Applying to College and Post-Secondary Programs: Section II Table of Contents and Resource Links

"What's Right for Me?"
Choosing between various programs

Vocational School

Vocational education is generally referred to as "career and technical education". Vocational schools teach students skills that they can apply to a specific vocation whereas colleges and universities teach theory, critical thinking, and analysis. Vocational programs come in a variety of shapes and sizes, but are generally shorter (usually only one to two years) than programs at colleges or universities. Career or vocational programs can result in certificates, diplomas, associate degrees, or even bachelor's degrees. Typically, career education instruction prepares graduates to jump immediately into entry- level professional positions. Areas of study also vary widely, including, but not limited to: business, computer education, health, science, social sciences, transportation, and materials instruction.

Community College

Community colleges, also referred to as junior colleges, are similar to four-year institutions in that they teach theory, critical thinking, and analysis. However, community colleges are generally more flexible than their four-year counterparts. Community colleges usually offer more schedule options, like night classes. Community colleges also allow students to take general education courses, for significantly less cost than at a four-year institution, while also allowing students to explore other interests on a schedule that works for the student. One major benefit of community colleges is that, generally, the cost of tuition is much less expensive than the average four-year institution; many community colleges cost less than two thousand dollars each semester. This gives students opportunities to explore career options without spending thousands of dollars towards a major that they may later decide is not what they want to do. Additionally, community colleges offer students the opportunity to manage other responsibilities while attending school, like work or caring for family. Many community colleges have open admissions policies, meaning that anyone is welcome to attend. An associate's degree is usually the highest degree awarded to students. Most associate's degree programs can be completed in two years of full time attendance.

Four-year Institutions

Attending a four-year college or university may be ideal for students who want to immerse themselves in academic life. The main differences between four-year institutions and vocational schools or community colleges are the degree of selectivity in the programs and the rigor of attending. Four-year institutions can be public or private. Selection and admission to four-year institutions is most often based on competitive factors including standardized test scores (SAT or ACT), high school grade point average and coursework, letters of recommendation, and admissions essays. Also, a high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate (GED) is generally required for a student to be admitted. Most students who attend four-year institutions attend on a full-time basis. Undergraduate programs generally focus on liberal arts and sciences, preparation for professional degrees (such as law or medicine), or preparation for other graduate level education. Four-year institutions offer a bachelor's (baccalaureate) degree as the highest undergraduate degree, but some also offer associate's degrees. A bachelor's degree typically takes four years to complete. The cost of tuition at four-year institutions is

usually more expensive than vocational programs or community colleges, although financial aid is available and there are scholarship and grant opportunities.

For-Profit Colleges

Over the last decade, for-profit colleges and universities (also known as proprietary colleges) have begun to saturate the higher education market. Consequently, deciding on a for-profit vs. non-profit college has become an important aspect of the decision process. For-profit colleges are subsidiaries of private for-profit companies. Their mission is twofold: educating students and making money for the company's owner or shareholders. For-profit colleges with accreditation are legitimate and many are regionally accredited by the same accrediting bodies for traditional schools or four-year institutions. Regional accreditation is generally the gold standard for accreditation and is the most widely recognized type of college accreditation. Many for-profit colleges are nationally accredited. Although it may sound prestigious because it is "national," this accreditation is less rigorous and less widely accepted by colleges for transfer purposes and less accepted by some employers. The curriculum for many for-profit schools focuses on practical, career-oriented degree programs. Many for-profit schools have drawn criticism for what some call pushy recruiting practices and questionable degree programs. Students considering a for-profit school should research the programs curriculum and its cost just like traditional colleges. If a student desires to transfer from a for-profit to a traditional college, they should check with the traditional college to be sure that their coursework will be accepted. Students should also be sure to ask for statistics on job placement after graduation, and always make sure the program fits their needs.

Additional Information

For more information about the differences between vocational schools, community colleges, and four- year universities, please see the following references and informational websites:

- **"The Pros and Cons of Community Colleges"** http://www.scholarships.com/resources/college-prep/choosing-the-right-school/the-pros-and- cons-of-community-colleges/

- **"College vs. Vocational School: 5 Tips on How to Choose"** http://u101.com/articles/general-education/college-vs.-vocational-school.html

- **"For-Profit Colleges: Game-Changers or 'Diploma-Mills'?"** https://indianapublicmedia.org/stateimpact/2011/11/25/for-profit-colleges-game-changers-or-diploma-mills/

- **"Regionally Accredited Online Colleges vs. Nationally Accredited"** http://www.geteducated.com/diploma-mills-police/college-degree-mills/156-regional-or- national-accreditation

- **"Mapping Your Future – Plan Your Career"** http://mappingyourfuture.org/planyourcareer/

- **"Bureau of Labor and Statistics – Occupational Outlook Handbooks"** http://www.bls.gov/ooh

Vocational Schools and Programs

Below is a list of vocational schools and programs in the greater Washington, DC area. CFSA's Office of Youth Employment can provide informational and financial assistance regarding vocational schools and programs, including but not limited to the programs listed below. Additionally, links to other resources to identify vocational programs are included below.

District of Columbia

Career Technical Institute
The Career Technical Institute provides courses to help students develop administrative, technical, and language skills in order to secure employment in office administration, healthcare services, and information technology. Their Admissions Representatives are available to provide complimentary Career Assessments designed to help students find the program that will satisfy their vocational goals. CTI is nationally accredited by the Council on Occupational Education and is licensed by the District of Columbia's Educational Licensure Commission. The U.S. Department of Education has approved Career Technical Institute to participate in the Title IV Federal Financial Aid program. Career Technical Institute is centrally located in downtown Washington, DC, at 1101 Vermont Avenue, NW, near Virginia and Maryland. Career Technical Institute is accessible by metro bus and subway.
- https://www.careertechnical.edu/about-us/

VMT Education Center
VMT Education Center provides training courses for those interested in becoming certified nursing assistances or home health aides.
- http://www.vmtltc.com/educationcenter.htm

Bennett Career Institute
Bennet Career Institute develops fully qualified cosmetologists, barbers, instructors, managers, and make-up artists. BCI provides training courses in cosmetology, instructor certifications, salon management, make-up artistry, and barber styling. BCI is committed to helping students pass the DC State Board Examination and become professionals in their fields of study.
- http://www.bennettcareerinstitute.org/

United People with Opportunities
UPO's employment and training programs include: basic computer training, Microsoft Office Specialist Certification, food service handler training and certification, parenting workshops, basic career development, advanced career development, and various courses through their Environmental and Construction Trades Training Academy, such as weatherization tactics, lead safe practices, air sealing, mechanical ventilation, and more.
- http://www.upo.org/

DC Department of Employment Services (DOES)
The **DOES Pathways for Young Adults Program** is designed to assist out-of-school and out-of-work District residents ages 18-24 by combining occupational training, life skills development and work

readiness instructions to connect them back to the world of work successfully. The two areas of occupational training include allied health and basic IT/Admin. Tech.

- ♦ http://does.dc.gov/service/pathways-young-adults-0
- ♦ PYAP Flyer

The **DOES Out-of-School Program** provides skills workshops, career awareness and work readiness modules, basic education, GED preparation and basic computer training, as well as vocational skills training. Training is provided in the following areas: Construction Trades, Emergency Medical Technology, Hospitality, Education and Information Technology, including Website Development. This is a year-round program that serves young adults, ages 16- 24 who are no longer attending secondary or post-secondary school. It is a training vehicle that assists youth in achieving short and long term educational and employability goals through relevant occupational skills training and guidance.

- ♦ http://does.dc.gov/service/out-school-program

Additional Online Resources:

- ♦ http://u101.com/colleges/Vocational/DC/
- ♦ http://www.rwm.org/rwm/tf_dc.html

Tip Sheet: Rehabilitation Services Administration

What is Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)?

The RSA is a federal agency under the United States Department of Education established to administer portions of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. RSA oversees grant programs that help individuals with physical or mental disabilities obtain employment and live more independently through the provision of such supports as counseling, medical and psychological services, job training, and other individualized services. The primary program is a formula based program to fund state vocational rehabilitation agencies to provide services to disabled individuals. RSA reviews performance to ensure that financial matters are conducted in conformance with financial requirements from statutes and regulations and that disabled youth from ages 14-24 receive services in a timely and adequate fashion. RSA's monitoring guide describes the process used for this monitoring. See RSA's website at https://rsa.ed.gov/ for more information.

Eligibility

Eligibility for RSA has two requirements:
1) The person must be an "individual with a disability," meaning a person who 1) has a physical or mental impairment which constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment for the individual; and 2) can benefit from vocational rehabilitation services to achieve an employment outcome.
2) The person must require vocational rehabilitation services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment.

Individuals who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits are presumed to be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services leading to employment, unless there is clear and convincing evidence that they are too significantly disabled to benefit from vocational rehabilitation services.

Applying

To apply, an individual must submit a written application requesting vocational rehabilitation services and providing sufficient information for the vocational rehabilitation agency to determine eligibility. Eligibility is to be determined within 60 days of application unless the vocational rehabilitation counselor and individual agree to an extension.

The Office of Youth Employment (OYE) through CFSA will be able to assist students in applying for and obtaining RSA funding and services. See Section I.E. for more information about OYE.

Services

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) services are services that an eligible individual may need in order to achieve his or her employment outcome. These include, but are not limited to:
- an assessment for determining eligibility and VR needs;
- vocational counseling, guidance and referral services;
- physical and mental restoration services;
- vocational and other training, including on-the-job training;

- maintenance for additional costs incurred while the individual is receiving certain VR services;
- transportation related to other VR services;
- interpreter services for individuals who are deaf;
- reader services for individuals who are blind;
- services to assist students with disabilities to transition from school to work;
- personal assistance services (including training in managing, supervising and directing personal assistance services) while an individual is receiving VR services;
- rehabilitation technology services and devices;
- supported employment services; and
- job placement services.

Grants and Scholarships for Post-Secondary Education

Providing financial assistance to persons with disabilities who are attending school vary among state vocational rehabilitation agencies, depending in part on the resources available to the state agency. In many cases, even the most generous of financial assistance provided by the vocational rehabilitation agencies will not cover all of a student's expected expenses, leaving a need for additional family contributions or loans. RSA is also available to help fund students in vocational programs. However, in order to have a vocational program paid for, it must be included as a criteria in the student's individual plan for employment, which all students connected to RSA will create. Remember --- RSA will not cover more than in-state costs for a program or school, even if the student goes out of state. For example, if a D.C. student wants to attend a program in Maryland that costs $10,000, but a similar program in D.C. is only $5,000, RSA will only pay $5,000 towards the Maryland program.

There are publications available that explain the types of financial assistance for individuals with disabilities. One is the booklet "Financial Aid for Students with Disabilities." It provides an overview of a variety of financial aid resources. Students with disabilities must apply for federal financial assistance from the same financial aid programs available to all students. To receive a copy of this publication or for more information, consult the resources below:

http://studentaid.ed.gov

Federal Student Information Center
Box 84
Washington, DC 20044
(800) 433-3243
(800) 730-8913 (TTY)

The George Washington University
HEATH Resource Center
2121 K Street, NW, Suite 220
Washington, DC 20037
(202) 973-0904
(800) 544-3284
(202) 973-0904 (TTY)

National College and University Identifiers

Below is a list of resources to help aid students and families in identifying colleges and universities across the country that meet their personal criteria.

- http://studentaid.ed.gov/prepare-for-college/choosing-schools

- https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges/how-find-your-college-fit

- http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/right-school

- http://www.petersons.com/college-search.aspx

- http://www.campusexplorer.com/college-tips/36394668/Finding-the-Right-College/

- https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges

- http://www.npr.org/2010/12/08/7506102/how-to-choose-a-college-that-s-right-for-you

- http://www.wisechoice.com/college-learning-center/college-advice-articles/finding-a-college/finding-the-right-college

For-Profit Colleges Overview and Cautionary Points

What is a For-Profit College?

For-profit colleges are owned and operated by businesses. Like any publically-traded business, they are ultimately accountable by law for the returns they produce for shareholders. While small independent for-profit colleges have a long history, by 2009, at least 76 percent of students attending for-profit colleges were enrolled in a college owned by either a company traded on a major stock exchange or a college owned by a private equity firm.

Most for-profit colleges charge much higher tuition than comparable programs at community colleges and flagship state public universities. 96% of for-profit students take out student loans, according to the 2012 U.S. Senate report. In comparison, 13% of students at community colleges, 48% at 4-year public schools, and 57% at 4-year private, non-profit colleges borrow money to pay for school.

Despite aggressive marketing to lower income populations, for-profit schools enroll far more students who incur large student loan debts. 57% of Bachelor's students who graduate from a for-profit college owe at least $30,000 in debt. In contrast, only 25% of those who earned a Bachelor degree at private, non-profit schools and only 12% from public schools borrowed this much money.[1]

U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee launched a 2-year Committee investigation into the for-profit college industry – visit http://www.help.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/?id=4390b234-dbda-460d-84e7-3a732a95fb0d for information regarding the investigation.

For more information about for-profit colleges, you can read these articles:
- ♦ "For-Profit Grads' Wage Disadvantage" - http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/07/03/study-finds-wage-disadvantage-those-starting-profits
- ♦ "For-Profit Colleges: Game-Changers or 'Diploma Mills'?" - http://stateimpact.npr.org/indiana/2011/11/25/for-profit-colleges-game-changers-or-diploma-mills/

Protect Yourself – Tactics to be Aware of by For-Profit School Recruiters/Representatives

- ♦ **The recruiter uses high-pressure sales tactics.**
  - Take the time to have all the students questions answered and do not allow them to be pushed into making a hasty decision.
- ♦ **The recruiter makes verbal promises.**
  - If a recruiter makes any promises or assertions about the school, ask to see that information in writing and verify that information with trusted sources.

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[1] Statistics from United States Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee report titled "For Profit Education: The Failure to Safeguard the Federal Investment and Ensure Student Success", July 30, 2012 found here: https://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/for_profit_report/PartI.pdf.

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- ♦ **The degree or certificate seems too easy to obtain.**
  - If the degree seems too easy to earn – for example the student simply need to take a test online or you can earn a degree based largely on life experience – the student should be very skeptical.

- ♦ **The recruiter claims a very high job placement rate, guarantees a job, or quotes high future income.**
  - Job placement numbers may be deceptive or inflated by excluding various groups of students who did not get jobs and/or including temporary jobs and jobs that have nothing to do with the student's program of study.
  - No school can guarantee that the student will get a job after completing their program, even in the best of economic times.
- ♦ **The recruiter tells the student the program will not cost anything.**
  - While the student may not have to pay out of pocket in order to attend a for-profit school, they may have to take on many thousands of dollars in loans that they will need to repay plus interest.

Pre-Enrollment Checklist

Learn as much as possible about a school *before* enrollment so that it is a wise educational investment. Below are some sample questions to ask and have answered before enrolling in a program. Get assurances in writing from school representatives and verify this information with trusted sources.
- ♦ **About the school:**
  - What is the student-faculty ratio overall and in the program being considered?
  - What amount (as a percentage) does the school spend on educational instruction versus marketing and recruitment?
  - What is the school's graduation rate overall and in the program being considered?
- ♦ **About the program:**
  - How many courses are offered and needed to complete the program?
  - Is the program accredited?
  - Will the program qualify for licensure (if applicable) for the student's chosen career field?
  - Are the program credits transferrable to other schools? If yes, which schools?
  - Are there prerequisite courses (e.g., math, English proficiency) needed to enroll in the program?
  - Does the school accept transfer of existing or prior learning credits? Does the school offer credit for prior work/volunteer experience towards completion of the program?
  - Is there an internship requirement? If so, does the school assist with placement opportunities?
- ♦ **About costs, financial aid and student loans:**
  - What is the total cost of admission, tuition, instructional materials, and other mandatory fees?
  - What is the deadline (if any) for submitting a financial aid application?
  - Does the school itself offer any scholarships or other financial aid for which the student may be eligible?

- What is the estimated student loan amount needed to be borrowed to complete the program? What is the projected monthly repayment rate upon completion of the program?
- What it the total (average) amount of student loan debt carried by graduates of this program?
- What is the school's loan default rate? In other words, what percentage of students cannot make timely payments of their student loans three years or more after leaving the school?
- What is school's cancellation and refund policy? What deadlines should the student be aware of?
- Is repayment required on scholarships/grants/GI Bill benefits if the student leaves school without completing the program?

♦ **Career placement and other school resources:**
- What is the school's job placement rate in the chosen career field for graduates of the program being considered?
- What is the average starting salary in the chosen career field?
- Does the school provide career placement services and/or counseling?
- What other resources (e.g., tutorial labs, libraries, training facilities, guidance counseling, veteran services) are available at the school to support the student's educational experience?
- Is there an active alumni network? Can the school put the student in contact with recent alumni in the chosen field of study?

Diploma Mills and Accreditation

Diploma mills are higher education institutions which operate without supervision of a state or professional agency, and grant diplomas which are either fraudulent or, because of the lack of proper standards, worthless. It is important to be aware that not every institution is what it appears. In the U.S., schools and universities can go through an accreditation process in which the institution and its programs are evaluated against standards for measuring quality. Note that diploma mills often claim accreditation by a fake accrediting agency to attract more students to their degree programs and make them seem more legitimate.

The U.S. Department of Education has published the "positive list" of schools that are accredited by accrediting agencies recognized by the Secretary of Education. The list can be found at http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation. One of the reasons that institutions seek accreditation is so that their students are eligible to receive federal student aid or other federal benefits. The database does not include postsecondary educational institutions and programs that elect not to seek accreditation but nevertheless may provide a quality postsecondary education. The "positive list" is simply one source of information – you may need to consult other sources if an institution does not appear on the positive list.

The Better Business Bureau suggests you watch for the following features and regard them as red flags when considering whether or not to enroll in a school:
♦ Degrees that can be earned in less time than at an accredited postsecondary institution, an example would be earning a Bachelor's degree in a few months.

- A list of accrediting agencies that sounds a little too impressive. Often, these schools will list accreditation by organizations that are not recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. These schools will also imply official approval by mentioning state registration or licensing.
- Offers that place unrealistic emphasis on offering college credits for lifetime or real world experience.
- Tuition paid on a per-degree basis, or discounts for enrolling in multiple degree programs. <u>Accredited institutions charge by credit hours, course, or semester.</u>
- Little or no interaction with professors.
- Names that are similar to well-known reputable universities.
- Addresses that are box numbers or suites. That campus may very well be a mail drop box or someone's attic.

For more resources and publications on accreditation and diploma mills visit -
http://www2.ed.gov/students/prep/college/diplomamills/resources.html

Applications

Overview

Generally, each institution has its own requirements, often including the actual application, a personal essay, and supplemental information for various programs such as art or athletics. Be sure to check each school's admissions website so that you have the most up-to-date information regarding the application requirements and deadlines. However, the college application process has become more streamlined in recent years with the increased use of programs that allow students to complete one set of general application materials to submit to multiple institutions. Some colleges and universities exclusively accept these types of applications, ex: The Common Application. Below are descriptions of the three most commonly used application aggregators.

The Common Application

The Common Application (Common App) is a nonprofit organization that provides students the opportunity to complete one set of application materials and submit them to any number of the Common App's member institutions. The Common App reportedly has 750 member institutions. By creating an account with Common App, students can keep track of the individual requirements of numerous college applications, monitor the submission status of each application, and minimize some of the stress associated with applying to a long list of schools. Follow the link to learn more and/or create an account: http://www.commonapp.org/. A searchable list of the member institutions can be found here: https://www.commonapp.org/search-colleges.

The Universal College Application

The Universal College Application (UCA) is another organization that allows students to apply to several colleges using the same materials. To register and learn more about the UCA, follow the link: https://www.universalcollegeapp.com/. The UCA has 44 Member Institutions; the list of members can be found here: https://www.universalcollegeapp.com/colleges.

The Common Black College Application

Students can apply to many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) using the Common Black College Application (CBCA). Students can complete the CBCA and apply to any number of their 53 Member Institutions for $35. The CBCA advertises that the application fee is a one-time fee and the Member Institutions will not require any additional application fees. The application and supplemental documents are sent to all 53 of the Member Institutions. Follow the link to learn more and to see a list of the Member Institutions: http://commonblackcollegeapp.com/.

College Application Fee Waivers
Overview

Application Fee Waivers Generally

Each institution charges a fee to process your application for admission. These fees can really add up depending on how many schools to which your student intends to apply. However, there are a few options for applying to schools for free. Individual institutions offer the opportunity to apply for a fee waiver as part of your application, so be sure to check each school's website for details.

SAT Fee Waivers

Any student who is approved for a fee waiver to take the SAT is automatically eligible for four fee waivers for college applications that can be used toward any of 2000 participating schools. More information can be found on The College Board's website: https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/applying-101/college-application-fee-waivers.

The Common Application Fee Waivers

The Common App has a fee waiver section on the "Profile" screen of Common Application Fee Waiver Section. Students must meet one of the following criteria to be eligible:

- Received or eligible to receive an ACT or SAT testing fee waiver.
- Enrolled in or eligible to participate in the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch program (FRPL).
- Annual family income falls within the Income Eligibility Guidelines set by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service.
- Enrolled in a federal, state, or local program that aids students from low-income families (e.g., TRIO programs such as Upward Bound).
- Family receives public assistance.
- Live in a federally subsidized public housing, a foster home or are homeless.
- Ward of the state or an orphan.
- Able to provide a supporting statement from a school official, college access counselor, financial aid officer, or community leader.

NACAC Fee Waivers

The National Association for College Admission Counseling is an organization of professionals involved in access to higher education. They also offer a form students may use to request fee waivers. The form is only for traditional high school students who are applying to colleges or universities immediately following high school graduation.

More information is available on the NACAC website:
http://www.nacacnet.org/studentinfo/feewaiver/pages/default.aspx.