The summer before your senior year is the time to prepare for the college admissions process. Start now, and by September you will be ready to apply to college.
Rising Seniors: Follow these eight steps this summer and you will be on the path to college.

STEP 1: Obtain a Copy of the Guide and “Get Connected”

Before the school year ends, be sure to obtain a copy of the 2019–2020 Step Up to College Guide. You can download a PDF version of it online at www.stepuptocollege.org.

Download the free Step Up to College (SUTC) mobile app via the App Store or Google Play to access interactive planning tools, activities, and links to valuable resources.

Visit www.stepuptocollege.org to access additional tips and resources.

Follow Step Up to College on social media for timely tips and important resources and information.

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Follow Step Up to College on social media for timely tips and important resources and information.

View our new, targeted videos highlighting the principles of the Guide and the college application process.

STEP 2: Prepare to Take the SAT and/or ACT

Read pages 27-30 of the Guide and look through the “SAT and ACT” feature on the SUTC mobile app.

Most colleges require standardized test scores as a component of your application package. Use the summer months to prepare to take the SAT and/or ACT.

Register for the SAT and/or ACT

Rising seniors should plan on taking the summer SAT and/or early fall ACT exam in order to be eligible for Early Decision/Early Action deadlines beginning November 1st. Students often perform better on one test than the other, so taking both is highly recommended. Visit the College Board’s website for information about SAT registration and test score deadlines: https://sat.collegeboard.org/register. Visit the ACT website for information about deadlines: www.act.org.

Please note: SAT and ACT test dates have been or will be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Please follow the SAT and ACT websites closely for rescheduled dates.

Prepare for SAT Subject Tests

Some colleges require that you take SAT Subject Tests, which are one-hour exams that measure your knowledge in specific subject areas. Check your preferred schools’ admissions requirements. For more information, visit https://sat.collegeboard.org, and search “SAT Subject Tests.”
Get ready for the ACT
The ACT is a content-based admissions test that measures your knowledge of subjects learned in high school. For more information on the ACT, visit www.actstudent.org.

Practice, practice, practice
Use the summer to familiarize yourself with the test format, review key concepts, and build your confidence. The following resources and strategies — some of which have a cost, while others are free — will help you maximize your score:

• **Purchase or borrow a test prep book.** Make sure that it is a recent publication and covers the recent versions of the SAT/ACT.

• **Explore test prep classes.** Ask your guidance counselor or search online to find a suitable course. The cost of these programs may vary significantly, so research carefully. Two options include:
  - Kaplan Test Prep: [www.kaptest.com](http://www.kaptest.com)
  - The Princeton Review: [www.princetonreview.com](http://www.princetonreview.com)

• **Check out online test prep services.** There are a variety of online courses to choose from, which may cost less than classroom courses:
  - ACT: [http://www.actstudent.org/onlineprep](http://www.actstudent.org/onlineprep)
  - College Board: [https://satonlinecourse.collegeboard.org](https://satonlinecourse.collegeboard.org)
  - Peterson’s: [www.petersons.com/testprep/](http://www.petersons.com/testprep/)

• **Take advantage of free test prep resources:**
  - Khan Academy: [www.khanacademy.org/sat](http://www.khanacademy.org/sat)
  - NAVIANCE Test Prep: (for schools that use NAVIANCE Family Connection)
  - Number2: [www.number2.com](http://www.number2.com)

• **Build your vocabulary by learning five new words daily.** Use flashcards or websites with word lists, such as [www.majortests.com/word-lists/](http://www.majortests.com/word-lists/).

• **Organize a summer study group with friends.** Meet weekly to stay motivated.

• **Take multiple practice tests.** To imitate the test-taking process, time yourself and take multiple practice tests. Free practice tests are readily available:
  - [www.khanacademy.org/sat](http://www.khanacademy.org/sat)
  - [www.act.org](http://www.act.org); select “Test Prep”

STEP 3: Understand Your Options for College

Read pages 16-19 of the Guide.
There are close to 5,000 colleges and universities in the United States. More than 100 of them are in the Philadelphia region. Use the summer to learn about the different types of colleges and universities and the degree programs they offer.

**Two-year colleges**
Two-year colleges offer certificate programs, associate degrees, and the opportunity to transfer to a four-year institution. Examples include:

• **Community colleges**, such as Community College of Philadelphia.

• **Two-year colleges**, such as Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology.

**Four-year universities**
Four-year universities offer undergraduate bachelor’s, graduate, and professional degrees. Examples include:

• **Public universities**, including Pennsylvania’s 14-state universities ([www.passhe.edu](http://www.passhe.edu)) and state-related universities, such as Penn State University, Temple University, and The University of Pittsburgh.

• **Private universities**, such as Arcadia University, Drexel University, Lehigh University, Villanova University, and the University of Pennsylvania.

**Private liberal arts colleges**
Liberal arts colleges offer four-year bachelor’s degrees. Examples include: Albright College, Dickinson College, Franklin & Marshall College, Gettysburg College, Haverford College, and Lafayette College.

**Specialized colleges**
Specialized colleges offer programs tailored to specific groups or fields of study. Examples include:

• **Arts colleges**, such as The University of the Arts.

• **Minority-serving institutions**, which include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), such as Lincoln University.

• **Women’s colleges**, such as Bryn Mawr College.

• **Religiously affiliated colleges and universities**, such as Gwynedd Mercy University, Saint Joseph’s University, and Holy Family University.
STEP 4: Do Fit Research

Read pages 14-15 of the *Guide* and check out the “Find Your Fit” feature on the SUTC mobile app.

Watch the video “The Right ‘Fit’” on www.youtube.com/StepUptoCollege.

Selecting the college that is the best fit for you — academically, socially, and financially — will be the key to your success. Take time over the summer to do “fit” research and find the schools that are right for you.

**Identify the right fit for you**

Determine the factors that are important to you in a college by completing the “Find Your Fit” worksheet on page 20 of the *Guide* and on the SUTC mobile app.

**Research colleges in depth**

Fit research is thorough, investigative research that uncovers the academic, social, and financial characteristics of a college. There are a number of online resources to help you:

- **College Greenlight**, www.collegegreenlight.com, searches for and offers fly-in programs, scholarships, and summer opportunities with financial aid.
- **Big Future by the College Board**, https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/, profiles colleges and sets up searches based on your choices.
- **College Navigator**, https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/, searches for colleges based on your preferences.
- **I’m First**, www.imfirst.org/colleges, searches for and offers profiles of colleges that support first-generation-to-college students.
- **College websites** offer specific details about all aspects of fit. Most colleges have social media pages you can follow. Many offer student blogs that provide different perspectives about campus life and programs.

**Complete the Philadelphia Futures Fit Form**

Once you have narrowed your search, begin exploring which schools will be the best fit for you. Complete the Fit Form on pages 24–25 of the *Step Up to College Guide* and on the SUTC mobile app for each school to which you are considering applying. When completed, the Fit Form will help you determine whether the college is a good academic, social, and financial fit.

STEP 5: Plan for College Visits

Read page 22 of the *Guide* and check out the “College Visits” feature on the SUTC mobile app.

The best way to decide if a school is the right fit for you is to visit. Prepare carefully over the summer to ensure you gain the most from every college visit experience.

**At the beginning of the summer:**

- **Check out college admissions offices online.**
  Look for links such as “book a visit,” “campus visit,” or “information sessions” to register for tours and open houses. Some colleges also may interview prospective students while they are on campus. Keep in mind that the best time to visit colleges is while classes are in session.

**Please note:** College visits may be affected by the campus closures happening due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Check with the college admissions office for up-to-date information.

**The week before you visit:**

- **Prepare the questions you will want to ask.** Review the “Questions to Ask on a College Visit” activity on page 23 of the *Guide*. The option to enter notes into the SUTC mobile app is available.
- **Print the schedule** for your visit and a campus map.
- **Plan what you will wear.** Remember, you will be making an impression on college officials, so dress appropriately. Be sure to wear comfortable shoes, as you are likely going to do a lot of walking and standing.

**During your visit:**

- **Take notes** during your tour.
- **Talk to current students.** Ask questions about campus life and classes.
- **Enjoy the campus.** Eat in the dining hall or student center, and walk around the university campus and the surrounding community.

**After your visit:**

- **Write down your impressions** after touring each school, and enter your notes into the SUTC mobile app for later reference.
- **Send a thank you email to the admissions office** to demonstrate interest.
STEP 6: Begin the Application Process

Read pages 12-13 and 26-38 of the Guide and check out the “Resume” feature on the SUTC mobile app.

Watch the video “Applying to College” on www.youtube.com/StepUptoCollege.

Get a head start on your college applications. Preparing a strong application takes time, hard work, and attention to detail. Generally, there are four options for college admissions. The option you select will impact when your application is due, when you find out if you are selected, and your ability to choose a college based on how much financial aid it offers. Learn more on page 31 of the Guide.

Understand your college admissions options

• Applying Regular Decision will allow you to apply to as many schools as you like and to compare financial aid packages.

• Rolling Admissions applications are evaluated on a first-come, first-served basis until the school fills its first-year class. This option also allows you to apply to as many schools as you like and to compare financial aid packages.

• Early Action allows you to apply earlier to — and hear back sooner from — your first-choice colleges. Early Action is non-binding, meaning it does not commit you to attend the school, but it does tell the school that you are interested.

• Early Decision is an option reserved only for the school you are certain is your best fit and promises that you will attend this college if admitted. Given the binding nature of Early Decision, make sure the college is the right financial “fit.” Remember, no college is your dream school if you cannot afford to go there.

Become familiar with the application process for each of your preferred schools

• If you plan to apply to Community College of Philadelphia, explore the online application at www.ccp.edu.

• If you plan to apply to a Pennsylvania state university, visit www.passhe.edu to review applications for all 14 state universities.

• If you plan to apply to a Pennsylvania state-related university, visit the school’s website for applications:

• Penn State University: https://admissions.psu.edu/apply, also available via The Common Application.

• Temple University: https://admissions.temple.edu/apply, also available via The Common Application.

• University of Pittsburgh: https://oafa.pitt.edu/apply

• Before applying to a college, learn about The Common Application, www.commonapp.org, which enables you to apply to multiple colleges using the same application form, resume, and essay. The “Common App” for admission in 2021 will be available in August.

Create your resume

A resume is a one-page document that outlines your education, skills, and achievements; it will be a component of your college application. See pages 12-13 in the Guide for instructions on preparing, writing, and formatting your resume. Complete the “Build Your Resume” activity on the SUTC mobile app and view a sample resume.

STEP 7: Begin to Draft Your Application Essay

Read page 35 of the Guide and check out the “Application Essay” feature on the SUTC mobile app.

Your college application essay — also referred to as your personal statement — will be a central component of your application. This is your opportunity to express who you are beyond your grades and test scores. Take time this summer to brainstorm your topic and start the writing process.

Choose the right topic

Select a topic that allows you to convey your uniqueness as an applicant and ties your personal characteristics, achievements, and experiences to your potential contribution as a college student. Your personal statement must convince the admissions officer that you are a good candidate for the institution. Be yourself and use the language that feels comfortable to you. Find the complete list of 2020-2021 Common App essay prompts at www.commonapp.org.

Do your best work

Your essay must also demonstrate your writing skills, so it should be thoughtfully organized, well-written, and carefully proofread. For help in drafting your personal statement, see pages 36-37 of the Guide and on the SUTC mobile app.
STEP 8: Start Thinking About Paying for College

Read pages 39-50 of the Guide and check out the “Financial Aid” and “Scholarships” feature on the SUTC mobile app.

Watch the video “Paying for College” on www.youtube.com/StepUptoCollege.

By planning early, you will be prepared to pursue a financial aid award that will make attending college possible for you. Understanding how to break down college costs and apply for financial aid is critical when choosing a college.

Learn about the types of financial aid:
- **Grants** (such as Federal Pell) are considered “gift aid” and do not have to be repaid. PHEAA, www.pheaa.org, is available for residents of Pennsylvania.
- **Scholarships** can range from a few hundred dollars to the entire cost of your education, and do not need to be repaid.
- **Loans** (such as direct loans and private student loans) have to be repaid with interest.
- **Federal work-study** provides you with part-time employment on campus.

Familiarize yourself with the FAFSA and CSS Profile

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is available at www.fafsa.ed.gov. You must complete and submit this form to the U.S. Department of Education to be eligible for all financial aid from the federal government, your state, and the college you ultimately choose to attend.

Some colleges and universities require students to complete the College Scholarship Service Profile (CSS Profile), which collects information for financial aid decisions. You are eligible to receive CSS Profile fee waivers if you are a first-year undergraduate applicant whose parents live in the United States. The application opens on October 1, 2020. It is available at https://cssprofile.collegeboard.org.

Learn the seven steps to conquer the FAFSA

With your family, look over the FAFSA tips and resources on pages 44-45 of the Guide and on the SUTC mobile app for step-by-step instructions on completing the FAFSA. The 2021 form will become available October 1, 2020.

Use the FAFSA4caster and Net Price Calculators

Visit www.fafsa.ed.gov/spa/afas4c/#/landing to get a preliminary idea of your eligibility for need-based aid and your family’s expected contribution. Net price calculators are federally mandated to be on all college and university financial aid websites to provide a financial aid estimate based on cost of attendance.

Research scholarship opportunities

See pages 50 and 61 of the Guide for a list of scholarships and scholarship search engines. You can also access this information on the SUTC mobile app.

Questions?

Visit www.stepuptocollege.org for more information. Philadelphia Futures is available to answer your questions about the college admissions process. Email stepuptocollege@philadelphiafutures.org.

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