THE 4 STEPS TO COLLEGE CHECKLIST

WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

isac.org
Find your local ISACorps member and discover free tools and resources for college, career, money management, and financial aid planning.

ISAC VIRTUAL 1-ON-1 MEETINGS
Book a confidential virtual meeting with an ISAC expert to get free help with college planning and financial aid. **isac.org/Booking**

Questions about ISAC Financial Aid Programs? Contact:
Student Engagement and Support
800.899.ISAC (4722)
isac.studentservices@illinois.gov

CHOOSING A COLLEGE AND APPLYING

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.
- 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.
- Sign up for the ISAC First Generation Scholars Network at **isac.org/FirstGen** to get additional support and resources on your path to education after high school.

2 PUSH YOURSELF / Working a little harder today will make getting into college even easier.

- Have your school counselor help you pick the courses that can help you get 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.
- Use the tools on **isac.org** to search for colleges and scholarships, navigate the financial aid process, learn about careers, and more.
- Take the SAT and/or ACT in your junior year. Check with your school counselor for test schedules.
- Find out admission requirements and make sure you fulfill them. Most colleges require 3 to 4 years of high school math, English, science, and social studies. A lot of colleges also want at least 2 years of a foreign language.

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.
- Participate in extracurricular activities to help you determine your interests, which can help lead you to the right college.
- Know your Grade Point Average (GPA), class rank, and SAT and/or ACT scores.
- Check out the websites of colleges you are interested in to get information about the college and its programs. You can also use the college resources on **isac.org** to help narrow your search. Make sure to discuss your choices with your parents or guardians 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.
- Sign up for Illinois' Direct Admission program at **oneclickadmit.org** in your junior year to receive admission offers in the fall of your senior year from participating Illinois public colleges and universities.
- Find out if the admission application process at your top choice colleges require any fees, transcripts, reference/recommendation letters, tests, essays, and/or interviews. In some instances, fee waivers may be available.
- 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 graduation rate, and talk with the financial aid office about your aid package. Check college websites for virtual tour opportunities.
- Find out if the college requires you to pay an enrollment deposit to reserve your spot.
- Let colleges you applied to know your final decision and make sure to sign up for placement testing and student housing, if needed.

Track and complete these separate processes

MEET DEADLINES

- Apply for admission to colleges — Date completed: _____/_____/_____
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) or Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid — Date completed: _____/_____/_____
- Send acceptance form/enrollment deposit — Date completed: _____/_____/_____
- Housing application and fees — Date completed: _____/_____/_____
- Sign up for placement testing — Date completed: _____/_____/_____
- Sign up for class registration/advising — Date completed: _____/_____/_____

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 other sources of financial aid by visiting **isac.org**. Search for scholarships using the tools and resources on the ISAC's website. Don't be fooled by services that ask you to pay for information and guarantee results — this information is available for free through your school, ISAC, or elsewhere online.
- In your junior year, use the Federal Student Aid Estimator at **studentaid.gov/aid-estimator** to get your estimated federal financial aid and the MAP Estimator on **isac.org** to estimate your eligibility for the Illinois Monetary Award Program (MAP).
- Get summer jobs or internships that relate to your career interests.

SENIOR YEAR

- Contact your ISACorps member to get free help in completing your financial aid applications. Work with your ISACorps member and use the tools on isac.org to learn more about scholarships ad financial aid.
- Beware of companies that ask you to pay them for help with applications and scholarship searches – they may be scams or frauds.
- Get ready to fill out the FAFSA* or, for qualifying students, the Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid (Alternative Application),** as soon as the application becomes available for the school year you plan to attend college, and check with the college financial aid office for other required forms and deadlines.
- If you will be completing the FAFSA, you will need to create a Studentaid.gov account at **studentaid.gov/fsa-id**. Parents will need a Studentaid.gov account separate from the student's.
- While in most instances the FAFSA will automatically pull in your tax information from the appropriate year, you can visit **studentaid.gov** to confirm the tax year information you will need to provide.
- Complete the FAFSA at **FAFSA.gov**, or, if eligible, the Alternative Application at **isac.org/AlternativeApp**. You can attend a Financial Aid Application Completion Workshop*** or meet with an ISACorps member for help filling out applications. Book a free virtual meeting with ISAC staff to complete your application by visiting **isac.org/booking**.
- 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. Use the resources on **isac.org** to search for other sources of financial aid. You can also search community-based organizations, local libraries, and companies, and ask high school counselors and financial aid administrators for suggestions.
- Complete and submit applications for financial aid programs that require an application separate from the FAFSA or Alternative Application.
- Check out the videos on ISAC's YouTube page for quick tips on college-going and financial aid.

AFTER SUBMITTING YOUR FAFSA

- You will receive a FAFSA Submission Summary (via email, if you supplied an email address) that will include all of the information you submitted on the FAFSA, as well as your Student Aid Index (SAI). Based on information provided in the FAFSA, your SAI is a number that the federal government uses as a guide to determine your financial need.
- Review the accuracy of your data and follow instructions on the FAFSA Submission Summary. If it needs to be corrected or if financial circumstances have changed, contact your college's financial aid office for assistance.

DECEMBER – SUMMER

- You will receive a financial aid offer from each college to which you have been admitted and that you listed on your FAFSA. Each offer will outline the types of financial aid and amounts you are eligible to receive.
- Compare financial aid packages and other factors to help you choose the college you will attend. You can use the Financial Aid Comparison Worksheet at **isac.org/FinAidWorksheet** to compare financial aid offers you have received.
- Accept all or part of the financial aid offered. Sign and return any required documents to the college by the deadline.

REMEMBER

- ► Meet deadline dates and keep copies and/or e-mail confirmation of all completed forms and worksheets.
- ► Reapply for financial aid each year.
- ► Along with **isac.org**, your college's financial aid office is the best source for information about all federal, state, institutional, and other financial aid programs.
- ► Your college may be required to verify your financial situation and may ask you to supply additional information.
- ► Although cost is always a consideration, check out the financial aid offers 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 Illinois Monetary Award Program (MAP) grant, other federal and state grants, and federal student loans.
** **Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid** – the application for certain students who are not eligible for federal student aid to apply for state financial aid.
*** **Check with your high school counselor** or visit the ISAC events page for information and a listing of workshops and events in your community. All events are free and open to the public.

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ISAC
Illinois Student Assistance Commission