



College Admissions from A-to-Z:

A Glossary of Terms

AANAPSI: *Asian-American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions.* Designated by the US Department of Education as institutions enrolling at least 10% of their total students who identify as Asian-American, Native American or Pacific Islander.

ACT: *One of the two major standardized tests used in the college admission process.* The ACT contains 4 multiple-choice English, Math, Reading, and Science tests. A writing section is optional. The test is scored in two phases: raw scores (number of questions answered correctly) and scaled scores. Students receive a composite score (the average of all four scores rounded to the nearest whole number).

Admit/Admission: *A favorable decision on a student's application.*

Advanced Placement: *A national program, created by the College Board, offering high school students the chance to take college-level coursework while in high school.* AP classes feature standardized curricula and culminate in an end-of-year examination. Colleges and universities assign students credit based on their test scores.

Alma Mater: *The institution from which a student graduated.*

Alumni: *A graduate of an institution*

Articulation Agreement: *An agreement between two institutions outlining requirements for transfer.* NOVA has articulation agreements with public colleges and universities in VA listing conditions NOVA students must meet to transfer.

Arts-Focused Undergraduate Institution (see also Conservatory): *A college or university focused on the study of visual and performing arts.*

Associate Degree: *A 2-year (4 semester) degree usually conferred by a community college. An associate's degree generally requires 60 credits.*

Audition: *A live performance for a panel as part of the admissions process.* Not all arts programs require auditions.

Bachelor's Degree: *Degree conferred by undergraduate institutions.* Also known as a 4-year degree, a bachelor's degree usually requires 120 credits.

Binding Agreement: *An agreement between an institution and a student, indicating that a student will attend that institution if accepted.* A student should only enter into a binding agreement with ONE school. See also: *Early Decision*

Black College Common Application: *An application portal allowing students to apply to over 60 Historically Black Colleges and Universities with one application.* Students can create a Black College Common Application Account [HERE](#).

Certificate: *Diploma from a non-credit post-secondary program.* Certificates often designate advanced training in a specialized field.

College: *An institution of higher learning focused on undergraduate study.*

Common Application: *An online portal allowing member students to create one application for over 1000 colleges and universities.* You can create your Common Application account [HERE](#).

Common Data Set: *A data report that many colleges and universities use to present admissions and enrollment data.* Every



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institution does not make public its Common Data Set report, but many do.

Credit Hour/ Carnegie Unit: *A measure of the time a student has devoted to a particular course.*

Generally, a credit is conferred for each 120 hours of study in a course.

Commuter Student: *A student who does not reside in on-campus housing at a particular university.*

Community College: *An institution that confers associate degrees.*

Conditional Admit: *An offer of admission contingent on the completion of set conditions (completing a summer bridge program or finishing a summer course with a certain grade).*

Conservatory: *See Arts Focused Undergraduate Institution. A conservatory is an undergraduate institution focused on the study of visual and performing arts.*

Defer (admissions decision): *A decision indicating a student must wait for an outcome on their application. Often students' applications are deferred from early action/decision to regular decision.*

Defer (Enrollment): *The choice of a student to enroll in a later school year from which they have been admitted. A college will save the student's space for a year. Often scholarships and financial aid previously awarded are not promised to students when they enroll.*

Demonstrated Interest: *Actions taken by prospective applicants to indicate enthusiasm for a particular institution. Campus visits, reading emails, attendance at high school visits, and webinar attendance are common ways students document their interest in institutions.*

Denial: *A negative decision on an application.*

Dual Enrollment: *A partnership program between a high school and an institution of higher learning where a student can attend classes at*

one school and earn both high school and college credit.

Domicile/Residency: *Designation, for tuition purposes, of a student's official residence,*

Double Major: *One diploma where a student fulfills the requirements for two different concentrations.*

Dual Degrees: *Two diplomas conferred at the same time. A student must fulfill the requirements of two majors at the same time.*

Early Action: *An admissions deadline occurring before regular decision. Early action (sometimes called priority) deadlines allow students to receive an admissions decision earlier. Schools often use early action deadlines as deadlines for institutional scholarships.*

Early Admission: *An admissions process where students who are not seniors gain admission before they graduate from high school.*

Early Decision: *A binding admission outcome. Students and schools enter into an agreement that accepted early decision students will attend that institution. Students may only apply to ONE institution Early Decision and they must sign an agreement to that effect.*

English Proficiency: *Designation that an international student can fully communicate in and understand English. Proficiency is generally demonstrated through meeting a score threshold on an established test.*



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Enrollment: *The process of joining the incoming class of students at a particular institution.*

Entrance Counseling: *A formalized meeting/education session for students who will be receiving financial aid. Entrance counseling is required for students accepting student loans.*

Essay/Personal Statement: *A focused piece of writing, usually in response to a prompt, that is used in the admissions process.*

FairTest.org: *An organization advocating for fairness in testing. FairTest maintains an interactive database listing the testing status of colleges and universities across the country.*

Fees: *Costs - in addition to tuition - which a student must pay to attend an institution.*

Fee Waiver: *An exemption from a fee - often application or enrollment - granted by an institution for a particular student.*

FERPA: *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. FERPA provides parents (and students over the age of 18) access to their educational records. During the college admissions process, students are prompted to waive their FERPA rights to keep recommendations and Common App Reports confidential.*

First-Generation Student: *A student whose parents have not graduated from a US-based college or university.*

First-Year Retention Rate: *The rate at which students return to a college or university after their freshman year. A high freshman retention rate demonstrates that colleges and universities provide adequate support and community for students to thrive during their transition from high school.*

First-Year Student: *Students in their initial year of study at a particular institution, regardless of their credit level. Students who complete dual enrollment coursework in high school are still considered first-year students.*

Fit: *The process of finding a college (or colleges) that match a student's academic, financial, and*

personal needs. Fit requires research and support from family members, college personnel, and high school personnel. SFA works with students to help them find the best fit.

Full-Need Institutions: *Colleges and universities that provide financial aid for admitted students that completely meets their documented need (via the FAFSA and/or CSS Profile). Schools meet need with and without loans. Find a comprehensive list of schools meeting full-need [HERE](#).*

Gap Year: *The year (or time period) between high school graduation and enrollment in college or other post-secondary training. Students can have a variety of reasons for a gap year, including work, cultural experiences, travel or participation in service programs.*

General Education Requirements: *Coursework required for graduation from a particular institution that is not connected to a particular major. General Education Requirements usually include courses in literature, qualitative studies, physical and laboratory sciences, social sciences and the arts.*

Grade Point Average: *A numerical representation of a student's achievement at a particular institution. Grade Point Average is typically calculated by dividing the quality points allotted to the grades a student has earned by*

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number of credits a student has completed. On the college level, GPAs are calculated by term and cumulatively.

Graduate School: Study in a particular subject beyond the bachelor's level. Graduate students earn Master of Arts, Fine Arts, or Science degrees.

Graduation Rate: *The rate at which members of a cohort of students (a group beginning in the same term) graduate from a particular institution.*

Institutions regularly calculate 4- and 6-year graduation rates.

Guaranteed Admission/Guaranteed Transfer:

A program and partnership between two institutions - usually a community college and college or university - outlining the path to admissions. A guaranteed transfer program usually requires that students maintain a specified GPA and complete specific coursework to achieve the transfer. NOVA has Guaranteed Admission agreements with many colleges and universities in Virginia.

Health Insurance Requirement: *Institutions require that all students who attend carry health insurance, either from a private company or through the institution. When enrolling, students will have to provide proof of coverage.*

HBCU: *Historically Black College and University.* HBCUs were defined (via the Higher Education Act of 1965) by the Department of Education as institutions founded prior to 1964 with the primary goal of educating black Americans. There are 107 institutions designated as HBCUs. Find them [HERE](#).

HSI: *Hispanic Serving Institution.* HSIs are defined by the Department of Education as institutions with an enrollment of at least 25% of full-time students who identify as Hispanic. Find the list [HERE](#).

Holistic Review: *College admissions review process involving reading a student's whole file before making an admissions decision. The goal of holistic review is to consider the whole person - beyond grades and test scores - in consideration of admission. Campuses utilizing holistic review consider each piece of submitted information and have no internal cut-off numbers (GPA/test scores) for admission or denial.*

Housing: *Where a student lives while attending a particular institution - students are housed on- or off-campus.*

Honors College/Program: In-class and extracurricular activities that are broader, deeper, or more complex than comparable learning exercises at institutions. Students are selected - by invitation or through separate applications - to participate in the program, which usually offers separate sections of courses, research opportunities, on-campus housing, and other experiences.

In-State Tuition: *Rate charged to students who meet the criteria of in-state residency.*

Informed Interest: *Demonstration by applicants that they are interested in attending an institution through a discussion of specific programs/offers at a particular institution. Students often demonstrate informed interest through supplemental essay responses.*

Interview: *Structured conversation between an admissions counselor or alumni appointee and a student applying for admission. Institutions requiring an interview use the feedback in the admissions decision.*



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January Admit: *An offer of admission that dictates a student begins in the second semester of the school year.*

Junior College: *A post-secondary institution offering coursework beyond the high school diploma. See also Community College.*

Legacy: *A student applicant with an alumni parent or grandparent from a particular institution. Some schools offer advantages in the admissions process for legacy students.*

Liberal Arts College/University: *Four-year institutions focusing on the study of humanities,*

arts, and sciences. Traditional liberal arts campuses do not have dedicated schools, such as business or engineering, and require students to take classes in several areas regardless of their majors.

Major: *A specific area in which a student specializes while pursuing a college degree.*

Match: *An institution where a student's background, academic history, and needs align with those of admitted students.*

Matriculation: *The process of entering a university as a candidate for a degree.*

Minor: *A secondary area of concentration in a subject area different than a major.*

National Candidate Reply Date: *The date by which students must respond to offers of admission from colleges or universities. That date is usually May 1.*

NCAA: *National Collegiate Athletic Association. The governing body for student-athletes at member organizations.*

Need-aware admissions: *An admissions process that factors a prospective student's financial need and ability to pay.*

Need-blind admissions: *An admissions process that does not factor in a student's financial need or ability to pay.*

Open Admissions/Open Enrollment: *A campus that is non-selective; any student meeting the requirements for enrollment can matriculate.*

Orientation: *The process used by colleges and universities to integrate new students and introduce them to the campus community and culture.*

Plan of Study: *An outline charting the courses required for graduation in a particular major placed in suggested order.*

Portfolio: *A collection of work submitted as part of an admissions packet by visual and performing artists.*

Pre-Screen: *An application due before a visual or performing arts student can submit an application to an arts-focused major.*

Private College/University: *A college or university not dependent on state or federal funds; it is primarily funded through tuition, investment and donations.*

Prospective Student: *Someone applying for admission to a particular institution.*

Public College/University: *A college or university dependent on state or federal funds for the bulk of its operational budget.*

Questions? *If you have questions about college admissions, contact*



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US! Reach out to an advisor in person, via email at college@acps.k12.va.us, or via text at 703-219-8713.

Reach: *An institution where a student, based on selectivity and their particular academic criteria, falls into the 25th percentile of accepted students.*

Recommendation (Letters of): *A letter written by someone, not related to a student, in support of their application. Recommendations are usually academic or character in nature.*

Restrictive Early Action: *An admission option allowing students to submit an application early to*

an institution and receive an early answer to their submission. REA dictates that a student may apply this way to only one private institution.

REA is not binding and admitted students will still have until May 1 to respond.

Residence Hall: *A building where on-campus students reside during an academic term.*

Rolling Admissions: *An application cycle where students will receive a decision once all the required documents are received. Decisions are released regularly and are not contingent on a deadline.*

SAT: *Originally labeled Scholastic Aptitude Test, the SAT is a standardized test used in the college admissions process. The SAT is taken digitally and has two sections: Reading and Writing and Math, which are divided into two modules. Students have 64 minutes to complete the Reading and Writing section and 70 minutes to complete the Math section. Students score between 200-800 for each section.*

School Profile: *A document explaining key academic information for a particular high school. A school profile is submitted with a transcript, giving admissions personnel background information and context for the transcript.*

Selectivity: *The rate at which applicants are admitted to a particular institution. The lower the admit rate, the higher a school's selectivity.*

Semester: *An academic term. An academic year has two semesters - fall (August-December) and Spring (January-May).*

Southern Academic Common Market: *The Academic Common Market is a tuition-savings program for college students in 15 SREB states who want to pursue degrees that are not offered by public institutions in their home state. [The](#)*

[states participating](#) and the [schools included](#) in the market are available using the identified links.

SRAR: *Student Reported Academic Record. A portal where students enter information about every course they've taken or are registered for. Check [HERE](#) for more information.*

Student-to-Faculty Ratio: *The number of enrolled students in comparison to full-time faculty.*

Study Abroad: *Programs allow students from one institution to attend partner institutions in other countries for a specified period (often a semester).*

Summer Admit: *An offer of admission for the summer term, usually as an invitation to a specific summer program.*

Supplemental Essays: *Smaller-word count responses to prompts for specific institutions.*



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Supplemental Essays are often referred to "Why Us?" essays, as they require demonstration of school-specific interest.

Transcript: *A documented account of a student's academic history. A transcript lists classes taken and in progress, final grades, quality points and weighted and/or unweighted GPAs.*

Test-blind: *Admissions process that does not allow for the submission of standardized test scores. Submitted scores are not accepted and will not be considered in the admission decision.*

Test-free: Admissions process that does not receive or consider test scores in the admission decision.

Test-optional: *Admissions process that allows prospective students the opportunity to submit test scores for consideration, but does not penalize students choosing not to submit.*

Tuition: *The cost required to attend classes at a particular institution.*

Trimester: *An academic term dividing the school year into three equal time periods.*

Undergraduate: *A college or university student pursuing a graduate degree.*

Undergraduate Program: *Program leading to a bachelor's degree at a particular institution.*

University: *An institution awarding both bachelor's and master's degree.*

Upper Level/Upper Division Course: *Classes taken during the later years of an undergraduate degree. The courses are often numbered with 300 or 400 code numbers.*

Virtual Tour: A digital experience allowing viewers to experience a location without being in the area, usually through the use of virtual reality. You can take many virtual tours via schools' websites, YouTube, Naviance, or [HERE](#).

Waiver: *Elimination of a fee - usually enrollment or application - granted from school personnel or through the Common Application.*

Waitlist: *An offer from an admissions department of a particular institution. Selection for a position on the waitlist indicates that a student meets the qualifications for admission just below admitted students and should be offered admission if a spot becomes available later in the admissions cycle.*

Weighted Grade Point Average: A grade point average calculated by granting more quality points to honors, advanced placement or dual enrollment classes.

Withdraw: *Formal process of removal from a class before meeting the seat time required to earn credit.*

X: No grade given.

YOU: *YOU can reach your goal and navigate the college admissions landscape...and WE can help!*
Reach out and ask any questions on your mind.

ZERO EXCUSES: *Now that you have the information and know the tools, you have ZERO EXCUSES.*



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Get started today - meet with an
adviser and get the help you need.