

THE COLLEGE CONNECTION NEWSLETTER

FOR HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

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Seek the Light

(“Collegewise.com,” by Kevin McMullin, Founder, Collegewise.com)

When brainstorming a college essay with a student, our counselors know when a topic has real potential—the moment a student lights up when telling us about it.

That pure, involuntary spark in a student’s face and voice when they tell us all about their favorite class, that one achievement of which they’re most proud, the feeling when they learned they’d been promoted to “shift leader” at their part-time job—whatever it is, genuine emotion cannot be faked. It draws the listener in, wanting to hear even more about the experience that’s generating that reaction right in front of us. And that’s exactly the feeling a good college essay should inspire in the reader.

The best college essays don’t necessarily have to be about positive experiences—they just need to be sincere, engaging, and an effective way for a reader to get to know the real student behind the application.

For students writing essays for your applications, seek this light. Go toward those topics that don’t require a lot of cajoling for you to find, and even better, those that you enjoy discussing and exploring with an interested listener.

For students progressing through your younger high school years, toward those subjects and teachers who inspire you to learn more. Go toward those activities you’d choose to do even if they had no bearing on your future college applications. Go toward opportunities and experiences that inspire you to bring your best self and work over those you do out of obligation.

Imagine how many stories you’d have to tell when you apply to college. And imagine how much more successful and enjoyable the journey to that time will be.

Here’s What You Need to Know about the Federal Pell Grant

(“blog.collegevine.com,” By Monikah Schuschu)

The Pell Grant program is run by the federal government of the United States through the Department of Education. The program awards monetary grants to help pay for college for students in the U.S. who have **high levels of demonstrated financial need**.

Pell Grants are awarded entirely based on need; **grades, test scores, and other merit considerations are not part of the selection process**. The amounts awarded vary based on a student’s individual circumstances and are subject to certain yearly and lifetime limits.

Unlike federal student loans, Pell Grants generally don’t need to be paid back in the future. There are a few exception to this rule; if your eligibility changes or you leave school early during the period of your grant, you may have to pay some or all of it back. Fortunately, most students won’t have to worry about these special circumstances.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, **the maximum Pell Grant available for the 2018-2019 school year is \$6,095** this is usually split up by semester. Your own eligibility will vary based on your personal and family circumstances, including the cost of attendance for the college you’ve chosen. However, the amount of your Pell Grant won’t change based on aid you receive from sources other than the federal government.

In order to be eligible for a Pell Grant, you’ll need to meet these initial conditions:

- You **must be a U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen**. (This often means having official Permanent Resident status.)

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- You **must be an undergraduate student** who has not previously received a bachelor's degree, unless you're in one of a handful of specific Pell-approved post-baccalaureate programs.
- You **must be attending a recognized post-secondary educational institution in the United States**, full-time or part-time.

There is no specific application process for the Pell Grant. All you have to do is fill out and submit your FAFSA by the appropriate deadline. The federal government will use the information about your family's finances that appears in your FAFSA to determine whether you'll receive a Pell Grant. For more information about Pell Grants and other forms of financial aid offered by the U.S. government, visit <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types/grants-scholarships/pell>

In Prime Position

("Insidehighered.com," By Lindsay McKenzie)

As Amazon green-lights two new headquarters in New York and Northern Virginia, universities and colleges scramble to create a talent pipeline for tens of thousands of high-paying tech jobs.

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University announced ambitious plans to support this expansion by building a \$1 billion Tech Innovation Campus in Alexandria, Va. — less than two miles away from Amazon's chosen 105-acre site near Reagan National Airport. **George Mason University in Fairfax, Va.**, plans to triple its computer science graduates — by growing undergraduate and graduate enrollment to 10,000 and 5,000 students respectively over the next five years.

New York universities and colleges stand ready to partner with Amazon, too. In prime position is **LaGuardia Community College**, located just minutes away from Amazon's proposed HQ in Long Island City.

4 Tips for Adding Safety Schools to Your College Short List

("usnews.com," By Bradford Holmes)

A great deal is written and said about how students should decide on the list of colleges to which they will apply, but they neglect one very important consideration when compiling this list: their safety schools. Here are several tips to help you determine your safety schools this application season.

1. Ensure you would genuinely be happy attending that institution: Guard against the possibility that you will be disappointed in your final college choice by searching for safety schools that you actually would like to attend. The factors you use to determine your dream program are just as important when selecting your safeties. Try to identify an institution that fits your criteria but is slightly less competitive than your dream school.

2. Research and reach out: Beyond investigating the basic facts about a potential safety school, research its smaller details, just as you would for your reach schools. Visit the college and request a tour. Reach out to the school to inform them that you are interested. Schedule a meeting with a

local alumnus, and fill out the application with as much care and attention to detail as you would give the others on your list.

Not only does this send a positive message to the college, but by embracing the application process at your safety schools, you will make them that much more familiar to you should you eventually choose to enroll at one of them.

3. Look for strengths in the areas that interest you: Many colleges in your reach category may be accomplished in every subject, but schools with higher acceptance rates may be just as strong in your particular field of interest. These matches can make excellent safety schools.

4. Check the statistics: Ensure your safety schools are truly safeties. Check the average GPA and standardized test scores of accepted students and verify that yours are higher. Verify that the college admits students with backgrounds like yours. The most ineffective safety school is one that might not accept you

New Data on Admissions: Criteria That Matter

(“Insidehighered.com,” By Scott Jaschik)

Based on the annual “[State of College Admission](#)” report — issued by the National Association for College Admission Counseling — academic factors (grades, especially in college preparatory courses, and test scores) count. Of the top eight factors, only one (demonstrated interest) is not based on academics.

To Factors in Admissions Decisions, First-Time Freshmen

Factor	Considerable Influence	Moderate Influence	Limited Influence	No Influence
Grades (all courses)	80.9%	10.4%	5.8%	2.9%
Grades (college prep)	70.8%	17.5%	8.8%	2.9%
Test scores (SAT, ACT)	52.3%	30.8%	14.5%	2.3%
Strength of curriculum	51.2%	29.3%	12.9%	6.5%
Essay or writing sample	16.7%	36.9%	20.8%	25.6%
Counselor recommendation	10.8%	46.1%	28.7%	14.4%
Demonstrated interest	15.5%	21.4%	34.5%	28.6%
Teacher recommendation	7.1%	46.4%	29.2%	17.3%

Senior Checklist

- Send completed applications by each deadline
- Practice for interviews
- Send thank you notes to anyone who wrote you a recommendation
- After filing the FAFSA, watch your inbox for the Student Aid Report
- Search for scholarships
- Check that each school has received your materials

Junior Checklist

- Take ACT/SAT pre-tests
- [Register to take the ACT](#): Next test date, Feb. 9, 2019. Deadline to register is Jan. 11, 2019.
- [Register to take the SAT](#): Next test date, Mar. 9, 2019. Deadline to register is Feb. 8, 2019
- [Register to take Subject Tests](#): Next test date, May 4, 2019. Deadline to register is Apr. 5, 2019
- Scope out colleges’ social media pages
- Schedule campus tours

What is a Trade School?

(blog.collegevine.com, By Kate Sundquist)

It might seem like everyone around you is getting ready to attend a traditional four-year college, but there are other options for students who find that a four-year school isn't the best fit for them. One option available is a trade school. For students who decide that their ambitions are best met by trade schools, this option is a quicker, more affordable route to achieving their long term goals.

A trade school can be known by a number of different terms, including vocational school, technical school, or career college. These terms are generally interchangeable and all refer to schools that teach skills directly related to specific jobs, usually ones that are hands-on trades.

Although you don't generally receive a degree from a trade school, you do usually achieve certification in a specific field or a certificate of completed study within your field. From a trade school, you'll be ready to jump directly into a specific trade with the knowledge and skills necessary to do the work required.

Trade schools offer a targeted education within a specific field, and they do so at a more affordable cost and within a smaller timeframe than traditional degree programs. For students who need to begin work as quickly as possible out of high school, for students with a trade-specific career in mind, and for students who don't want to pursue a higher degree in college, trade schools are a solid option.

Some of the jobs that you can pursue through a trade school include plumber, dental assistant, tractor trailer driver, auto body repair, mason, locksmith, welder, marine mechanic, automotive technician, cosmetologist, home healthcare aide, carpenter, child care aide, and nursing assistant.

Should I Go to a Community College?

(blog.collegevine.com, By Monikah Schuschu)

Four-year colleges aren't the only option available to you when it comes to continuing your education after high school. Community colleges, public institutions that offer up to two years of study, are quite popular across the United States due to their accessibility, affordability, and convenience in location and scheduling. Whether community college is your top choice or not, it's wise to make sure you understand what this option entails in case you want or need to pursue it later on.

Community colleges are publicly funded post-secondary educational institutions designed to make college-level classes accessible to a wider range of people. Most community colleges don't award bachelor's degrees, but do offer the opportunity to earn an associate's degree after the equivalent of two years of full-time study. They might also offer professional training and certification programs.

If you want to get your bachelor's degree, you'll need to transfer to another college to complete your education. Each four-year college has its own process for evaluating transfer applicants and deciding whether the credits you earned at community college will count toward their degree programs.

Compared to traditional four-year colleges, community colleges are more often designed to accommodate working adults in addition to full-time students. For example, you might find classes offered in the evening to accommodate students' work schedules.

With college costs rising every year, you and your family may be attracted to community college in hopes of reducing the overall expense incurred in the process of getting your bachelor's degree. For some students, attending community college is a wise decision that, in the long run, will help them more successfully pursue their educational, career, and all-around life goals.

College News

Northeastern University in Boston plans to acquire the New College of the Humanities, a London-based institution. NCH prides itself on offering an education that melds aspects of the Oxford tutorial system and the American liberal arts college and boasts a roster of superstar visiting professors like Richard Dawkins and Steven Pinker who give guest lectures.

Georgia Institute of Technology is considering creating brick-and-mortar "storefronts" for prospective and current students to sample its course offerings, listen to lectures and network. Many students enjoy the flexibility of studying online but still crave contact with the institution and other students in their cohort, said Rafael Bras, the university's provost.

SCHOLARSHIPS & CONTEST PROGRAMS

AXA ACHIEVEMENT SCHOLARSHIP - The AXA Achievementsm Scholarship offers college scholarships of \$2,500, \$10,000 and \$25,000 to high school seniors who have demonstrated outstanding achievement in their activities in school, the community or the workplace. Scholarship winners are known as AXA Achievers. They are ethnically and economically diverse, but they share these qualities: ambition and drive; determination to set and reach goals; respect for self, family and community; ability to succeed in college. Deadline is December 14, 2018 or until 10,000 applicants are submitted. <https://www.scholarsapply.org/axa-achievement/>

DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION SCHOLARSHIPS - Each year, the DAR awards more than \$150,000 through more than 25 different scholarships. Application deadline is February 15, 2019. <https://www.dar.org/national-society/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 to enter: March 1, 2019. <https://www.gallerycollection.com/greeting-cards-scholarship.htm>

MENSA EDUCATION AND RESEARCH FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIPS - \$70,000 of scholarships awarded based solely on a 550 word essay explaining career, academic and/or vocational goals and how you plan to achieve those goals. Deadline January 15, 2019. <https://www.mensafoundation.org/what-we-do/scholarships/>

DECA'S SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM - \$300,000 in scholarships from DECA's corporate partners like Marriott, Napa Autoparts and Publix. Scholarships are merit based. You must be a DECA member to apply. Deadline January 18, 2019 <https://www.deca.org/high-school-programs/scholarships/>

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 is April 20, 2019. <https://www.legion.org/sites/legion.org/files/legion/publications/248ACY0416%20Legacy%20Scholarship%20Pamphlet.pdf>

UNIGO 10K SCHOLARSHIP

Imagine a historical figure is brought back to life. Who is it? What's their favorite mobile app? Applicants must be at least 13 years old, be a legal US resident and must be planning to enroll in college by fall 2024. Deadline to apply December 31, 2019. <https://www.unigo.com/scholarships/our-scholarships/unigo-10k-scholarship>

Top Ten List Scholarship

"Create a top ten list of the top ten reasons you should get this scholarship" One winner will be awarded \$1,500. Applicants must be at least 13 years old, a legal US resident and planning to enroll in college by fall 2024. Deadline to apply is December 31, 2018. <https://www.unigo.com/scholarships/our-scholarships/top-ten-list-scholarship>

Pride Foundation Scholarships

60 scholarships available with 1 application to promote leadership and diversity in the LGBTQ community. Applicants must be residents of Alaska, Washington or Oregon and demonstrate financial need. Scholarships range from \$500-\$5,000. Deadline to apply is January 12, 2019. <https://pridefoundation.org/find-funding/scholarships/guidelines/>

Comcast Leaders And Achievers Scholarship

Awards granted based on students' academic and leadership abilities in school or work experiences or in the community. Scholarship is \$2,500. Applicant does not need to be a Comcast subscriber, but needs to live in an area served by the cable company. Deadline to apply is December 7, 2018. <https://www.unigo.com/scholarships/by-state/california-scholarships/comcast-leaders-and-achievers-scholarship/4100>

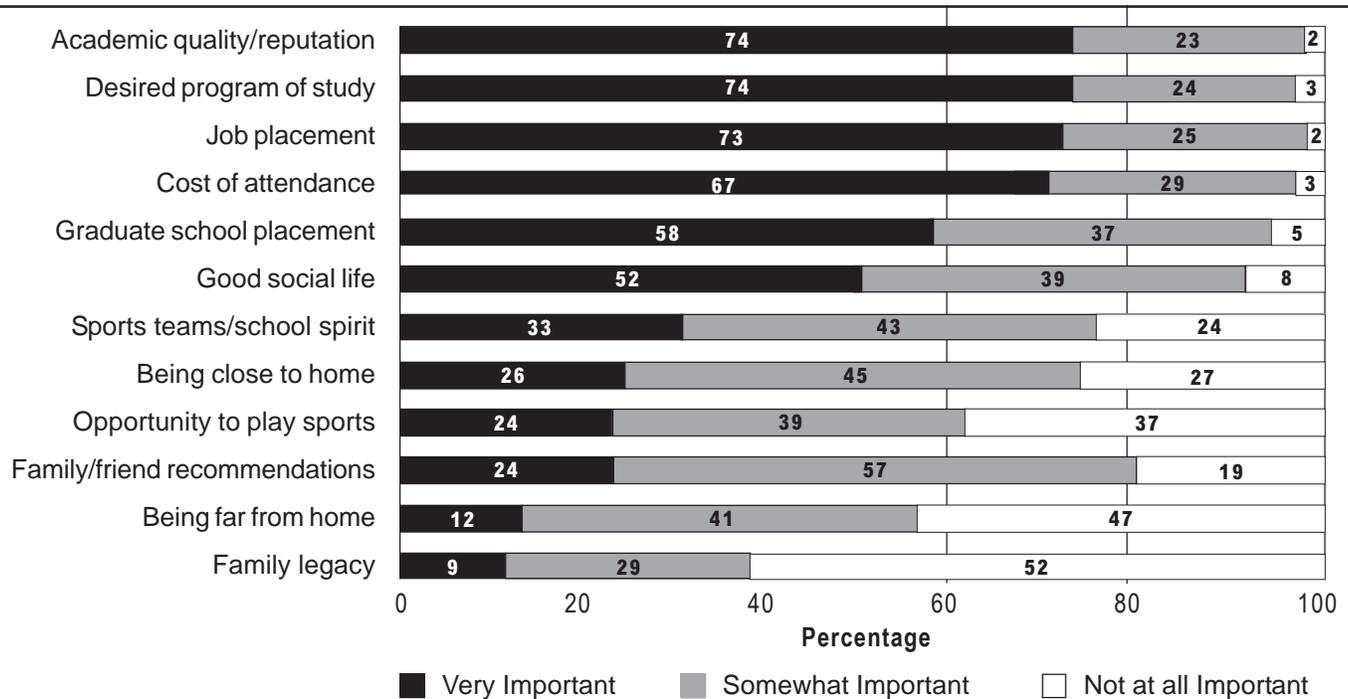
What High School Students Say They Seek in a College

(*Insidehighered.com*, By Scott Jaschik)

Key findings from a new study by the National Center for Education Statistics, identify the three factors with the highest percentages of “very important” ratings were academic quality/reputation (74 percent), having a desired program of study (74 percent) and job placement (73 percent). Cost of attendance was close behind.

The new NCES data also point to the importance of location, with nearly three-quarters of students saying that being close to home is somewhat or very important. More than twice as many students said being close to home was very important than said being far from home was very important (26 percent versus 12 percent).

FIGURE 1. Percentage distribution of students’ ratings of the importance of factors that influence college choice among fall 2009 ninth-graders in spring 2012



NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HLSL:09 First Follow-up Public-Use Data File (NCES 2014-358).

College News

Trinity College of Connecticut will award institutional aid for four years based on a single application at the point a student first applies for admission, as long as the student is eligible for Pell Grants and has a family income of less than \$60,000. “Our goal is to remove the anxiety, confusion and complexity from a process that discourages low-income students from applying to and persisting at institutions of higher education,” says a Trinity explanation of the new policy.

The law school at **Seattle University** has suspended an externship option for students with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, known as ICE. Externships provide law school credit for work with various groups. Students said ties to ICE could endanger undocumented students and questioned the ethics of ICE’s work under President Trump.

Junior Spotlight

6 Pre-College Programs You Can Join in High School

(blog.collegevine.com, By Laura Berlinsky-Schine)

Participating in activities outside of your comfort zone can allow you to explore your passions and even make a difference in the world. They are also great additions to your resume; they show that you take the initiative to pursue activities that aren't readily available through school or your immediate network. You'll also gain real-world experience. Here are six pre-college program ideas:

1. Join a Nonprofit Organization or Start Your Own Chapter Nonprofit organizations such as museums, zoos, and cultural centers tend to offer many opportunities to high school students, such as courses and training programs. This is a great way for students to explore a passion, philanthropy, and learn about a potential future career.

Students can also get involved in nonprofits by founding or participating in chapters of organizations at their high schools. For instance, many high schools have chapters of organizations such as UNICEF, which supports and fundraises for children's rights around the world.

2. Get Involved in Peer Outreach Programs

Through peer outreach, teenagers work with other students toward missions and common goals. Doing so teaches them how to tackle real-world problems, build practical skills, and develop confidence. One such program is [The Young People's Project](http://www.typp.org/), <http://www.typp.org/>. The program trains high schoolers to become Math Literacy Workers as they teach math to elementary school students in their communities.

3. Youth Court, <https://www.youthcourt.net/>

In this program, teens get involved with and learn about the justice system by acting as lawyers, jurors, and judges in real court cases with juveniles who commit minor offenses. The network offers local programs across the country.

4. Boys and Girls State, <https://blog.collegevine.com/girls-and-boys-state/>

In this prestigious, selective program for students interested in government, high schoolers participate in activities such as legislative sessions, court proceedings, and assemblies, as well as observe presentations by government officials and other professionals. The programs last one week and are usually held on college campuses.

5. Become a Brand Ambassador

Some companies employ students to promote their products on social media. You can also take the initiative to start your own project and gain a following by launching a YouTube channel or approaching local businesses to see if they could use your assistance. You'll build valuable skills marketing products—and yourself—and may even earn some money.

6. Girls Who Code

Founded with the mission of closing the gender gap in technology, Girls Who Code offers summer programs and after-school clubs for girls wanting to build character and coding skills in a supportive community. The after-school programs require facilitators to guide students through the experience, so you'll need to get a teacher or community member on board to start one locally.

To Find the Best Fit, Ignore the Rankings

(“www.insidehighered.com,” By Scott Jaschik)

Every fall, *U.S. News & World Report* and others release their rankings, suggesting which are the best” colleges — among all and in certain categories. Educators have for years questioned the validity of the rankings, pointing out flaws with various parts of the methodologies of *U.S. News* and others. [A new study](#) from researchers at Stanford University’s Graduate School of Education examines all of the evidence about rankings and comes to this conclusion: the best way to find a college that is a “good fit” is to ignore the rankings.

In summarizing the paper’s findings, Denise Pope, a senior lecturer at Stanford’s education school, said, “Research tells us that the most successful students, both in college and beyond, are the ones who engage in the undergraduate experience regardless of how selective a school may be. This is almost always the case whether a student attends the top-ranked or 200th-ranked college.” Key factors in *U.S. News* and other rankings reward graduation rates and reputation. *U.S. News* has, over the years, placed more emphasis not just on raw graduation rates but “expected” graduation rates to reward institutions with higher than expected rates for students from at-risk populations. But the Stanford study finds that graduation rates still reflect the student body being served more than the quality of the institution. And the study says there is no evidence linking reputation to anything but ... reputation. So reputation is “a self-fulfilling metric.” Even measures that might seem inherently good — such as the percentage of class sessions that are small — may not actually mean much, the study says. “While small classes are often seen as desirable, this metric is problematic ... When schools offer more small classes, there is less space for students in those classes, meaning fewer students actually get to take them. Consider, as an extreme example, a school with 200 students where each student takes only one class. If there are nine classes with two students each, and one huge class with the remaining 182 students, the average class size at the school would still be only 20

students, and a full 90 percent of those classes would be considered ‘small’ classes.”

The Stanford report generally suggests that students looking at potential colleges focus on finding places where the right conditions exist for the students to make the most of their opportunities. And that kind of review needs to focus on concrete measures or conditions that typically aren’t what makes a college rise or fall in *U.S. News*.

A key point of the report is that there is no single right focus for a college search — and that the selectivity-driven measures used in most rankings may be appropriate for a minority of students, but misdirect most others. “For some students, deciding where to go to college may depend on academic factors, such as access to cutting-edge researchers in a beloved field with opportunities to be involved in graduatelevel work, or a well-established professional preparation program,” the report says. “For others, the decision might be influenced by location: a college close to home, or far away, in a small town or in a big city. Or it might have to do with extracurricular programming: a robust student activities program, intramural sports, or the arts. “The decision might include cultural opportunities: a university with a strong international languages program, a culturally diverse student body, and a track record of successful study-abroad exchanges.

The presence or absence of a Greek system or a large Division 1 athletics program might be important factors for some students. Perhaps religious denomination, institutional size, or comprehensive support for those with learning differences may sway the decision. And of course, financial aid and cost are key factors as well.” The report adds that “rather than choosing a school based primarily on a flawed scoring system, students should ask whether they will be engaged at the college in ways that will allow them to form strong relationships with professors and mentors, apply their learning via internships and long-term projects, and find a sense of community.”