicating with prospective students and have changed our procedures to prevent this from happening again. In addition, our staff is calling each of

the affected students to apologize and discuss their application status. They hope to contact all of the students by the end of this week."

The **University of Utah** today announced the creation of an experimental program to offer some students the option of an income-share agreement. Eligible students may receive up to \$10,000 each semester (fall, spring and summer) under the agreement. In exchange, students will pay 2.85 percent of their annual income after graduation for three to 10 years, depending on their major and the amount they received. Payments may be paused for students pursuing graduate degrees or who are volunteering or working but earning less than \$20,000 a year.

A professor of engineering at the **University of Houston** is facing criticism for writing an email to graduate students about the importance of personal hygiene, singling out certain cultures in the process. "Most Americans shower twice daily once in the morning and once before going to bed," the letter asserts. And if "you do eat spicy/garlicky food, please use mouthwash." Some students have commented that publicly the letter is appropriate. But others have said they believe the note is racist and offensive due to the inclusion of certain cultural groups.

## WHAT ACT SCORES DO YOU NEED TO QUALIFY FOR THE NCAA?

*(Collegevine.com)*

If you're hoping to play NCAA sports, you need to make sure that you can meet the requirements, especially when it comes to test scores. The NCAA calculates your GPA based on a 4.0 scale, but it only considers your core classes. This means that the GPA on your transcript may differ slightly from the GPA used by the NCAA, since your transcript weighs all classes, not just core courses.

**How Your ACT Score is Calculated:** Normally, you consider your ACT as a composite score. This is the average of all your section scores and it is also on the scale 1-36. The NCAA does not consider your composite score. Instead, it considers your scores as a sum with a total possible between 4-144.

**NCAA Eligibility Requirements for Divisions II:** NCAA eligibility requirements start to become significant at the Division II level. This is due in part to the fact that 56% of Division II athletes receive some type of athletic scholarship. Basically, in addition to taking a full load of core courses, Division II athletes need to achieve a 2.2 GPA on a 4.0 score and meet ACT score requirements. These score requirements vary according to your GPA. The lower your GPA, the higher you'll need to score on your ACT. Get the specifics [here](#).

**NCAA Eligibility Requirements for Division I:** NCAA eligibility requirements are most stringent for Division I athletes. In addition to taking a full load of core courses, Division I athletes need to achieve a 2.3 GPA on a 4.0 score and meet standardized testing requirements. Testing requirements vary according to your GPA. The lower your GPA, the higher you'll need to score on your ACT. Get the specifics [here](#).

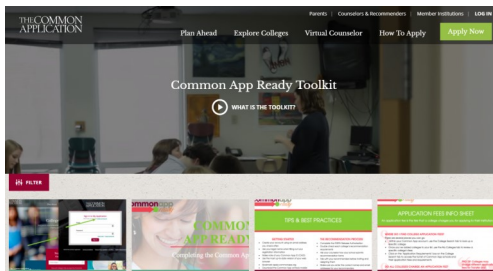
Check out the [NCAA 2018-19 Guide for the College-Bound Student Athlete](#) for more information.

## JUNIOR CHECKLIST

- Schedule college visits for spring break
- [Register to take the ACT:](#)  
Next test date, April 13, 2019.  
Deadline to register: March 8
- [Register to take the SAT:](#)  
Next test date, March 9, 2019.  
Deadline to register: Feb. 8
- [Register to take Subject Tests:](#)  
Next test date, May 4, 2019.  
Deadline to register: April 5
- Scope out colleges' social media pages

## COMMON APP READY TOOLKIT

([www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org))



As juniors prepare for their final year of high school, counselors are planning workshops for students and their families. Fortunately, there's no need to start from scratch! Check out [Common App Ready](#) for free, ready-to-use presentations.

## POPULARITY OF EARLY DECISION CONTINUES TO GROW

([Insidehighered.com](http://insidehighered.com))

In 2018, many colleges with competitive admissions announced new efforts to encourage and help low-income and middle-income students apply and enroll. Some observers have noted that these efforts do not touch early-decision programs, in which students apply and receive decisions early in return for a pledge to enroll if admitted, or early-action programs, which are non-binding. And the resilience of early admissions comes despite years of criticism that wealthy applicants are most likely to apply early. They, of course, need not worry about financial aid applications and are more likely to receive counseling that allows them to make choices about where they want to enroll.

An analysis by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation pointed to evidence about who applies early. "Twenty-nine percent of high-achieving students from families making more than \$250,000 a year applied early decision, compared with only 16 percent of high-achieving students from families with incomes less than \$50,000. In short, low-income students are half as likely to apply early, even though doing so would dramatically increase their likelihood of admission."

But even amid these criticisms, the numbers announced by colleges in December showed that many of the most competitive institutions are admitting what are likely to make up more than half of their freshman classes early, and a number of institutions are reporting record numbers applying and being admitted early. And it continues to be the case that admission rates at some of the most competitive institutions (where admissions rates are in single digits overall) are in the teens for early applicants, hardly making it easy to get in, but notably easier. And yet those admit rates are falling at many institutions.

### QuestBridge Impact

Several colleges, mindful of the criticisms about early-admissions programs favoring the wealthy, are now noting their involvement with [the QuestBridge program](#). QuestBridge is a nonprofit that works with high-achieving, low-income high school students. It operates a program in which students who "match" with an early-admissions program are assured a full scholarship. These students are generally at income levels that they would receive a full scholarship through the regular process, but this allows them to apply without fearing that they will be admitted without one.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

**12th ANNUAL CREATE A GREETING CARD SCHOLARSHIP CONTEST** - Design a greeting card and win a one-time \$10,000 scholarship. Contest is open to all students 14 years of age and older. A panel will select 100 designs per month that will be posted to The Gallery Collection's Facebook page for voting. Top 10 designs will move to the finalist round. Deadline: Mar. 1, 2019. [Apply here](#)

**SOCIETY OF AUTOMOTIVE ENGINEERS** - A variety of corporate-sponsored scholarships for graduating high school seniors are offered, ranging in value from \$1,000 to \$10,000. All scholarships are contingent upon the applicant's enrollment in an engineering program accredited by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). Deadline: Mar. 15, 2019. [Apply here](#)



**What is IDOC?** The [Institutional Documentation Service](#) is a secure online tool provided by the College Board through which students can upload and submit required tax documents. The required tax documents may differ for each school that requires you to complete IDOC, but the most common documents will be parents' federal income taxes (or non-tax filer statement), parents' W-2s and/or 1099s, parents' business tax returns, student's federal income taxes (or non-tax filer statement), and student's W-2s and/or 1099s.

## HOW TO GET COLLEGE APPLICATION FEE WAIVERS

*(Nerdwallet.com)*

The price of applying to college can add up fast, but getting a college application fee waiver can help. In many cases, you have to front these costs in order to apply to colleges. But if you can prove that you have a financial need, there are ways to get around some of them. Here's how.

### 1. Ask for ACT and SAT fee waivers

Costs related to college applications start with standardized testing fees. It costs \$47.50 to register for each standard SAT you take, and \$50.50 to register for each ACT test. Both cost more if you want to take the essay portion of the tests in addition to the other sections (\$64.50 for the SAT, \$67.00 for the ACT).

You can get [ACT](#) and [SAT](#) fee waivers to take up to two of each test for free. To get either, talk to your high school college or guidance counselor. Each test company allocates only a certain number of waivers to each high school, and it's up to the school's counselors to distribute them based on need.

### 2. Request college application fee waivers

The SAT fee waiver is a gift that keeps on giving: In addition to letting you take the test for free, it also lets you skip the application costs for four colleges. If you get an SAT waiver, the College Board will send you application waivers in the fall of your senior year or when you get your SAT test scores.

If you didn't get an SAT waiver, or if you did but want to apply for free to more than four schools, there are other ways to potentially get those fees waived. You can request some application fee waivers directly through the college application, or fill out the [NACAC's fee waiver request form](#) and submit it with your application.

Many college applications, including the Common Application (a generic application that more than 600 schools accept), have a field where you can indicate that you want to be considered for a fee waiver. If a school's application doesn't have a fee waiver option, try the NACAC fee waiver request form. In both cases, you need to qualify based on your financial situation — the requirements are similar to the ACT and SAT waiver requirements. Your high school counselor also has to verify that you have a financial need, either electronically or with a signature.

However, there's no guarantee that you'll be able to get a fee waiver or that a college will honor it if you do; each campus can use its own discretion.

### 3. Find colleges with no application fee

Not all hope is lost if you can't get a fee waiver. Some colleges give out codes for a free application to students who attend certain college fairs or visit the school's campus. And many colleges simply don't charge application fees at all. The College Board has a [list that indicates colleges with no application fee](#) and colleges that accept fee waivers.

### 4. Ask the college to waive the fee

But if all else fails, it doesn't hurt to just ask the college to waive the fee. Call the admissions office yourself or ask your high school counselor to help advocate in your favor.

"If a student's high school counselor wrote us a note indicating that paying the application fee would create some financial hardship for the family, we would waive it," says Kent Rinehart, dean of admission at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York, and a NACAC board of directors member.