COLLEGE COACH
consultants

November 2025

Seniors—
File Early Decision/Early Action applications.

Create college portals. Check them weekly.

Check college for early scholarship deadlines.

Send 1st marking period grades for ED/EA schools that require them.

Work on the remaining college applications.
File FAFSA and CSS Profile, if applicable.

Complete STARS (formerly SRAR) if applicable.

Underclassmen—
Look for PSAT score release and review the report.

Map out a plan for test prep with an advisor.

December 2025

Seniors—
File any additional college applications before deadline dates.

Schedule the spring SAT or ACT
testing dates.

Helping Your Teen Choose A College Major

One of the most significant decisions your child will face in college is choosing a major. As a parent, your role isn't to decide for them, but to guide, support, and help them explore options with confidence.

Choosing a major isn't a one-time decision; it's a process of exploration. By combining honest self-assessment, real conversations with professionals, and ongoing curiosity, your student can make thoughtful choices that lead to both fulfillment and opportunity. Keep in mind that only about 46% of graduates end up working directly in their field of study, which shows how often skills transfer across careers.

High school coursework lays an important foundation. Students who complete a well-rounded set of challenging academic classes keep more doors open when it comes to college majors. They enter college better prepared and less likely to spend time catching up in subjects they avoided. Remember, roughly one-third to half of the classes a college student takes will be in their major, so a strong general foundation pays off.

Encourage exploration beyond the classroom. Support your child's involvement in extracurricular activities, volunteer work, and hobbies that reflect genuine interests. Summer enrichment programs, internships, or part-time jobs help students "test drive" interests. Just as valuable are conversations with adults who work in careers that interest your teen. Encourage your student to ask questions: *What does a typical day look like? What did you major in? What do you wish you'd known in college?* These conversations often spark insight and confidence.

Many high schoolers have only a vague idea of how majors differ in focus, workload, or style of learning. Together, look at curriculum guides on college web-sites to see what courses are required for different majors. Marquette University's "Choosing Your Major" page offers a clear overview of how to explore academic interests and connect them to career paths.

Encourage them to use free online tools to understand their strengths and interests better. Students can also explore the O*NET Interest Profiler, which matches personal interests with potential career fields, the 123test Career Test, or the University of Arizona's CareerExplorer, which links personality traits and skills to career options. Using multiple assessments helps reveal consistent patterns and new ideas.

When your student gets their results, encourage reflection rather than rigid conclusions. Ask: *Which careers sound exciting or surprising? Which feels like me?* Then take it a step further, talk with professionals or family members in various fields, seek out summer internships or programs where you can explore majors/fields. Interests often evolve, so revisiting these tools every year or two can be eye-opening.

As you and your student look at colleges, ask about academic advising and career support. A good advising program helps students make informed choices, plan course loads, and connect with internships and mentors. *Even the best services, however, only work when students use them*. Encourage your child to meet with advisors early, even if they think they already know their path.

Finally, reassure your teen that it's okay to change direction. According to several sources, 35%-80% of students change majors. Studies show that switching majors doesn't always delay graduation and can actually lead to a better academic fit.

Focus on Majors: Considering a Major in Genetics

Career Paths for Genetics Majors

· Genetic Technologist / Laboratory Technician

· Research Associate in Biotech

· Pharmaceutical Sales Representative

· Clinical Research Coordinator

· Genetic Counselor Assistant

· Public Health Specialist

· Forensic Scientist

· Plant Geneticist or Breeder

· Animal Breeding / Veterinary Genetics Assistant

· Conservation Biologist Data and Computational Analyst

· Bioinformatics Technician / Data Analyst

· Biostatistician (entry-level)

· Science Writer / Communicator

· Policy Analyst or Regulatory Affairs Assistant

Fascinated by heredity and the mysteries of DNA? A major in genetics might be the perfect fit. Genetics is the study of inheritance and variation in all living organisms—from humans to plants and even viruses. It blends biology, chemistry, and computer science and is central to understanding everything from disease prevention to agricultural innovation.

Genetics majors begin with a strong foundation in math and science. Most programs require coursework in biology, chemistry, biochemistry, calculus, and statistics. High school students interested in this path should take four years of math and science, especially biology, chemistry, physics, and calculus, to prepare for college-level rigor.

Because genetics is highly research-oriented, students spend significant time in labs designing experiments, analyzing data, and communicating results. Upper-level courses might include molecular genetics, genomics and bioinformatics, human genetics, and evolutionary biology. These studies build both scientific knowledge and problem-solving skills that are valuable across many careers.

While genetics is an excellent foundation for medical or graduate school, it also opens doors to a variety of careers right after college. Graduates may become laboratory technicians, science writers, or representatives for biotechnology companies. The fast-growing biotech industry offers roles that combine research, technology, and business, while data analysis and lab management positions suit students who enjoy leadership and hands-on work.

Genetics plays a vital role in both healthcare and agriculture. In medicine, genetic testing helps identify disease risks and tailor treatments to a patient's DNA, a step toward personalized medicine. In agriculture, genetics improves crop yields and develops disease-resistant plants, addressing food-security challenges. These real-world applications make genetics one of the most dynamic and relevant fields in science today.

When exploring potential colleges, go beyond the course catalog. **Research opportunities:** Look for schools with active undergraduate research programs. Check department websites to see what projects are offered during the school year or summer, and whether students can join faculty-led work early on or take courses with research components.

Internship connections: Choose programs with ties to nearby hospitals, biotech companies, or research centers. These connections make it easier to find meaningful internships. For instance, Cornell University offers students access to industry-linked labs.

Resources and labs: Explore how many labs a campus has and whether it's received recent funding for new facilities. Department newsletters often highlight student research, new technology, and faculty achievements.

Concentration options: If you already know your focus—bioinformatics, paleogenetics, or epigenetics—look for schools that match your interests. Smaller colleges may also offer strong mentorship and better lab access than large universities.

Genetics isn't limited to the lab. Consider programs that offer fieldwork, museum partnerships, or study abroad options focused on ecology or global health. Hands-on learning beyond the classroom deepens understanding and expands opportunity.

Strong programs include Rutgers University, UC Davis, and the University of Wisconsin–Madison, known for their robust research and lab opportunities. Arizona State offers a concentration in genetics, cell, and developmental biology within its biological sciences major, while the University of Michigan and UC San Diego feature genetics specializations within molecular biology programs. Students drawn to agricultural genetics might thrive at a research powerhouse like Texas A&M.

Genetics is a field that rewards curiosity and persistence, perfect for students eager to uncover how life's blueprint shapes our world.

Financial Matters: How to Find Colleges That Offer Merit Aid

Perhaps you've realized that you won't qualify for need-based aid after running net price calculator tools or an SAI tool. That can be discouraging. The good news is that many colleges award merit aid, which is money given for achievement rather than financial need. Understanding how merit aid works, how it differs from need-based aid, and how to find generous colleges can make a difference.

Merit Aid vs. Need-Based Aid

• **Need-based aid** depends on your financial situation, as calculated through the FAFSA and/or the CSS Profile. Federal grants, subsidized loans, college/university grants, and work-study programs fall into this category.

• **Merit aid** is different. It's awarded for academic success, leadership, or unique talents, or other strengths that make a student stand out, regardless of income or assets. Colleges use it to attract students who would enhance their community or academic reputation.

Some colleges offer only need-based aid, while others provide large merit awards to students they especially want to enroll. Knowing which type of school you're dealing with can help you focus your search.

In his book *Who Gets In and Why*, Jeff Selingo describes colleges as either buyers or sellers in the admissions marketplace.

Seller schools are the well-known, highly selective universities such as Harvard, Stanford, and Amherst. They admit a small percentage of applicants, and all of their financial support is need-based.

Buyer schools are institutions that compete for strong students. They may have higher acceptance rates or be trying to raise their academic profile, so they use merit scholarships to attract applicants. Understanding this buyer-seller model can help you build a smart and budget-friendly college list. Look for high-quality "buyer" schools where your GPA and test scores place you in the top 25 percent of admitted students. That is where you're most likely to receive generous merit aid. Examples include Dickinson College, Elon University, and Santa Clara University.

How to Use the Common Data Set

The Common Data Set (CDS) is one of the best tools for finding schools that give significant merit aid. It's a standardized report that colleges post online. It can be found by searching for the college's name and the term "Common Data Set."

When you find it, scroll to Section H, titled *Financial Aid*, and look for:

• **Percentage of students without financial need who received merit aid.** A figure above 10 to 15 percent shows that the school awards merit aid.

• **Average non-need-based scholarship amount.** If the average is $20,000 or more, the college is generous with top applicants.

• **Overall percentage of students receiving institutional aid.** This shows how much the college uses scholarships to shape its incoming class.

By comparing this data across several colleges, you can identify where your academic profile might lead to substantial awards.

It's also worth knowing that some colleges offer full-tuition or even full-ride scholarships for students with exceptional grades and test scores. These awards are highly competitive and may require separate applications.

A good place to start is by checking lists of full-tuition scholarships available at various universities.

• **Keep in mind that not all schools allow merit and financial aid to be combined.** Policies vary by institution regarding the stacking or combining of various types of aid. Contact the financial aid office at each school to confirm how they handle different types of aid in combination.

A smart approach is to group colleges by how they handle merit aid:

• **Likely full pay (sellers):** Highly selective private universities and top public flagships that give little or no merit aid.

• **Likely partial merit (moderate buyers):** Strong regional or mid-tier national universities that award $10,000 to $25,000 per year to top students.

• **High-merit potential (aggressive buyers):** Colleges seeking to raise rankings or geographic diversity that may offer generous merit aid, including full-tuition or full-ride scholarships.

Next, compare your GPA and test scores with each school's middle 50 percent range. If you're above the midpoint, you're in the zone for merit aid.

The Bottom Line

Finding colleges that offer merit aid is about strategy, not luck. It begins with understanding buyers and sellers, then using tools like the CDS to see where your accomplishments are most valued. As Jeff Selingo reminds readers, college admissions isn't about finding one perfect school. It's about finding the right fit for your goals, personality, and budget. When you focus on value and alignment rather than name recognition, you often discover that a reasonable (for you) financial offer can also be one of many great-fit schools.

Ace Your College Interview

College interviews come in several formats: 'informational', 'recommended', and 'evaluative.' Colleges offer interviews because they want to enroll students who will enhance their campus community and bring new ideas. Interviews are also wonderful opportunities for you to ask questions. Think of the interview as a two-way conversation; it's not just the college wanting to learn about you, but also about you finding out as much as you can to make an informed decision.

Informational interviews are the most common. This type focuses on an exchange of information: what do you want to know about the college, and what do they need to know about you? Interviews are typically conducted by a current student or an alumnus off campus at a public location convenient for you. Interviewers will reach out to schedule a meeting, usually at a coffee shop or on Zoom. Your interviewer will only have your contact information; they haven't read your application, essays, or seen your academic record. Their role is to assess your interest level and answer your questions. They provide feedback to the college but cannot render admissions decisions.

Come well-prepared with 5-7 written questions that highlight your passions and enthusiasm. Examples: "I've read about exciting research in the math department; how easy is it for first-year students to engage in faculty-led research?" or "I'm interested in the Living and Learning options. Can you share more?"

Recommended interviews are optional, but colleges suggest them for a reason. Participating shows genuine enthusiasm and initiative, especially at schools that track “demonstrated interest.” It’s a chance to personalize your application and show that you’ve taken the time to engage beyond the written materials.

Evaluative interviews become part of your application review. The interviewer will be trying to understand if you align with the types of students they're seeking. They'll be assessing intellectual curiosity, resilience, academic integrity, and personal drive. Be ready to showcase what makes you a good fit. Know what you want from the college, do your homework thoroughly, and reread your application.

Be on time or early. Learn about your interviewer if possible; prepare questions; make steady eye contact; and mention that this is your first-choice college, and they'll note that in their report. Send a thank-you note that evening. Email is fine, but no texts! Expect questions about your major choice, why you want to attend, and your high school experiences. Talk about yourself in ways that highlight your strengths and connect your interests with the college's mission. Mention things not in your application, be enthusiastic, and practice in advance. Ask a counselor or another adult to practice for your interview to ease your nerves. Interviewers understand you're nervous, but try to keep nerves in check. Breathe deeply, smile big, and walk in with confidence! You'll do just fine!

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