

THE 4 STEPS TO COLLEGE CHECKLIST

CHOOSING & APPLYING TO COLLEGE

WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION

isac.org
isac.studentservices@isac.illinois.gov
800.899.ISAC (4722)

ISACorps member -
find your local representative
on the map at isac.org

What's Next Illinois
whatsnextillinois.org

STEP 1 - BE A PAIN

Let everyone know that you are going to college and need their help.

- Ask for help early in your high school years to identify your interests and skills, and think about jobs and careers that fit.
- Talk to your parents, siblings, friends, teachers, coaches, professionals in your chosen field of study and other adults with experience for advice on college.
- Research colleges and careers on the Internet and at your local library.
- Begin asking teachers, counselors and/or employers if they would be willing to write a letter of recommendation to include with your admission and scholarship applications, if needed.

STEP 2 - PUSH YOURSELF

Working a little harder today will make getting into college even easier.

- Have your high school counselor help you pick the curriculum that will get you into the college of your choice.
- Don't be afraid to take the tough classes, including Honors and Advanced Placement courses, which most colleges prefer over the easier courses, and will better prepare you for college.
- Create an electronic portfolio through whatsnextillinois.org to store personal, educational, career and test score information.
- Take the ACT and/or SAT in your junior year. Check with your high school counselor for test schedules. Students in Illinois public high schools take the ACT as part of the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) in April of their junior year.
- Find out admission requirements and make sure you fulfill them. Most colleges require 3 – 4 years of math, English, science and social studies. A lot of colleges also want at least 2 years of a foreign language.

STEP 3 - FIND THE RIGHT FIT

Find out what kind of college is the best match for you and your career goals.

- Attend college fairs in your area — make a list of colleges you want to learn more about and questions to ask at the fair.
- Participating in extracurricular activities can help you determine your interests which can lead to the right college.
- Know your Grade Point Average (GPA), class rank, and ACT and SAT scores.
- Check out the websites of colleges you're interested in, or whatsnextillinois.org to get information about the college and its programs. Make sure to discuss your choices with your parents and get their input.
- When thinking about where you'd like to attend, consider things like 2 year vs. 4 year colleges, type and length of academic programs, cost and financial aid availability, housing options, location and community, services and programs, campus life, and enrollment size. Use the College Match tool at isac.org to get a list of colleges that match your qualifications.
- Apply to at least 3 – 5 colleges at the beginning of your senior year.
- Find out if the admission application process at your top choice colleges requires any fees, transcripts, reference/recommendation letters, tests, essays and/or interviews.
- Visit the campus, take a tour, sit in on classes, talk with students and professors, find out if the college has job placement services, research the college's reputation and graduation rate, and talk with the financial aid office about your aid package. A lot of colleges offer online "virtual" tours that help keep travel costs down – check their websites.
- Once admitted, find out if the college requires you to pay a deposit to reserve your admission place.
- When you decide which college to attend, let colleges you applied to know your final decision and make sure to sign up for placement testing and student housing if needed.

MEET DEADLINES

Track and complete these separate processes, here and/or through whatsnextillinois.org.

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apply for admission to colleges | Date completed: ___/___/___ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and other financial aid applications | Date completed: ___/___/___ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Send acceptance form/enrollment deposit | Date completed: ___/___/___ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housing application and fees | Date completed: ___/___/___ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sign up for placement testing | Date completed: ___/___/___ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sign up for class registration/advising | Date completed: ___/___/___ |

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FINDING & APPLYING FOR FINANCIAL AID

STEP 4 - PUT YOUR HANDS ON SOME CASH!

If you think you can't afford college, think again. There's lots of aid out there.

Freshman, Sophomore and Junior Years

- Research federal, state, institutional and private sources of financial aid by using one or more of the free scholarship search services available at isac.org. Don't be fooled by fraudulent services that ask you to pay for information and guarantee results.
- Get summer jobs or internships that relate to your career interests to save money for college.

Senior Year (Through December 31st)

- Call an ISAC Call Center Representative, contact an ISACorps member or visit isac.org for financial aid information. Use the EFC Calculator to get your estimated expected family contribution (EFC) and other information.
- Get ready to fill out a FAFSA* and check with the college financial aid office for other required forms and deadlines. Most students submit the FAFSA online at fafsa.gov, so you'll need to apply for a personal identification number (PIN) at pin.ed.gov. A parent will need to get a separate PIN.
- Use a scholarship search service at isac.org to search for other financial aid sources. Beware of FAFSA and scholarship search services that may be scams or frauds. Do not pay for information or services that are provided free elsewhere.
- Investigate the total cost of attendance for the colleges you think you might want to attend, and continue to research funding available from federal, state and institutional sources. Look for more information on other private sources of financial aid: search local newspapers, community-based organizations, local libraries and companies and ask high school counselors and financial aid administrators for suggestions.

Senior Year (After January 1st)

- You and your parents should prepare income tax forms for the previous year since tax information is reported on the FAFSA.
- If you're the beneficiary of a 529 college savings and/or prepaid tuition program, start the process to retrieve the proceeds.
- Attend a FAFSA workshop** event or meet with an ISACorps member for help filling out the FAFSA.
- Complete, electronically submit (via fafsa.gov) or sign and mail the FAFSA after January 1st, but before the priority date for the college and the Illinois Monetary Award Program (MAP).
- If you are not using a PIN when submitting the FAFSA online, sign and mail the signature page.
- Complete and submit applications for financial aid programs not covered by the FAFSA.

7-10 Days After the FAFSA Is Filed

- You will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) (via e-mail, if you supplied an e-mail address) that will include all of the information you submitted on the FAFSA, as well as your official expected family contribution (EFC).
- Review the accuracy of your data and follow instructions on the SAR. If the SAR needs to be corrected or if financial circumstances have changed, contact the financial aid office for assistance.

March - Summer

- You will receive a financial aid award letter from each college about the different programs and awards you are eligible to receive from that college.
- Compare financial aid packages and other factors and choose the college you will attend.
- Accept all or part of the financial aid offered. If required, sign and return the award letter to the college by the deadline.

Remember

- Meet deadline dates!
- Keep photocopies and/or e-mail confirmation of all completed forms and worksheets.
- Reapply for financial aid each year and use the Renewal FAFSA process.
- Along with isac.org, the financial aid office is the best source for information about all federal, state, institutional and private financial aid programs.
- Your college may be required to verify your financial situation and may ask you to supply additional information (e.g., federal tax return forms).
- Although cost is always a consideration, check out the financial aid packages from different schools. More expensive colleges may offer more financial aid through institutional funding, making their cost comparable to a less expensive school. Another option is to start at the local community college and then transfer to a four-year college later.

When You Receive a Scholarship

- Make sure you understand the conditions of the scholarship. Know what you are accepting and agreeing to do!
- Report to the financial aid office any scholarships from outside groups you are/will be receiving.

If You Need A Loan

- Follow procedures outlined by the financial aid office when applying for a student or parent loan.
- Make sure you understand all the loan terms and how it will be repaid before you take out the loan.
- Only borrow what you need!

* FAFSA - Free Application for Federal Student Aid - All students must file this application to be considered for the federal Pell grant, the Monetary Award Program (MAP) grant, other federal and state grants and federal student loans.

** Check with your high school counselor or see the Outreach Activities calendar at isac.org for information and a listing of FAFSA workshops and events in your community. All events are free and open to the public.