

MAJOR FAQ TOPICS

These questions and answers are intended only to provide a quick response to some frequently asked questions. A number of these answers will only raise more questions, which should be directed to your ASPIRE Advisor, or your high school college counselor.

SELECTION OF A CAREER FIELD

Do I have to select a career field before I register for college?

No, but it helps to reduce the amount of time you spend in college if you do. But if you really don't know what you want to study, you can take a generalized series of classes. These classes will meet some of the general graduation requirements so that you don't just waste your time. This will give you a chance to further explore your career options. Be sure to discuss this approach with a college counselor.

Do I have to get my career field approved by anyone?

No. But you should talk to an advisor at the college you plan to attend to see if there are special requirements which must be met before you register for that particular course of study.

Should I discuss my potential career choices with anyone?

By all means. Your parents, your high school guidance counselor, people whom you know that work in the field, your ASPIRE Advisor if you have one, and an advisor at the college you wish to attend.

How can I find out more about a specific career field?

Use the Oregon Career Information System, found at oregoncis.uoregon.edu/login. A large number of career fields are listed alphabetically, and much valuable information is available there. This source will also provide information on related career fields you may not have considered.

I don't know what I want to do. How can I start to investigate careers?

First, you need to understand yourself, what you are interested in, and what you like and don't like to do. There are a number of ways to start this analysis of yourself. First, take the self-assessment analyses available on-line at oregoncis.uoregon.edu/login. Look under "Exploration Tools."

Next, take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery "test" (ASVAB). Finally, take the analysis tools available at EducationPlanner.org. Print the results of each of the computer-based tools, and take them, with the results of the ASVAB to your school career counselor or your ASPIRE Advisor.

I'm already interested in one or more careers. How can I find out more about them?

Look at oregoncis.uoregon.edu/login. Click on "Occupations" and then on the specific career field(s) in which you are interested. Then click every link and topic shown. You will be given a wealth of introductory information on the career field, with links to further related information. You may want to print and save some of this information for later review with your counselor, ASPIRE Advisor, and parents.

What other sources are available for career information?

You could "job shadow" someone currently working in the field. This would involve spending a day at their work site to see what they actually do. Your high school probably holds or publicizes Career Days which feature a specific field. You could attend those. Finally, there are trade unions and professional organizations which would be happy to provide more information about the work their members do.

How could I gain a little practical exposure to the career field?

Easy. Find out where the work is performed, and then investigate potential volunteer positions. For example, persons interested in the medical professions could volunteer at a hospital. Potential social service opportunities are available at food banks and nursing homes. Finally, it may be possible to actually work in the field part-time or summers. If you are interested in administrative or business management work, a summer job as a clerk could provide some insight into those fields.

How can I best obtain information from job shadowing or other exposure to persons in the field?

Plan ahead what you want to find out. Be prepared with questions before you start any interview. Do not go on a job shadow experience without having identified specific information you wish to obtain. An interview questionnaire is useful, so that you can be prepared when you meet the person. A sample is available from your ASPIRE Advisor, Career Counselor at school, or in books about interviewing (which are available in

HIGH SCHOOL COURSEWORK

What courses should I take in High School?

The first courses you should schedule are those mandatory courses required for admission to college. These are not necessarily the same as the courses need to graduate from high school. If you have a specific college in mind, find out what courses they require for admission. If you do not have a specific college in mind, use one of the Oregon University System's schools (OSU, PSU, etc.)

How can I find out what a college requires for admission?

Check the college web site. It will give you that information. Your high school college and career center may have printed information on that subject in the form of a college catalog. Admission to college is not the same as admission to a specific course of study. For example, medical professions have different requirements for admission to the programs than do programs in social services or business, even at the same college or university. Be sure to check both the school and the departmental requirements for admission to the specific program you are interested in.

What elective courses are useful for everyone?

A number of courses in high school provide skills and knowledge which will be of value to any career field, or useful in obtaining practical information for life. Included in this category are courses related to computer productivity programs such as Word, Access, Excel, Power Point, and similar subjects. Another category would be those for life skills, such as Investments, Personal Finance, Business Law, and US Government. Which of these to take, and how many of them, is up to you, but see the next question. You should discuss the selection of courses with your high school counselor, ASPIRE Advisor, and your parents.

What courses are useful to help prepare for my college major?

Using the Oregon Career Information System, oregoncis.uoregon.edu/login, look up the occupation in which you are interested. There should be a tab for "Preparation". Clicking on that will eventually lead you to useful high school courses. You should take as many of these as you can, because it will provide you with information that will either convince you that you are interested in the field, or that you are not. You should discuss the selection of courses with your school counselor, ASPIRE Advisor, and your parents.

What are AP classes?

AP (Advanced Placement) classes are courses taught at the college level but are offered at the high school. They provide high school credit toward graduation, but upon passing a special exam, they will also provide college credit in the subject. The courses are more difficult than high school classes in the same subject, but the increased rigor

of the class helps prepare the student for work at the college level. It is highly recommended that the student headed for college take one or more AP classes to help prepare them for college level work. But until the student has proven that they can handle that level of work, they should only register for one of the AP classes at a time. There is generally a fee charged to take the exam, but it will be less than the cost of taking the course at college.

What are Honors Classes?

These are high school classes which are more demanding than the usual high school coursework. They help prepare the student for the more challenging courses in later years of high school and college. They should be taken if available so that the student can become accustomed to performing at a higher level of work.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Should I participate in extra-curricular activities in high school?

By all means. Such activities, such as sports, clubs, community service, and even employment provide opportunities for students to see more of life than just the classroom. You'll learn to work with others, to experience situations and learn skills not available in the classroom. It may be possible to engage in such activities which are related to career fields you are considering, and give you an opportunity to determine if you really want to pursue that course of study. Certainly these activities provide the opportunity to meet new people and develop better interpersonal relationships. Scholarship committees look for applicants who have participated in extra-curricular activities because it demonstrates initiative, a willingness to work, and a more broadly developed personality.

Which types of extra-curricular activities are best?

The activities which provide the student with additional skills or knowledge, such as volunteering to teach younger children, or assisting in a hospital are more valuable than baby-sitting or picking fruit. Activities which show that the student has tried to gain new experiences by helping others will be looked upon favorably when applying to colleges and for scholarships. Activities which just fill idle hours with no increase in skills will be less valuable.

TYPES OF POST HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

Are my only choices after high school to either attend college or get a job?

Absolutely not! But in one thing you do have no choice. You will need further education and training, even if it is just on-the-job training. Nobody knows instinctively how to flip burgers and refill coke machines, let alone more complex tasks.

I'm not a good student. What are some alternatives for me?

There are a lot of them. Some provide training at no cost to the student, such as some trade union apprentice training programs, and the military services, which have many fields in which they provide training. A number of technical training programs are available in vocational-technical schools which concentrate in building technical skills, but these do not provide the broader education that is provided by a college. Most community colleges provide technical courses which lead to a certificate of accomplishment, often in less than two years. These programs enable the student to become employable quickly. Look at oregoncis.uoregon.edu/login under your occupational interests to find out what training is required, and how it can be obtained.

What is the difference between a state school and a private school?

A state school is one which is funded in part by the taxpayers of the state. Because of that, tuition and fees may be somewhat less than those at a private school. A private

school is not funded by taxpayers, but in part by contributions from alumni and other private sources of funds, such as religious denominations. Federal financial aid is available at both types of school. Other financial aid, such as grants and scholarships, may be more plentiful at private schools, which would help narrow the cost differences.

What is a community college?

Community colleges (CC) are schools which offer many different levels of programs for a wide variety of interests. Students may earn Associate (two-year) degrees in a number of subject areas. Some students attend CCs to get the courses they need for the first two years of a bachelor's degree, then transfer to a four-year school to complete the work. Other students study subjects not available in four-year schools. Still others concentrate on obtaining specific technical skills which will enable them to enter the workforce in a shorter period of time than a college education requires.

Are community colleges less expensive?

Generally, yes. Most community colleges charge lower tuition and fees than do four year schools, although books and supplies would be the same cost as at a four-year school. Since there are usually CCs close to most larger cities, it may be possible to continue to live at home, and save the added expense of having to rent an apartment or live in a college dorm.

Is there an advantage to attending a community college?

Community colleges may be a good first step for students to make, because they can obtain the first two years of their college education at a more convenient location, then transfer their credits to a four-year school to finish their education. Sometimes students can enroll in community colleges and a four year school at the same time, thus ensuring their admittance to the four-year school when they are ready to do so.

Students with financial concerns should carefully consider enrolling at a community college for their first two years of college to save money.

Are there relationships between community and four-year colleges?

Sometimes, in some subject areas. Many community colleges are developing "partnerships" with four year schools which may be of significant advantage to students. Check with the community college and four-year schools you are interested in to see if such an arrangement exists. In any event, students enrolling at a community college and planning to transfer to a four year school should discuss that plan with an advisor at the four-year school they are planning to attend to ensure that the courses the student plans to take will be transferable to the four-year school.

Is admission to a community college difficult?

No. In fact, it is much easier than admission to a four-year school. Four-year schools generally have a minimum high school GPA requirement, and require the applicant to have taken the SAT or ACT exams. Essays may be required. A lengthy admissions form is required. At a CC, no minimum GPA is required, and the application form is generally one page (although admission to specific programs such as nursing or dental hygiene requires much more documentation and is very competitive.)

Is it easy to transfer from a community college to a four-year school?

The ease of transferring depends upon many factors, such as courses taken and admission requirement at the four year school. Some courses may be transferable, others may not. Admission requirements for persons with some college experience

differ from those for new college students, so you should check with the four-year school to determine their policies and requirements.

Are there other types of training other than colleges?

Yes. There are trade or technical schools for selected trades such as the construction trades, real estate schools, and hair dresser schools. Some of these may be free if admitted, such as those for construction trades. Others may charge tuition, such as real estate schools. Costs and lengths of study vary considerably depending upon a number of factors. See your ASPIRE Advisor or high school counselor for further information if you are considering one of these schools.

What is a for-profit college?

This is a school which is run by a private firm for profit. It issues college degrees just as do state and private colleges. Costs may be higher than either of those classes of schools. The courses of study may vary in subject matter and length of time it takes to complete the studies. Students should make inquiries with persons currently working in the student's chosen career fields to learn how degrees from a particular school are accepted in the industry.

How can I tell what is the best school for me?

It is a myth to assume that there is one "best" school for a specific student. Many schools offer identical or near identical courses of study. Students should also consider cost of attendance, reputation of school, the college environment such as urban or rural campus, and other factors. Entrance to college is a very competitive process, and a prospective student should consider and apply to several colleges. Then, after the student has been accepted, and the financial aid package has been received from the schools, the student can make an informed decision about which school to attend.

Is training available in the military services?

Yes, many types of training are available from military services. However, some commitment of time is required so that the service may recoup its investment in the trainee. If the military service is of interest to you, contact your local recruiter for the service which interests you most.

SELECTING A COLLEGE

How do I find a college which provides the educational opportunities I want?

Go to the Oregon Career Information System (oregoncis.uoregon.edu/login), and select the work you want to do under "Occupations." Then follow the links toward career preparation and colleges that provide the programs to prepare for that career. You may then select the state you wish to check, and a list of schools with that program in that state will be presented. Once you have the name of the schools that provide the program, you may then review the material the school has put on it's own web site.

What other things should I consider in selecting a school?

There are a number of other factors to consider. Live at home, or live at school? Urban or rural environment? Geographical location? Does it have the sports and extracurricular activities you want to participate in? Is the cost within your ability to fund? Do you meet the admission requirements? Some of these factors are important to all people, but not in the same order of priority. Consider what you want to experience, then make a choice.

APPLYING FOR COLLEGE

What are the first steps in applying for college admission?

1. Determine that the college meets your requirements.
2. Determine that you meet all requirements for admission (have the required courses, grades, tests taken, etc.)
3. Obtain the application and all related instructions from the school or the school's web site.
4. Complete the application and have it reviewed by others to insure that it is complete and accurate. Keep a copy and submit by the due date. Submitting the application ahead of the due date is even better.

Should I apply to more than one school?

It is highly recommended that you apply to more than one school, particularly if you are applying to four-year schools. Each application you submit requires application fees of \$25 to \$75, so you want to be realistic about how many you need to submit in order to minimize expenses yet maximize your opportunity for admission. Some schools will now waive the application fee if you submit your application online.

In addition, the schools with higher admission standards generally require formal essays, thus more time will be required in preparing the application packages.

If you are applying to a CC, you need only file an application for admission with the school of your choice.

Do I need letters of recommendation?

That will depend upon the requirements of the specific school to which you are applying. Some schools do require them, others do not.

When do I apply?

Check with the school to find out when their application deadline is. Some schools have two deadlines: one for guaranteed early admission (may be called "Early Admission Deadline") which may be in fall or early winter, and the other for regular admission, which will be in the spring. If the school has an early admission deadline, use that one. It will get a major piece of work out of the way early in the senior year, will put you in line for early consideration for that school's scholarship dollars, and will leave more time later for seeking and applying for other scholarships.

Should I apply using a written application, or an on-line application?

If the school offers the choice, use the on-line application. They will generally be processed faster than paper applications. Again, some schools may waive their application fee if you submit online. Doing so is also an indication to the school that you are familiar with computers and internet access and use. Be sure to keep a copy of your application.

Who should I obtain recommendations from?

People you ask to write recommendations should be those who are familiar with your academic record and capabilities, as well as those who are familiar with your school activities outside the classroom. It is a good idea to have a brief written description of your high school life (both academic and extra-curricular) to hand to the people you are asking for recommendations. This will give them additional information about you, and they will probably use some of it in preparing their letters. Give them at least two weeks to prepare the letter.

COLLEGE ENTRANCE TESTING

What tests do I need to take to get into college?

In general, four-year colleges and universities require that applicants take either the ACT or the SAT test. Sometimes it may not necessarily be a deciding factor in admission decisions, but the scores must be submitted. Community colleges generally

do not require these tests to be taken, but will require that their own placement exam be taken to properly place the student into the proper level classes. To find out what tests are required for the schools to which you are applying, check the college's web site.

Why should I take the PSAT?

Taking the PSAT will give you experience with the pressures and format of the standardized test, and the format of the SAT. It is good preparation for the SAT. It will also indicate areas on the SAT which you may need to work on to get a better score to submit with your admissions application to college. For high school juniors taking the test, it is also the only way to qualify for National Merit Scholar recognition, and possible related scholarships.

When should I take the PSAT?

The PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test) is given in October of the applicant's junior year of high school. Check with your ASPIRE Advisor for specific date and location.

When should I take the SAT?

You should take the SAT in the spring of the junior year of high school. That way, if you feel your score could be improved by taking the test again, you have time to retake it in September or October of your senior year.

Should I take the ACT instead of the SAT?

You should determine which test is required by the schools you wish to apply to. Some schools only accept one or the other of those tests. Most schools accept either test. In general, the ACT may be better suited to students who generally do well in school, but not on standardized tests. The SAT tends to benefit students with better vocabularies, and who do well on reasoning tests.

How can I prepare to take the ACT or SAT?

Commercial books are available at bookstores, and in libraries, which provide sample tests and suggested ways to approach the tests. Generally, high school college counselors have a few copies of the books available. In addition, information is available on the test's web sites mentioned below.

Where can I get information on these tests?

Information on the PSAT and the SAT is available at www.collegeboard.com. ACT information is available at www.actstudent.org. These sites will have information on the test schedules and fees, as well as ways to prepare for the exams, and sample exam questions.

Should I take a special course to prepare for the ACT or SAT?

You certainly can do so, and there is some indication that these courses may help. But they are expensive. Before signing up with one of them, discuss the course with your high school college counselor, and investigate free methods to prepare for the exam.

Are there any other tests required for admission?

There may be, so check early with the schools you are considering to see what additional admissions requirements are, including requirements for entrance into specific programs of study.

WRITING ESSAYS

Will I need to write essays?

Probably. Essays may be required by college admissions offices for admission to the school, or to specific courses of study within the school. They will be required when applying for scholarships. However, essays are rarely needed for entrance to CCs. Be

sure to keep copies of any essays prepared. You may be able to reuse portions of them for other scholarship applications.

What do I need to know before I start writing essays?

Since the persons reading the essays will be trying to understand who you are, you need to present an insight into yourself in the essay. It's key that you understand who you are and what you are interested in before you begin writing. If you are unclear about your goals, objects and beliefs, you cannot write a meaningful essay. Spend a couple of hours considering your strengths, weaknesses and interests. Consider the "whys" as much as the "wants." Explain why you want to do a specific type of work, rather than just state that you want to do it.

What are the essay reviewers looking for?

Reviewers are looking for an insight into the applicant's personality, goals, hopes and attitudes. The writer needs to quickly point out their favorable aspects, and do so in a way that sets them apart from other applicants. It is often helpful to write the essay in the form of a story (a true one!) about themselves. In the case of scholarships, writers should be aware of the goals of the sponsoring organization and indicate how the student's goals fit well with the organization's goals.

Can I have help writing the essays?

The work on the essays should be the student's. The student may of course ask others to review the drafts and comment on them. Good people to ask to review the essays would be parents, advisors, coaches, and others familiar with the student and their goals. Be sure that you proofread the final essay, and have someone else do so also.

What resources are available for helping prepare essays?

Numerous books are available in libraries and bookstores which explain how to write essays. Some are available in high school libraries. Reading a couple of these references before starting to write any essays will provide some valuable insights into how the essays will be reviewed and what the reviewers like and do not like.

COLLEGE COSTS

What does it cost to attend college?

To determine cost of attendance, gather information from the colleges you are interested in attending, including tuition, fees and books. If you plan to move away from home, you must also include normal living expenses such as rents and utilities, or dorm costs. Finally, don't forget personal expenses such as transportation, clothing and entertainment. Estimate all of these expenses and set up a four-year budget.

What is the Expected Family Contribution (EFC)?

The EFC is an amount calculated by the Federal Government based on information supplied on the FAFSA. It shows the amount that the government expects the family to pay for college. It considers such factors as family size, assets and income. This amount will be provided to you soon after you have submitted the FAFSA. In general, the colleges you apply to will provide you with a financial aid package which is equal to the cost of attending that school, less the EFC.

What are personal expenses?

Personal expenses include clothing, entertainment, cell phones, i-pods, transportation, and any other expense likely to be incurred even if not attending college. It does not include any college-related expenses.

How can I find out about college costs for the school I want to attend?

Generally, college costs can be obtained from printed college catalogs, college class schedules, and on the college's official web site. Be sure to include books, tuition, lab

fees, incidental fees and other expenses applicable to your field of study. The costs of a personal computer should be included in your estimate, although most schools have computer labs available for nominal additional charges.

How can I prepare a budget?

Take a look at the budget format shown on Pg. 59 of the ASPIRE Advising Handbook. This shows most possible categories of expense. Estimate the amount you would expect to spend during the school year (September – June), and enter that. You may project costs for following school years by adding inflation factors for each year, such as 5% more for each successive year of study. This won't be exact, but it will provide you with a rough idea of how much college will cost.

What financing sources are available to me?

A number of financing sources are available to you. Federal grants, federal work-study programs, subsidized and unsubsidized loans, outside work, family savings, and private loans are all sources of college funding. Ask your ASPIRE Advisor or high school college counselor for suggestions on how to find out more about this

FINANCIAL AID

What financial aid is available?

Financial aid can come from numerous sources. Grants are the preferred source, as they do not have to be repaid. Scholarships also do not require repayment. Work-study programs provide campus related jobs which pay a salary which can be applied to school costs. Finally, there are subsidized and un-subsidized loans, which must be repaid with interest, although repayment may be deferred until after school is completed.

When do I apply for financial aid?

You will begin applying for financial aid in the fall term of your senior year in high school. You will continue to apply for financial aid throughout your college career.

What is the FAFSA?

The FAFSA is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. It is an extensive form requiring extensive financial information about the student and family financial situation. It should be drafted in December, submitted as soon after January 1 as possible, and updated as new or more accurate information is available. The FAFSA is the only way to apply for federal grants, work-study jobs, and federal loan programs, and is often required by scholarship committees. The FAFSA data is the basis for calculation of the EFC. Since federal aid is limited, the earlier the application is submitted, the better the chances for success.

What is the Financial Aid Package?

The Financial Aid Package is prepared by the school or schools to which you have applied for admission. It will be based on the FAFSA submitted in January, and the EFC received in that process. The package will outline the amount of Federal grants, Federal work-study employment, and Federal subsidized and unsubsidized loans.

When you have received all of the packages from the schools to which you have applied, you may evaluate the packages, and select the one you wish.

SEEKING SCHOLARSHIPS

Should I apply for scholarships?

If you have a clear concept of who you are and where you want to go, yes. A high GPA is not always required. However, since scholarships will be awarded to those who the

scholarship providers believe will be successful in college, the student should have a satisfactory reason why high school academic achievements are not as high as they could have been.

When do I apply for scholarships?

There is no single date for applying for scholarships. Each scholarship awarding organization establishes its own deadline. The scholarship “season” extends from November until June of the student’ senior year of high school.

Where do I look for scholarships?

There are a number of sources of information on searching for scholarships. A brief list follows. Your ASPIRE Advisor or high school counselor can provide further useful suggestions.

1. Register at internet-based scholarship search engines such as www.scholarshipexperts.com, <http://oregoncis.uoregon.edu> (financial aid sort), www.fastweb.com, and others.
2. Review the OSAC (Oregon Student Assistance Commission) list of scholarships at GetCollegeFunds.org. OSAC has a universal application, so you may apply for more than one scholarship using only one application form.
3. Contact the college’s athletic department if you are planning to play sports
4. Contact the academic department of the college to see if there are scholarship opportunities there
5. Parent’s or student’s employer
6. Banks and credit unions where the family does business
7. Labor unions if a family member is a member
8. Fraternal organizations
9. Religious organizations where the student is active
10. High School college counselor
11. Library books on seeking scholarships

How many scholarships do I need to apply for?

As many as you have time for. The more applications you submit, the more chances you have of succeeding.

It is important to consider the size of the applicant pool when choosing scholarships to apply for. If you are applying for scholarships at the national level, such as those found on the internet-based search engines, you will be competing against the largest possible pool of applicants. As you work your way down to scholarships at the state, local and school level, that pool shrinks, which increases your odds of winning a scholarship.

On average, successful scholarship applicants submit seven applications for each scholarship received. It can become a lot of work, thus it pays to start preparing early. For example, you can begin preparing essays and searching for scholarship sources in your junior year of high school.

COMMON COLLEGE TERMS

Semester – A period of time during which a complete class is presented. Generally, a semester is about 4 ½ months long.

Term – A period of time during which a complete class is presented. Generally, a term is about three months long.

Semester (or Term) Hour – the measure of how much credit is given for a specific course. Colleges will either be on the semester system or the term system. This can be determined from the college’s web site or catalog. This may or not be related to the amount of time spent in class, depending upon the specific classes being taken.

College Catalog – A publication which explains the college’s policies and procedures related to academic and social activities on the campus. It will also explain the variety of programs offered, and what the admissions requirements are for each of the programs. The catalog will probably be available both in printed and electronic (web-based) versions.

Class schedule – Generally a printed listing of each class to be offered during a particular semester or term, showing when the classes are offered, where they meet, who the instructor is, and other key information. Students and their advisors use these to plan the student’s activities as they work toward their degrees.

COMMON NEW COLLEGE STUDENT QUESTIONS

How do I know which classes to take?

College classes are of two types: required and elective. The college catalog and in most cases, the web site, will provide a listing of all classes required for earning specific degrees. In addition, the catalog will provide information on the types of electives which may be taken to complete work on the degree. Finally, you should be in touch with your college advisor so that you can be informed of any changes to class requirements. A check with the counselor each year is essential.

When do I register for classes?

Find out from the college when registration begins. A number of schools use computer registration processes. Register for classes as early as possible, as class size is limited in a number of courses. Everyone working toward the same degree as you are will be needing the same courses. Early registration is key to getting what you need when you need it.