

# 3 Practical Benefits of Taking a Gap Year Before College

A gap year is a great opportunity to gain experience, life skills, and clarity on your next steps after high school. Learn more about the benefits here.

As another school year comes to a close, many high school graduates face the dilemma of what to do next—including whether to go straight to college or take a gap year. A gap year is an opportunity for students to take a break from their studies and explore other interests. Many students take this time to work, travel, learn, and gain more life experience. If you're unsure what you want to do after graduation, taking a gap year could be a great way to gain perspective and figure out your next step. Here are the top three benefits of choosing this path.

## 1. Gain work experience

Some high school students are interested in gaining work experience and earning money, but they might not have a full- or part-time job yet. Taking a gap year can be an excellent opportunity to work, save money, gain experience for a résumé, and think about your future career path(s). [Will you need to go to college](#) to pursue your goals, or would trade or technical school be sufficient?

Having work experience can help you save money to put toward your future education plans. It also looks good on college applications and shows that you've used your gap year wisely.

## 2. Strengthen important life skills

It's normal to feel like you might be missing some important life skills as you finish up high school. I mean, you probably just turned 18 or are about to, so you are literally still a teenager—a kid, really, but legally an adult. Have you ever thought about how to manage your money, time, wants, and needs? If not, I recommend starting by taking a financial literacy course to learn more about managing your money. You can find a [great online course free from Khan Academy](#). Learning how to manage your time can also be super helpful when it comes to keeping up with assignments and social activities in college. It's important to be able to distinguish between your wants and needs, such as basic groceries versus junk food. Also, taking care of yourself can be a little daunting, especially if you haven't had much practice. Do you know how to cook, do laundry, drive, or fill your car with gas? If not, taking a gap year can be a great way to learn and establish necessary life skills before starting college.

## 3. Formulate clear goals

Taking a break from school can be a great way to clear your mind and help you figure out your next steps in life. It's important to remember that taking time off from school does *not* mean giving up on your education; rather, you're taking a step back to evaluate your priorities and goals. By taking this time to research and explore different majors, schools, and careers that genuinely interest you, you can gain a better understanding of what you want to do in life and make more informed decisions about your future.

**Related:** [Your Goals, Your Life, Your Gap Year](#)

It's completely normal to feel unsure about what you want to do after graduating high school. Facing big decisions can be overwhelming. A gap year is a great opportunity to take some time off from your studies and figure out what you want. Hopefully, this information has helped you decide whether a gap year is right and beneficial for you. It's your future, so take the time you need to make it a great one.

## Early Admission Trends of the 2023–2024 College Application Cycle

The best way to prep for college admission is to look at the previous application cycle, especially if you're applying early. Here's what's been trending.

Applying to college via early admission has always been a strategic move for students aiming to bolster their chances of acceptance. However, with schools like [Duke University](#) reporting an [Early Decision acceptance rate of just 12.9%](#), applying early is by no means a sure thing. Nonetheless, it remains an improvement to students' chances, considering Duke's anticipated Regular Decision acceptance rate for the Class of 2028 is 4.5% after Early Decision applicants have claimed roughly half of the available seats.

Since the pandemic, Moon Prep has seen huge changes in college admission trends that have turned the higher education world on its head, including new test-optional policies and the reversal of race-based admission decisions. Here

are some of the most notable changes from the 2023–2024 admission season to help you prepare for the future.

## Application numbers continue to increase

Over the past few years, students have submitted more college applications through the Common App than ever before, with the total volume of applicants to [Common App schools](#)

[Sign](#) increasing by 65% since 2019–2020. Consequently, many schools have lower early acceptance rates than previous years; [Yale University](#) saw its [lowest acceptance rate](#) in the last 20 years at 9.02%. But it's not just highly competitive schools that are seeing an increase in applications—the [University of Georgia](#) had a [3.5% increase in Early Action applications](#), and the [University of Tennessee](#) received [49,248 early admission applicants](#) (10,774 more than the previous application cycle), marking their most competitive pool yet.

**Related:** [5 Recent and Interesting College Admission Trends Students Should Know About](#)

## Test-optional remains murky but popular with students

Students still love the option of applying to college without submitting standardized test scores, with more than [415,000 Common App applicants](#)

[Sign](#) (roughly half) not reporting scores this year—an almost 20% increase from last year. While schools like [Dartmouth College](#) and [Brown University](#) will require at least some form of score reporting, others like [Emory University](#), [Princeton University](#), [University of Pennsylvania](#), and [Carleton College](#)—just to name a few—have announced admission will

remain test-optional through at least the 2025 application cycle. However, some highly selective schools have reversed their test-optional policies earlier than planned; [Harvard University](#) will now require standardized test scores for the 2024–2025 cycle—a year earlier than previously announced—[citing a study](#) that “found that test scores were a better predictor of academic success in college than high school grades.” This quickly changing landscape of test-optional policies has left many students grappling and unsure whether to invest time and resources into standardized testing for college admission.

## More diverse students are applying

The [increased diversity of students](#) applying to college is another ongoing trend that has continued from last year. Since fall 2019, the number of applicants identifying as an [underrepresented minority has increased by 67%](#)

[Sign](#), with those identifying as first-generation students also increasing at the same rate. The rate of growth of American Indian or Alaska Native (86%) and Black or African American (70%) applicants has been the most significant. In response to the reversal of race-based admission decisions, some universities have updated essay requirements. This year, Northwestern University’s essay prompt asked students:

*We want to be sure we’re considering your application in the context of your personal experiences: What aspects of your background, your identity, or your school, community, and/or household settings have most shaped how you see yourself engaging in Northwestern’s community, be it academically, extracurricularly, culturally, politically, socially, or otherwise?*

Essays like this give students the opportunity to highlight their unique backgrounds and experiences while also helping colleges maintain a diverse class.

## Deferrals pile and waitlists grow longer

Another impact the pandemic has had on early admission trends is the use of applicant waitlists. Due to uncertainty surrounding increasing applications and enrollment numbers at top universities, many colleges have started to use waitlists or [defer students more heavily](#). For example, of the nearly [41,000 Early Action applicants](#) who applied to the [University of Southern California](#) this year, more than 38,000 were deferred to Regular Decision. [Florida Atlantic University](#) implemented a waitlist for the first time ever, anticipating sending final decisions to students by May 31.

**Related:** [How to Escape Your Dream College's Waitlist](#)

As the college admission landscape continues to evolve, students should do consistent research and look at past admission trends to help them make the best college search and admission decisions for them. Be sure to reflect on these admission trends in particular to help you determine whether applying early is the right choice for you.

## Love to Read? 5 Valuable Scholarship Opportunities for Bookworms

Calling all book lovers! Put down your latest read and check out these amazing scholarships and contests based on books, reading, and literature.

One thing everybody knows about college is that it costs money! “How can I afford college?” is a frequently asked question for students and their families. A smart answer to this question is scholarships. And one interesting thing about scholarships is how unique each one is. You can find scholarships for almost any interest, including books, reading, and literature! Here are five great scholarship opportunities that every bookworm should look into.

## 1. Ayn Rand Essay Contests

Founded in 1985, the [Ayn Rand Institute offers three student essay contests](#) for avid readers of *Anthem*, *The Fountainhead*, and *Atlas Shrugged*.

Requirements and submission deadlines vary depending on the novel you choose, as do prize amounts, with grand prizes of up to \$25,000! Students in grades eight to 12 worldwide are invited to apply for the *Anthem* scholarship by May 31; *The Fountainhead* is open to middle and high school students ages 13 and up worldwide until June 7; and *Atlas Shrugged* is open to high school, undergraduate, and graduate students worldwide until June 14. Visit the official website and fill out the contact form to view the instructions for each contest.

## 2. Book Lovers Scholarship by Calvin Rosser

Does this name sound familiar? Sponsored by Calvin Rosser—a writer, entrepreneur, and regular funder of several different Bold.org opportunities—this [Book Lovers Scholarship](#) is open to high school, undergraduate, and graduate students in the US, with all GPAs and majors encouraged to apply. Just answer this question in 250–400 words: “If you could have everyone in the world read

just one book, what would that book be and why?” With a May 31 deadline, this is a great annual opportunity for those who read multiple books across several genres!

**Related:** [How to Turn Your Hobbies Into Scholarships With Ease](#)

### 3. Bookshelf to Big Screen Scholarship

The [Bookshelf to Big Screen Scholarship](#) is another contest offered by Bold.org. Some well-known book series such as *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, *Twilight*, *The Hobbit*, and more have been created into modern-day films. Which is your favorite adaptation and why? High school and college students in the United States can share their thoughts in 400–600 words for a chance to win \$1,000. This scholarship has rolling monthly deadlines until February 28, 2025, but students who apply earlier have a greater chance of winning, so start working on your application now!

### 4. Once Upon a #BookTok Scholarship

One more opportunity offered by Bold.org, the [Once Upon a #BookTok Scholarship](#) is for book lovers who’ve been influenced by the #BookTok community. The social media “digital literary movement” #BookTok has encouraged a community of readers to get together, discuss books, and find new ones to read. Are you engaged in the debates about character arcs? Were you looking for a new book when the #BookTok community gave you several recommendations? Then this scholarship is for you! To be eligible, you must be a high school or college student in the United States and respond thoroughly in 400–600 words to the prompt about your ideal bookshelf inspired by #BookTok



recommendations. Apply by the rolling monthly deadlines until August for a chance to win \$500 for college!

## **5. *Poets & Writers Magazine* writing contests, grants, and awards**

While there are many amazing scholarship opportunities for readers, there are also contests out there for readers who love to write! If you're a writer or would like to get started, check out the opportunities posted in [\*\*\*Poets & Writers Magazine's Writing Contests, Grants, and Awards database\*\*\*](#). You can find contests for poetry, short stories, novels, fiction, nonfiction, and more, with cash awards from \$500 to nearly \$100,000! From grants to university scholarships, there are so many opportunities for writers of all ages and locations. Do keep in mind that every contest has its own rules and requirements—including some entry fees, which make them different from traditional scholarships. Check the official website for more information, including a [\*\*handy submission calendar\*\*](#).

**Related:** [\*\*Fun Scholarship Opportunities for Students Who Love to Write\*\*](#)

There are so many ways to earn and rack up grants and scholarships for college, especially for book lovers. Finding free money for college based on your interests isn't impossible and can also be fun! As you can see, taking time to research and apply for scholarships and grants you're interested in can pay off in the end.

# Dollars and Degrees: A Guide to Saving in College for Financial Success

Financial success in college is within your reach if you want it to be. Use this advice to reduce your costs and put some money away for the future.

College students aren't always known for having the best saving habits, but we also can't deny the sore state of the economy right now. The ramen noodle and frozen pizza stereotype is often true just because of the affordability of such things. If you're in your first year of school, you might not be thinking about saving money right away. While your focus should be on furthering your education, learning skills for financial success doesn't have to wait for the future—there's no reason why you can't start achieving financial wellness now! Whether you're currently a student or a family member of someone in college, there are plenty of ways to reduce your costs and put money away. Here's how.

## Find cost-effective housing

If you're going to a four-year college or university, the cost of housing is often grouped into your costs along with tuition. Some colleges require you to spend at least one year on campus, while others allow you to live wherever you want. Unfortunately, room and board can sometimes double the cost of what you're paying each semester. Dorm life can be a fun and unique experience, but if it's not within your budget to shell out thousands for a dorm room and campus meal

plan, living at home or finding other off-campus housing could be a more affordable solution.

A nearby apartment might have a higher price than you could afford by yourself, but living with a few other students can significantly cut down on rent and utility costs. If you want to get creative and have more independence, consider unique alternative housing solutions. The tiny home industry is booming right now—a great opportunity for nontraditional students in particular. Converting a small space into your own home can be an incredibly cost-effective way to live. For example, you can [transform an inexpensive shed into a tiny home](#) for a few thousand dollars. Of course, you'll have to consider other necessities like insulation, utilities, interior and exterior finishes, zoning laws and locations, and laying a foundation. But if you consider yourself handy, it's a great opportunity to experience independent living on a budget.

## Start saving as early as possible

Just starting your college career? Now is the ideal time to start [becoming more financially savvy](#), and you can begin by better understanding your financial aid. It can be a big help when it comes to your tuition costs and refiling your FAFSA each year so you aren't paying as much out-of-pocket. Next, create a budget for your time at school. Include things like room and board (or rent), food, textbooks and other supplies, subscriptions, and any other incidentals you might need quick cash for along the way. Creating a budget might seem intimidating at first, but it will give you a clear picture of how much you can spend each month without stressing. If you're not sure where to start, this might be a good opportunity to sit down with a parent or guardian and learn about the importance of spending responsibly.

Related: [Budgeting Best Practices All Students Need to Learn](#)

## Build credit and get insured

After you have your budget set up, consider opening a checking account or [getting a credit card](#) if you don't have them already. College is a great time to start establishing credit. Having a healthy credit score by the time you graduate college will make it a lot easier to rent an apartment or buy a car. Something else you might not think about right away is making sure you have health insurance. If you're covered by your parents' insurance, don't sweat it. But if you don't currently have insurance, make sure you get it before you head off to school, or you'll be paying a lot more without it. Unfortunately, accidents happen. You might get sick or injured, and the last thing you want as a college student is a hefty hospital bill with no insurance. Talk to your parents about your options and research plans that fit your needs and budget.

## Find fun ways to budget and save

Saving money and budgeting as a college student doesn't have to be intimidating. In fact, it can be a lot of fun, especially if the end of the month rolls around and you have some leftover funds. It might feel hard to save when your friends want to go out all the time or you think you just can't live without your Netflix subscription. But when you have a specific financial goal in mind and you finally reach it, it's a great feeling. Thankfully, there are still things you can do to tuck some money away without sacrificing too many of the things you love. First, consider some [non-traditional ways to save money](#), including:

- Shopping at thrift stores
- [Cooking your own meals](#) and getting creative with leftovers

- Leaving your car at home and relying on your feet and campus transportation
- Joining on-campus clubs and activities for perks like free food
- Using apps like [BookScouter](#) to find the best prices on textbooks
- [Learning about investing](#)

You can also [turn your saving habits into more of a challenge!](#) Get your family involved to hold you accountable as you start something like the 52-week savings challenge, which requires you to save one dollar the first week and increase it by a dollar each subsequent week. By the end of one year, you'll have saved \$1,378. You can also [gamify your saving strategies by using apps](#). Some apps will even do the saving for you. [Acorns](#), for example, rounds up whatever you spend to the next dollar and saves it in the app for you to withdraw at any time—so that \$4.62 coffee gets rounded up to \$5, and the difference goes into your savings account.

**Related:** [Our Best Advice for Managing and Saving Your Money as a Student](#)

As a student, implementing creative saving strategies now will start you on the path to financial success faster. You'll also learn healthy saving and spending habits you can carry with you into the working world for a financially stable and less stressful adult life.

## **5 Important Conversations for Students of Color on Campus Tours**

As a student of color, finding a diverse, equitable college is all about asking questions that lead to the right conversations. Here's what to ask about!

Choosing a college is nerve-wracking and time consuming. Several factors can influence one's college decision, including cost, location, academic programs, and extracurricular opportunities. Attending college is a major financial and time investment, so it's important to do your research to make sure you'll be on a campus where you feel comfortable and safe.

While the United States is becoming more racially and socially diverse, college campuses are not immune from racism. Students of color report experiences of [racial microaggressions](#) inside and outside the classroom, racial profiling from campus security, and harmful threats of violence. These discriminatory incidents can have an enormous impact on a student's sense of belonging and mental health, their overall college experience, and their likelihood of graduating. Talking to admission counselors, current students, and alumni on college tours is a great way to learn about the campus experience and ensure the chances of you having these experiences are at their lowest. If you're a student of color and attending a campus visit soon, here are a few important questions to ask and conversations to start.

## 1. Scholarship and funding opportunities

Many students and families struggle to keep up with [rising tuition costs](#), housing, and other living expenses. But students of color also take on [greater student loan debt](#) on average, which has a huge impact on their ability to accumulate wealth, purchase homes, and start families after college. It's

important to understand the landscape of scholarships and funding opportunities at your schools of interest. In addition to completing the FAFSA, it helps to search for additional funding and resources through employment programs, [college-specific scholarships](#), and other campus resources. Ask these questions to learn more on each tour you take:

- What institutional and major-specific scholarships are available for students of color?
- What is the most common scholarship that students of color are awarded?
- Are there specific scholarships associated with job opportunities on campus?
- Are there book loan programs or funding available for purchasing school supplies?
- Is there an emergency fund on campus? How do students access it?
- Are there pantries on campus that provide free food, hygiene products, and clothing?

**Related:** [Infographic: How to Fill Out the FAFSA and Why It Matters](#)

## 2. Student involvement opportunities

Clubs and organizations like Black Student Union or Latinos Unidos serve as safe spaces for students of color to meet like-minded peers, receive support, plan and enjoy culturally relevant events, engage in social advocacy, and more. These organizations have also proven to play an important role in a student's sense of belonging and likelihood of graduating. Here are a few questions to ask about student life: He

- What clubs or organizations are available on campus for members of different racial/ethnic groups
- What cultural sororities and fraternities exist on campus?
- Are students allowed to create new groups if something isn't currently available?
- Where do opportunities exist for international students to get involved on campus?
- Are there professional organizations that specifically assist students of color with career connections?
- Are there scholarship opportunities available for students of color involved in clubs or professional groups?

### 3. Academics and professors

As a student of color, it's important to choose your major wisely for the future you're imagining. Factors like rigor and accreditation may play a role, but it's also important to ask questions that allow you to fully understand the academic experience and support available to you. Consider the following:

- What does the diversity of faculty and staff look like: How many full- and part-time faculty of color are there? What about administrative staff?
- Do faculty and staff of color serve as advisors and/or mentors for students or extracurricular groups?
- How many students of color are currently enrolled in your program(s) of interest? How many have graduated over the last 10 years?
- Are there academic departments that focus on race-specific topics such as African American Studies?



- What are the school's retention and graduation rates for students of color? Where are there racial disparities?
- What are the employment rates for graduates of color, and where have most students of color obtained jobs after graduation?

**Related:** [A More Diverse College Search: How to Find Colleges With Strong DEI Efforts](#)

## 4. Campus equity and safety

Factors like location and the diversity of the student body all play a role in a campus's climate. It's important to take note of [campus life resources](#) when assessing your potential colleges. Here are a few questions to ask about campus culture and safety:

- How does the campus handle discrimination complaints and who do you take complaints to?
- What are the school's Bias Incident Reporting procedures and statistics?
- Does the college have a diversity and equity statement?
- How is student freedom of speech handled on campus? What opportunities exist for community service and social advocacy on campus?
- What is the student perception of law enforcement and campus security?

## 5. Learning and mental health resources

On most college campuses, there are plenty of resources that can help in your personal and academic growth. There are also many places to turn to if you're struggling with mental health or other concerns. Here are a few questions to ask about tailored campus resources for students of color:

- What academic support programs exist for students of color and [first-generation college students](#)?
- Are there any [TRIO programs](#) available on campus?
- Where can students of color go for mental health support?
- How many campus mental health counselors and other support staff are of color?

**Related:** [5 Great Resources to Improve Mental Health for Students of Color](#)

These questions should help give you a jump-start on gathering the right information during your next campus visit. Don't be afraid to ask questions to your tour guide, admission officers, current students, or anyone else you meet on campus. Your future depends on the answers you find!

## **5 Important Things to Explore Off Campus During a College Visit**

You want to see dorms, classrooms, and facilities on a campus tour, but what should you look for off campus? Here are some important areas to investigate!

Most college visits are primarily about what's on campus: the classrooms, dormitories, student centers, and numerous other facilities the school might offer.

It can be easy to travel, do a campus tour, and just go home without exploring anything off campus. But what you find outside the basic tour is often what sets certain schools apart. When you commit to a college, you aren't just committing to their academics or activities but to their town or city as well. If you're going to be living there while you're at college, you should find a place you'll love to live. But how do you know if you're going to enjoy a place before moving there? By exploring more than just the school's campus during your visit! There's plenty to look for, and you can decide what you want to see depending on your priorities, but here are five important areas to get you started.

## 1. Food and health care

While an official campus tour will probably cover your dining options, you might find yourself wanting a specific type of food you can't find on campus, some snacks in your dorm room for those long study sessions, or a fun spot to go with friends. That's why it's good to know what [grocery stores](#) and restaurants are near the school. Some exploring can give you an idea of where they are, what kind of food they stock, and what their prices are like. And like how there might be things your dining hall doesn't have, there may also be services your campus health center can't provide. If you need a specific treatment plan or doctor, you'll want to know where the nearest medical facilities are. Is there a pharmacy near you in case you need to fill any prescriptions? Walking around the area off campus can help you figure out where these things are in proximity to you and your college should you ever need them.

**Related:** [The Best College Restaurants Across the Country: Part 1](#)

## 2. Community and culture

Something as simple as walking around your school's neighborhood can also indicate what the community is like. Is the college located in a [rural, suburban, or urban area](#)? Is the nearby neighborhood made up of homes or businesses? If people do live there, what do they think of the college? You can learn a lot about life on campus based on how the community and the college interact. And while there will probably be plenty of activities and events on campus, it's also worth checking out what the city has to offer. Depending on your hobbies and interests, you can look for different things: If you enjoy outdoor activities, see if there are any parks near you. If you're more interested in indoor activities, look for libraries or museums. This can give you an idea of what your life outside of class will look like.

## 3. Transportation

When you find interesting things to do in the city, you'll have to find a way to get there. That's why it's important to look at your transportation options. Is there public transportation near your campus? If so, is it safe? How much does it cost? If you don't want to use public transportation, you'll need another option. While walking around the neighborhood, see if the area is pedestrian or bike friendly. Are there things within walking or biking distance? If you're thinking of [having a car on campus](#), are there enough parking spots at your school? How much does it cost to keep a car there? While often not included in the cost of your school's tuition, housing, or other fees, transportation costs can greatly impact how affordable a certain school is. If it's far away from your home, are you going to be driving or flying there? How much will that cost? And what about school breaks—will you stay on campus or travel back home? These expenses can add

up, making transportation necessary for determining both your quality of life and the overall cost of your college choice.

**Related:** [List: Colleges and Universities With the Best Transportation Systems](#)

## **4. Employment opportunities and off-campus housing**

While some students can participate in work-study to help cover their college costs, many can't. That's why you should also look at employment options near your college while you're in school and after you graduate. If you choose to work off campus, are there jobs that you can get to easily? It's a good idea to check what the cost of living in the area is to make sure your income can help cover your school fees or housing costs. Additionally, looking at off-campus housing while visiting the area can help you figure out if that's an option for you, even if you're planning to live on campus for the first year or so. Are there enough housing options near your school? How much do they cost? The degree you're pursuing will ideally help you land a job after you graduate, which will help with these costs. But this is much easier to do in an area with plenty of job opportunities in your desired field. If you're planning to stay in the same city post-graduation, you should also check what companies, jobs, and internships are available to you there.

## **5. Safety and potential hazards**

The final thing to look at off campus is the safety of the college town or city. While they'll probably tell you on the tour what [safety measures they have on campus](#), it's important to know how safe it is off campus as well. If you don't get a feel for this just by exploring the area, you can look at crime statistics for the location. But your safety isn't just tied to crime; it's important to check if the location of the school is prone to [natural disasters](#) as well. If so, what does the school and city do to protect students? If you need to evacuate, would you be able to do so easily? Outside of natural disasters, it's always nice to get a feel for what the weather is like at the college too. Do you want to live somewhere cold or warm? Dry or humid? Sunny or snowy? Even something as simple as the weather should factor into your final college decision.

**Related:** [10 Uncommon Questions to Ask in Your College Search](#)

These are just a few of the many things you can explore and research off campus during your college visit. While your campus tour will probably clue you in on whether you like the school itself, taking some extra time to explore the local area will clue you in on whether you like the city the school is in. This is where you'll be living the whole time you're pursuing your education, so it should be a place that makes you feel at home.

## 10 Type-A Tips to Plan the Perfect College Tour Road Trip

How often have you made plans and one obstacle derails everything? That won't happen on your college visits if you follow these precise planning tips.

Visiting prospective colleges is a crucial step in choosing where to further your education. You can make the most of your tours by turning your visits into a fun road trip! However, a smooth and productive road trip requires a *lot* of planning and intention. You need to visit the right colleges, have reliable transportation, make time to explore each city, and plan everything else to a T for the most fulfilling and affordable experience. Here's exactly what you should do to ensure your college tour road trip is an unforgettable, enlightening experience for you and your family.

## 1. Research your colleges thoroughly

You should visit schools that are good fits for you rather than just because. Thoroughly do your research in advance, starting with the colleges that interest you most. After that, list schools that aren't at the top but you'd be happy to visit. Consider a balance of different types of schools, such as public and private institutions, when [deciding which colleges to see in person](#). Once you've got your list, detail why you're drawn to them and what you want to visit most on these campuses.

## 2. Don't wait until the last minute

You probably won't get a spot on an admission tour if you're calling colleges the day you're due to arrive on campus. You'll also have a hard time finding lodging and getting the city experience you want if you wait until the last minute. Plan your visits and the rest of your road trip well in advance: Call your colleges, book your hotels, plan your route, and research your must-see tourist spots!

### 3. Make a list of questions for each school

This is your opportunity to learn things about campus life that can't be answered in a Google search—so take advantage of it! Here are some ideas for [questions to ask during campus visits](#):

- Do financial aid packages change a lot after the first year?
- What's the work-study program like?
- Does my major of interest have a good program here?
- How often do students meet with academic advisors?
- How does the college commit to diversity, equity, and inclusion?
- What are the most popular campus hangout spots?

Compile as many questions as you need to ensure you're making an informed decision about which college to attend.

**Related:** [Campus Visits: Places to Go and Questions to Ask](#)

### 4. Establish a budget for the trip

Establishing a budget for your trip is essential for a seamless experience. Start saving up for your trip well in advance to ensure you have the money you need to enjoy the experience fully.

The last thing you want to do is overspend and worry about the consequences when you get back home. Setting a concrete budget and saving goal ensures this won't happen, so consider the following:



- How long is your road trip?
- What activities are you doing?
- How much do you need for gas?
- How much do you need for food, lodging, and other essentials?
- How much can you set aside for emergencies?

## 5. Ready your vehicle for the trip

Your vehicle needs to be just as ready as you are for a road trip. Take your car to your local garage or check the following [vehicle maintenance components](#) yourself if you're comfortable:

- Battery and lights
- Brakes
- Tires, including pressure, tread, and traction
- Levels of all fluids: brakes, coolant, engine oil, power steering, transmission, and windshield wiper

## 6. Pack light and efficiently

What you need on a road trip depends on how long you'll be gone and where you're going. Look up the weather where you're visiting and think of the activities you'll be doing to help you determine what to bring as well, like comfortable shoes for walking or portable chargers for long days on the move.

## 7. Create an itinerary for each day

You only get a short amount of time to visit each college, so it's important to pack your days with activities that will help you make an informed decision about where to go to school. Check out the dorms, the bookstore, health and career centers, and the admission office. Eat at the dining hall, meet your financial aid officer, introduce yourself to professors, and visit coaches if you're an athlete. A well-organized itinerary doesn't have to account for every hour of the day, but a generally detailed plan with specific activities and time estimates can help keep you on track.

**Related:** [Top 10 Tips for Your College Visit Road Trip](#)

## 8. Be intentional about your road trip diet

Food can be one of the biggest expenses on a road trip if you default to eating out for every meal. Not only that, but what you eat [impacts your mental health and mood](#). If you eat sugary snacks (as many people do on the road), you're at risk for blood sugar crashes that cause mood swings. And you don't want that on a long college tour! Choosing healthy foods to eat on the go can keep you energized and in high spirits every day of your trip. Pack your cooler with healthy snacks to [save some money](#) and nurture your holistic health. And if you do eat out, opt for nutritious meals that will fill you up and give you energy.

## 9. Leave time to explore each city

You'll spend a lot of time in the cities your chosen colleges are in, so make sure you leave time during each visit to explore them. Visit popular tourist attractions. [Go to a good restaurant](#) that jumps out to you. Explore parks and nearby

neighborhoods. Get a feel for what life will be like in the city and how you might spend your time there as a college student.

## 10. Be engaged on each tour

The whole point of this road trip is to visit potential colleges. Make sure you're getting everything you can out of the tours you take of each campus. Ask your questions. Meet and chat with the students and faculty who are there. Participate in all the activities your tour guide has planned to make the most of the time you set aside to be on campus. And if there's time after the tour, explore and observe on your own to get a real feel for the campus environment.

**Related:** [Top 10 College Visit Tips for a Successful Campus Experience](#)

College tours are so influential in helping you decide where to go to college, and a road trip is a classic travel experience. If you plan it thoroughly, it's sure to be the meaningful, productive experience you want.

## How to Use Technology to Make Your College Campus Visits Even Better

Colleges offer a variety of ways to enhance your in-person campus visits with technology. Check out all the ways you can make your tours even better here!

As a high school student navigating the challenges during the early days of the pandemic, I was at the forefront of a new frontier in the college admission process: remote campus visits. When college campuses closed across the country during the outbreak of COVID-19, schools amped up their online visit offerings with virtual tours, 3D maps, webinars, and more. While current options are probably not quite as...distanced...as mine were, I discovered a lot of ways technology can be used for campus visits that I want to share with you (yes—it's okay to use your phones in my little masterclass!). Here are my top tips on how you can utilize technology to enhance your college tour experiences.

## Online tours

Before visiting a college in person, it can be helpful to explore the campus virtually through video, photo, or other [online tours](#) (typically offered through the college's website). These options are great for getting a preliminary feel for the campus layout, facilities, aesthetics, and more. They're also a low-stakes way to help you decide if you're up for taking an in-person tour.

**Related:** [Top Tips to Help You Decide Which Colleges to Visit in Person](#)

## ChatGPT

Despite the controversy surrounding artificial intelligence, [ChatGPT can be a powerful tool](#) in a variety of ways for campus visits. Not only can it tell you about a school's campus, its culture, statistics, and other basic info, but you can even ask it to generate an itinerary for your visit. If you're traveling several hours from home for a college visit or just want to check out the area surrounding the

campus, this can be a great help—just be sure to double-check its recommendations so you know they're not outdated.

## Virtual campus maps

If you're not a fan of traditional paper maps, you're in luck: Many colleges offer interactive virtual maps on their websites or mobile apps. These are ripe with information and can provide great insight into things like which residence hall you might want to see or what buildings your classes may be in. If you're touring without a guide, lean on those virtual maps to help you along your visit!

## Campus apps and social media

In recent years, more colleges have hopped onto the idea of maintaining their own mobile apps, which are stuffed with information like cafeteria menus, important phone numbers, [upcoming events](#), and more. If a prospective college has one, I recommend downloading it and snooping around to see what's up on campus. Social media is another powerful tool for keeping track of what's going on before and during your visit. Be sure to follow the college's channels to stay informed leading up to your tour.

**Related:** [6 Simple Ways to Connect With Colleges on Social Media](#)

## Live chats with admission, alumni, and student networks

Many colleges now offer the chance to live chat with admission staff through their website. This is a great way to get real-time answers to your questions if you're

visiting a campus without a guide! In addition to chatting with college reps, some institutions also have student- or alumni-run groups on platforms like Facebook and ZeeMee. This is a fantastic opportunity to [connect with current students](#) or graduates and get their thoughts about the school, favorite spots, hot tips, and more. If they're current or local, they might even be willing to grab a quick bite with you while you're on campus and spill *all* the details.

## QR codes

Like many businesses and restaurants these days, some colleges have QR codes placed around the campus. These typically offer additional information about the college's programs, upcoming events, clubs, history, and a wealth of other topics. Grab your phone and scan the codes with your camera to see what you can learn!

## Note-taking apps

While note apps are widely used, it can be easy to sleep on them when you're excited on a campus tour. But this is a great way to jot down your impressions of the campus, its students, and study areas as well as any questions you want to ask after the tour. I promise, these notes will prove invaluable later when you're looking back on your visits to make a final decision!

**Related:** [7 Smart Things You Should Do on Your Next Campus Visit](#)

By harnessing the power of technology and using it to your advantage, you can maximize your college campus visit experiences, stay informed, and make well-informed decisions about your future school. Good luck and have fun!

# Improve Your College Research With Great Campus Tour Experiences

Campus visits are the best way to enhance your college search and make it easier to choose where to apply. These tips can help you maximize the experience!

You can read every piece of information on a college's website, but you'll never truly know what it's like to be a student there until you take a campus tour.

Whether you're visiting a local college or a university on the other side of the country, you need to take the tour seriously to make an informed final decision.

Here are some of the benefits of campus tours and five tips to help you get the most out of these experiences.

## Why attend campus tours?

A campus tour gives you a chance to see the school in person and understand the student experience firsthand through important connections such as:

- **Getting a feel for the campus:** During a tour, you can walk through the halls, explore campus, and picture yourself calling this school home for the next four years.
- **[Learn from current students:](#)** In most cases, the people conducting school tours are current students. They can provide honest insights about the college and what makes it great.

- **Get answers to essential questions:** Learning about things like student life, activities, and campus traditions online or through a brochure can be challenging. An in-person tour gives you the chance to ask crucial questions and get in-depth answers.

**Related:** [3 Main Types of College Visits You Should Know About](#)

## How to get the most out of your tour

If you're going to take the time to attend a college tour, you might as well get as much out of it as possible—especially if you're thinking about going to a school far from home. These tips will help you enjoy the tour and get the information you need to make the best choice for your future.

### Make sure you can see and hear well

You've taken the time to set up a tour and travel to the school. How frustrating would it be to spend the whole tour craning your neck trying to see what's going on or straining to hear what the tour guide is saying? Arrive early so you can chat with your guide and get to know the other attendees. Then choose your place in the group carefully. Stand near the front to make it easier to hear the guide, especially when they stop to talk about a specific building or highlight a vital aspect of the school. Some schools utilize helpful technology like [communication headsets](#) to make sure you don't miss anything while walking in a large group. But if you do miss something, don't hesitate to ask the guide to repeat themselves. This is your time to explore the school, and there's nothing wrong with seeking clarification.



## Seek out your desired major's department

All aspects of the tour matter and will contribute to your decision on which college to attend. However, a trip to your department(s) of interest is critical. Say you plan to major in Computer Science—pay attention to the Computer Science building, where it's located, the kind of equipment you'll have access to, the number of people milling around the area, etc. If you notice the building seems poorly maintained or has outdated equipment, that might be a sign you won't get the level of training you need at this school. Conversely, if it seems like it was recently updated and has the latest tools and technologies, that's a positive sign.

**Related:** [Campus Tours: What to Expect and How to Prepare Ahead of Time](#)

## Ask the right questions

When you ask [specific, relevant questions](#) while you're visiting campus, it's easier to gain valuable insights and decide whether a school is right for you. Here are some essential questions to cover during the tour:

### Admission questions

- Who conducts admission interviews: alumni, students, admission officers?
- Do any majors have an enrollment cap?
- On average, how many students are admitted to the college each year?

### Academic questions

- Are most classes taught by professors or teaching assistants?

- What's the average class size?
- Who gets priority during course registration periods?
- How many classes do most students take each semester?
- How popular is my desired major?

### **Student support questions**

- What kinds of tutoring services are available?
- How often can students meet with [academic advisors](#)?
- How easy is it to connect with professors outside the classroom?
- What kind of [mental health support](#) is available on campus?

### **Financial aid questions**

- What percentage of students receive financial aid or scholarships?
- Do financial aid packages adjust along with tuition?
- How easy is it to contact financial aid officers?

### **Student life questions**

- How did you get involved as a new student here?
- What are the best ways to [make new friends on campus](#)?
- What are some of the school's most significant events and traditions?

### **Housing questions**

- Are students required to live on campus? If not, what percentage of students do?
- How much control do students have over where they live or with whom?

- What kind of relationship does the school have with the local community?

### **Student outcome questions**

- What is the four-year graduation rate?
- What is the retention rate from freshman to sophomore year?
- What kind of career guidance do students receive here?

## **Explore on your own**

It's great to be part of a group and talk to your guide during a college visit.

However, you should break off when the tour ends and [explore on your own](#). It'll give you a chance to soak up the school environment in a more natural way. Pay attention to how you feel as you wander and spend more time in areas that are most relevant to you and your college goals.

## **Take notes and reflect**

Take notes or use your phone to record during the campus tour—but always ask permission before recording video or audio of anyone. When you're finished for the day, look back at your notes or listen back to the recording and consider the highlights. What positives and negatives stood out to you? Use this information to compare different schools and choose the right one for you.

**Related:** [How to Take Your Campus Visit Experience Into Your Own Hands](#)

Now that you know how important campus tours are and the best way to maximize their value, it's time to start scheduling appointments. Research and contact the colleges and universities you want to visit to find upcoming tour dates and book your spot.

## **How to Clean Up Your Social Media for College Admission**

We have one more item for students to add to their college admission to-do lists: Clean up your social media! Here's why it's important and what to review.

Social media is an influential part of our daily lives in the modern world. As students gear up for college, it's important to know how your online presence can shake things up in the admission game—for better and for worse. Let's go over some do's and don'ts of social media to help you make informed decisions and present your best self in case college admission committees are looking.

### **Realize the potential impact on college admission**

A well-managed social media presence may be able to positively influence admissions officers, adding an extra dimension to your application. On the other hand, a careless online presence can have real negative consequences. Posting inappropriate content or engaging in questionable behavior may raise concerns if admission committees look up your profiles, and some colleges make a point to do so to vet applicants. According to a [survey by the American Association of](#)

[Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers](#), “11% of respondents said they ‘denied admission based on social media content’ and another 7% rescinded offers for the same reason.”

**Related:** [How to Lose Your College Acceptance](#)

## Avoid problematic posts

Your online presence on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok can provide potential insight into your personality and hobbies outside of academic life. Admission officers may review your profiles [when looking at your college applications](#), making it crucial to maintain a positive and respectful image. It’s advisable to avoid any inappropriate or offensive content that may adversely affect your chances of securing admission, including:

- Posts with explicit language, derogatory remarks, or offensive memes
- Constant complaints or rants about school, teachers, or peers
- Excessive posts about partying, skipping class, or engaging in irresponsible behavior

These types of posts portray a negative attitude and lack of maturity to admission committees. They also suggest a lack of commitment to academics and personal responsibility. Even if your profile settings are private (and if they aren’t, keep reading!), it’s important to think before you post so you don’t have any regrets.

## Build a positive online image

A better way to use social media is to exhibit your accomplishments, extracurricular pursuits, and community outreach endeavors as a college-bound

student. For example, if you [volunteer for a local charity](#) or nonprofit organization, share photos or stories to show how it impacts your community. Post about your leadership roles within school clubs or organizations—like being the student council president or captain of a sports team—and share updates about your initiatives and successes. Attend specialized workshops, seminars, or summer programs related to your academic interests and share insights or experiences gained from these opportunities. These types of posts make a better impression by showcasing your potential as a valuable addition to any college's academic community and demonstrating your dedication to personal growth.

**Related:** [How to Be Responsible Using Social Media as a Student](#)

## Do a digital cleanup

Now that you know what you should and shouldn't post, your social media profiles may need some spring cleaning. First, scrutinize all your profiles and eliminate any content that could be viewed unfavorably. Delete any unsuitable photos, offensive language, or potentially contentious viewpoints. Even though anything uploaded on the internet can still be discovered, presenting a fresh persona on social media is crucial as you progress through high school and college.

## Check your privacy settings

It's highly recommended that students adjust their privacy settings to regulate the viewership of personal content. If you haven't yet, navigate to the settings menus of your social media platforms. Typically, you can find this by clicking on your profile picture or avatar and selecting "Settings" or "Account Settings." Look for

options related to privacy or security. This section usually allows you to control who can see your posts, who can send you friend or follow requests, and who can view your personal information. Review the available privacy options carefully. You can change settings for profile visibility, post visibility, contact information visibility, and more. Adjust these settings according to your preferences. Even if your settings are private, you should still refrain from sharing overly personal information. You never know who may gain access to it, so it's crucial to [balance sharing your personal life](#) with friends and family and safeguarding personal information from strangers.

**Related:** [How to Prepare Your Social Media for the Job Search](#)

As you approach the college admission process, remember that your online presence is a practical tool that can either help or hinder your prospects. Take the time to curate a positive digital image that aligns with your values. By being mindful of your social media activity, you can ensure that your online persona reflects the qualities colleges seek in prospective students.

## **How to Write a Great Essay About Your Ideal College Major**

Writing about why you're pursuing a major and your passions in an admission essay can feel vulnerable, but it's powerful. Here's how to go about it easily!

The idea of writing a college admission essay is daunting for most—whether you're just entering high school or getting ready to start applying. Believe it or not, these essays play a pivotal role in making or breaking your application.

They're a great way to boost your application (when written well!) and also give admission officers a chance to get to know you better. What better way to do this than by shining a spotlight on the major you plan to pursue and building a narrative about why it's important to you? Let's discuss your prospective major first and foremost before exploring how to write about it in your college application essays.

## Embrace your prospective major

Regardless of your passion—astronomy, anthropology, art history, or something else entirely—there's a reason you've set your sights on it. Perhaps it stemmed from an early fascination with constellations, an ingrained interest in historical civilizations, or a passion for brushstrokes. Accept it for what it is and start considering how you can build a future with that passion! You have the opportunity to highlight your unique qualities and demonstrate how your major choice aligns with both your academic and personal goals in your college essay.

**Related:** [The Pros and Cons of Declaring a Major on Your College Applications](#)

## Build a gripping storyline

Now, let's take on the difficult task of coming up with a [\*\*gripping storyline about your interests\*\*](#). Consider your college essay to be a story in which you play the lead role as it develops. What life-changing events or moments inspired you to set your sights on your future major? Make sure you really put thought into where the idea to pursue your major came from, because the moment it happened is



often deeper than you realize. Then carefully craft the story of what led you there, making sure to give vivid details and an engaging picture of your journey. During the writing process, be sure to keep the essay conversational but not overly casual—although college essays are less academic, it's important to keep in mind that they are *still* being read by higher education professionals.

## Use emotions to express your passion

To captivate a reader, it's best to use descriptive emotions to express your passion for your chosen major. The feelings you have about the major and what inspired you to become interested in it will drive your commitment going forward through your college journey. After explaining the way your field of interest makes you feel, talk about what you want to do with a degree to fulfill your goals. *Why* do you want to study this major, other than the event that caused you to think about pursuing it? [What are your future plans](#) for actually working in the field? Thinking beyond college is a great way to impress admission counselors and ensure you'd be a hardworking, goal-oriented member of their student community.

**Related:** [An Essay About You: How to Tackle Your College Essay](#)

Writing about your intended major in your college admission essay doesn't have to be this big, intimidating thing. Think of it more as an exciting opportunity to tell someone, unfiltered, why you're passionate about your interests. As a quick reminder, the Common App releases its essay prompts each year and often keep some of the same from the previous year. As one of the options, applicants can usually answer a prompt of their choice, whether it's one they have already written or one they have designed. This means you can utilize this option to talk

about the major you plan to pursue right in the Common App, where all your other materials are!

# A Green Guide to Finding the Best Eco-Friendly Colleges

More and more students are searching for environmentally responsible colleges. Learn what eco-friendly really means and how to find a campus that cares.

In a world that's increasingly conscious of environmental issues, many students are seeking higher education institutions that align with their values of sustainability and environmental responsibility. The quest for eco-friendly colleges and universities goes beyond typical academic considerations, encompassing campus practices, curriculum offerings, and community engagement in environmental initiatives. If you're looking to go green in your college search, here's a starter guide to help you find colleges that prioritize environmental stewardship.

## Understanding eco-friendly colleges

Before diving into the search process, it's essential to understand what makes a college eco-friendly. While definitions may vary, environmentally friendly colleges typically exhibit several key characteristics:

- **Sustainable campus practices:** A college that is truly environmentally friendly prioritizes sustainability in its operations. This includes

energy-efficient buildings, renewable energy sources, waste reduction and recycling programs, water conservation efforts, and sustainable transportation options. One great example is the [University of Chicago](#), a recent [ENERGY STAR Partner of the Year Award](#) winner for their commitment to energy efficiency.

- **Green curriculum:** Many colleges offer academic programs focused on Environmental Studies, Sustainability, Renewable Energy, Conservation, and related fields. They also integrate sustainability principles into various disciplines, from Engineering to Business to the Humanities. For example, the [University of Connecticut](#) offers hundreds of sustainability-focused courses and even implemented an [environmental literacy gen ed requirement](#) in 2019.
- **Environmental initiatives:** Green colleges actively engage in environmental advocacy, research, and community outreach. This could involve partnerships with local environmental organizations, participation in sustainability-focused events, and campus-wide initiatives to promote eco-conscious behavior. Take, for instance, the [Institute for Sustainability and the Environment](#) at [Pace University](#), which provides “experiential and place-based educational opportunities for students of all backgrounds, degrees, and academic levels” while “foster[ing] collaboration with external partners through training and leadership.”
- **Student involvement:** It’s also important to assess the level of student involvement in sustainability efforts. Look for colleges with active environmental clubs, student-led initiatives, and opportunities for hands-on experience in sustainability projects. One super-active institution is the [University of Colorado Boulder](#), whose Division of Student Affairs houses an [Environmental Center](#) that hosts workshops,

meetings, and volunteer opportunities for students related to campus sustainability efforts.

**Related:** [5 of the Most Sustainable Universities in the World](#)

## Resources for finding eco-friendly colleges

From rankings and reports to campus visits and networking, there are several ways to find and research institutions that are committed to sustainability. Here are some key resources to utilize as you conduct your college search.

- **Official college rankings and guides:** Several organizations produce lists and guides specifically focused on sustainable colleges. The Princeton Review's [Green Colleges Guide and Rankings](#) and the [Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education](#) offer valuable insights into colleges' green initiatives and practices. CollegeXpress also offers lists and articles to help you in your green college search. Check out recommendations from real students in our list of [The Best Colleges and Universities for an Eco-Friendly Campus Lifestyle](#), or read about [10 Great Universities at the Forefront of Climate Change Education](#).
- **Sustainability reports:** Many colleges publish annual sustainability reports detailing their environmental performance, goals, and achievements. These reports provide valuable information about a college's commitment to sustainability and ongoing efforts to reduce its environmental footprint. Try Googling the name of your college(s) of

interest plus “sustainability report,” or look for a Sustainability section on a school’s official website.

- **Campus visits and tours:** Whenever possible, schedule campus visits and tours to experience a college's sustainability initiatives firsthand. Pay attention to campus facilities, recycling bins, green spaces, alternative transportation options, and any signage or information related to sustainability efforts. [Don't forget to take notes](#) about everything you find!
- **Virtual tours and webinars:** In addition to physical visits, many colleges offer [virtual tours and webinars](#) that highlight their sustainability initiatives. Take advantage of these online resources to learn more about a college's commitment to environmental stewardship, even if you’ve already visited campus.
- **Student and alumni networks:** Connect with current students and alumni to learn about their experiences with sustainability on campus. Social media platforms, forums, and alumni networks can be valuable for gathering insights and perspectives from those familiar with a college's culture.

## Tips for evaluating eco-friendly colleges

So you found the Sustainability page of a school’s website or saw recycling bins in the dining hall. But how do you *really* know they follow through on their environmental promises? Here are a few ways to dig even deeper:

- **Research institutional policies:** Review a college's mission statement, sustainability policies, and strategic plans to understand its commitment to the environment. Look for specific goals, targets, and initiatives

related to sustainability as well as reports about any progress they've achieved.

- **Assess campus facilities:** Research a college's facilities, infrastructure, and operations to further gauge its sustainability efforts. Consider factors such as LEED-certified buildings, renewable energy installations, water conservation measures, and waste management practices. If you can't find this information on a school's website, email them so they can point you in the right direction.
- **Explore academic offerings:** Investigate the academic programs a college offers, including majors, minors, and courses related to [environmental studies and sustainability](#). Look for interdisciplinary programs, research opportunities, and experiential learning initiatives in these areas as well.
- **Engage with the community:** Learn about a college's partnerships with local communities, businesses, and environmental organizations. You can also inquire about opportunities for community engagement, service learning, and environmental activism both on and off campus.
- **Consider student support services:** Evaluate the availability of available student services related to sustainability. These could include green living communities, eco-representatives, and sustainability-focused events and workshops.

**Related:** [10 Colleges That Went Green Before It Was Cool](#)

Finding an eco-friendly college may take some extra research, but you are far from alone in your quest. By using all the resources available to you and looking beyond academic reputation or campus amenities, you can find a college that shares your desire to make the world a better place. It's time to get out there and start your search for the best colleges for you and the planet!

# Unique Extracurricular Activities for a Better College Application

Extracurriculars can give you an edge in college admission, but unique activities can really make your résumé stand out. Learn how to pursue them here!

Extracurricular activities are a crucial part of college applications. They help admission officers understand your interests and aspirations while offering a glimpse into your life and passions—so it's a good idea to participate in activities that genuinely interest you. It's even better when your activities and experiences are unique and stand out from the crowd. Here are a few ideas for different activities you could pursue to get an edge on college admission.

## The importance of extracurriculars in the admission process

When it comes to extracurriculars and college admission, there are a few rules that aren't exactly unique but ring true for every student. Admission officers value quality over quantity, so it's okay if you don't participate in a bunch of activities. You can show colleges you're committed and have had a meaningful experience with your chosen pursuit. However, it's still possible to juggle multiple interests and hobbies. I have many hobbies, but I dedicate quality time to each of them. You just need to put effort and time into each activity if you want to make it work. The most important thing to remember is to have fun and enjoy it!

**Related:** [How Extracurriculars Benefit Your College Applications](#)

## What makes an extracurricular activity unique?

"Unique" extracurriculars are [activities that aren't as mainstream](#), but the unique aspect could also be something that makes your experience stand out, adding distinctive value to your college applications. For example, you might play polo or rugby, which are not as common these days. Alternatively, you might play a pretty common sport like soccer. To make your experience more unique, you could work to become the manager or captain, which requires you to take charge by implementing strategies, organizing events, and fostering team spirit—therefore increasing your involvement and leadership. Other examples of unique activities include ventriloquism, choreography, fashion design, and snorkeling. These types of hobbies help you develop important skills but also make your résumé more interesting and memorable. Let's dive deeper into these different categories of unique activities that are sure to impress colleges.

### Sports that stand out

When we think of extracurricular activities, sports may be one of the first things that come to mind. It's no surprise that athletics are a popular pastime for students, with the option of both school and club sports providing a wide variety of choices. From gymnastics to golf, soccer to dance, the opportunities are endless. Some unique options include pickleball, rugby, archery, and surfing. When it comes to choosing which sport(s) to pursue, it's important to go with



something that you genuinely enjoy and can see yourself putting in time and effort to improve. Don't forget that practice makes perfect (or close to it)!

**Related:** [The College Intramural Sports You Want to Play](#)

## Clubs and other activities

There are so many other extracurricular options to highlight to colleges, from organized activities like Girl Scouts to hobbies like music and writing. There are likely many opportunities in your community and not just at your school too. Identify a unique interest and see if it matches the mission of a local organization; all it takes is a little effort to ask around and get involved. Try to find a leadership opportunity if possible, or you could even create your own club dedicated to something you love—this shows initiative and drive, which colleges love. If you don't have many opportunities in your town or school, there are a lot of online extracurriculars as well. I was interested in writing and reached out to CollegeXpress to [join their Student Writing Program](#). This is my fourth article, and it is so fun! If you're interested in becoming a student ambassador for CollegeXpress by creating vlogs or writing articles, be sure to check out their website!

## Create your own

When it comes to finding something fun and fulfilling to do in your free time, there's no need to limit yourself to traditional clubs, sports, or other activities. You can explore a variety of self-taught hobbies that can be just as rewarding and impressive on a résumé. If you find that formal activities are too expensive or don't meet your needs, don't worry! You can always turn to the vast resources on [YouTube](#) for lessons and inspiration on just about anything you want to learn.

Whether you're interested in mastering soccer tricks, learning how to sew, or playing the piano, you can find a wealth of information online. Pursuing a hobby on your own can be challenging, but it can also be incredibly rewarding. It's worth it to give it a try; it might turn into a lifelong hobby or even a future college major or career. And remember, you don't have to let anyone else dictate what you can and can't do. If you're passionate about or interested in something, go for it, and don't take no for an answer!

**Related:** [Great Extracurricular Activities That Won't Break Your Bank Account](#)

When it comes to finding unique extracurriculars that stand out to colleges, there are countless opportunities available to you, but it can be daunting to figure out where to start. My advice is to focus on doing what you love rather than just thinking about what will look good on a college application; seeing your passion shine through is what truly impresses college admission officers. If there isn't a club or organization that aligns with your interests, consider starting your own to explore your unique passions. Remember, extracurricular activities don't have to be formal or structured—you can try out sports, join clubs, or simply pursue your hobbies on your own, and it can be as simple as watching YouTube videos to learn how to start. Whatever you decide to do, don't hesitate to take the first step and start exploring. Good luck!

## **How to Leverage Specialized Extracurriculars in Emerging Fields for College**

Extracurriculars in emerging fields are a great way to impress colleges, but what opportunities are available? Let's discuss what you can do to stand out.

Once upon a time, having high SAT scores and an impressive GPA were the only ways to secure a college acceptance—but the competition for admission seems to constantly be reaching new heights. Aside from reviewing high school exam scores and overall grades, colleges and universities increasingly place value on students with extracurriculars tied to emerging career fields. Specialized extracurricular activities allow high school students to explore their interests and set themselves apart from other applicants in the college application process. Let's examine the growing significance of up-and-coming career fields such as artificial intelligence (AI), renewable energy, and biotechnology, plus how you can navigate and maximize these opportunities as a student.

## The importance of specialized extracurriculars

Colleges weigh a student's extracurricular activities alongside their grades to get a better perspective on the student's character and talents. While your grades and exam scores are essential, they don't give a complete picture of [who you are as a student](#) and a young adult. Extracurriculars let them know if you'll be a good fit on campus and what level of participation you'll likely bring to the student body.

Extracurricular experiences often reflect a student's leadership abilities, so students who engage in specialized extracurriculars can show prospective

admission departments their commitment and dedication to emerging fields and how they apply that knowledge practically. Specialized activities provide concrete examples of how you use leadership skills and impact those around you.

Admission offices then use all this to determine who is passionate about their fields of interest and will follow through on their commitment—the kind of students they want on their campus.

**Related:** [What Students Should Know About STEM Extracurricular Opportunities](#)

## Identifying specialized extracurricular opportunities

Several industries are experiencing rapid growth in the STEM and technology sectors. Artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and biotechnology are quickly becoming popular areas of study, and consequently, many universities actively seek students who are passionate about and demonstrate potential in these fields. STEM activities also offer excellent [opportunities for underrepresented students](#) to stand out on their college applications, thus encouraging equality and diversity in STEM fields.

### Artificial intelligence (AI)

The [AI industry is growing exponentially](#), and there's a growing demand for students with a strong interest in machine learning, programming, and data science. Students can catch the attention of admission officers by engaging in AI-related activities, such as joining robotics clubs, participating in coding competitions, and working on AI research projects. These extracurriculars show

colleges that you have an interest in AI and the critical technical expertise, creativity, and problem-solving skills for success in this industry.

## Renewable energy

With the importance of sustainability in our culture, many universities now offer various study options in renewable energy. Students who are passionate about contributing to a more sustainable world should consider starting or participating in a solar energy club, school recycling program, or green technology project. Sustainable and environmental initiatives as extracurriculars reflect a student's desire to shape a better future and can significantly enhance your college applications.

## Biotechnology

Technological advancements in agricultural and medical fields make biotechnology a necessary and popular field of study. Students who are interested in and talented in biology, health, or genetics should participate in extracurriculars that align with these. For example, college admission officers will take notice if you're a member of a bioengineering club, participate in science fairs, intern with a biotech company, or volunteer at a hospital. Biotechnology is the driving force behind [digital trends in the health care industry](#), and the demand for knowledgeable employees will only increase.

**Related:** [5 Great Places to Look for STEM Volunteer Opportunities in High School](#)

## Engaging in your extracurriculars

Once you've identified your passion(s) and discovered what you want to study further in college, you must engage in your activities as much as reasonably possible. Look for available internships or volunteer positions in your area, and get involved in clubs and project fairs to prove your interest further. Here are a few highlights you can then add to your résumé.

## **1. Active participation**

More than just being a member of a club, you *must* show your dedication to your chosen passion to catch the attention of colleges. Participate actively in events, projects, or meetings. Apply to local and national competitions to demonstrate your specialty, or try mentoring younger students who share your passion for STEM-based subjects. Even if you're not an extrovert or outgoing leader, you can still showcase your leadership skills by initiating projects or working behind the scenes to support a successful project or event.

## **2. Personal projects**

Not everyone has a school or community that offers these types of clubs or events to engage with. Don't worry! You can still gain practical experience with a specialized extracurricular by other means. Consider [learning how to code](#), creating a website or app, engaging in private research, or initiating a campaign to develop or improve energy conservation policies in your local area. These examples highlight you as a creative individual who thinks outside the box and forges a path for your peers to follow.

## **3. Leadership skills**

How *much* you participate in extracurriculars is as important as how *long* you participate. This quality can bring a competitive edge to your college applications if, for instance, you started with your club or organization in an entry-level role, then with more experience and time, you held a [unique role with more responsibility](#). Those changes in your membership prove your leadership skills and commitment to the group. Admission officers look specifically for students who step up and take on these roles as future productive members of campus.

**Related:** [8 Leadership Qualities All Students Should Have](#)

## Building a portfolio

When (or even before) you begin the college application process, you should build a portfolio of your accomplishments in and out of school. Most high school students include a résumé, transcripts, letters of recommendation, creative work, and athletic statistics, among other content. Make sure you use your portfolio to draw attention to any of the ways you've engaged with your school or community in a STEM subject area, including:

- Internships
- Volunteering and community service
- Artistic and creative pursuits
- Academic clubs and teams
- Leadership work and positions
- Sports and athletic participation
- Part-time jobs
- Independent projects

Be strategic about which extracurricular activities to highlight in your portfolio. You don't have to list everything—instead focus on showing application readers your best activities.

**Related:** [How to Craft the Perfect High School Résumé](#)

Your extracurricular activities let admission officers know more about who you are and how you will benefit their college community. Identify leadership opportunities and display a deep commitment to your endeavors. The evidence of your growth, initiative to take advantage of opportunities, and interest in emerging fields could make the difference between a college acceptance or rejection.