

College Information Handbook



Round Rock Christian Academy
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512-716-1354
www.rrca-tx.org

RRCA Student:

You are now embarking on one of the most exciting and stressful times of your lives. Being an upperclassman involves so much more than off campus lunch privileges, being on the top of the totem pole, homecomings, and proms. You will dream of the future and have many memories of the past. In one year, you will experience a gamut of emotions and feelings. You will think that you are an adult just because you have turned 18 and that you are invincible. In your senior year, you will encounter a lot of firsts... but you will also encounter many more lasts.

As you begin your senior year, you will need to spend some serious time in prayer as you are seeking the Father's will for your life. What college will you go to? What will you major in? Where will all the money come from? The college admission process can be filled with a big rush of adrenaline and disappointments. You will have to work very hard and pay particular attention to detail. You will need to wait patiently as someone else decides if you are qualified to be a part of his or her college. You will learn that the procrastinators do not finish first and usually have to settle for what is left.

This planning handbook has been prepared to assist you and your parents walk through the college admission process. It is designed to minimize your stress. I challenge you to walk confidently through the college admission process knowing that God already has a plan for you and your life. I am excited and ready to help you as you discover what your future has in store for you.

In Christ,

Rebecca Blauser
Head of School

Tiffany Jaksch
Secondary Principal

PSAT: October 16 (you are automatically registered)

The PSAT will be given at RRCA during a school day in October each year. This is one of the most important standardized tests that you take. The PSAT is the official test for qualifying for the **National Merit Scholarship Program**. While this score is not officially part of the college admission process, many colleges subscribe to PSAT lists sorted by group scores. For example, while A&M may not receive your individual PSAT score, they can request a mailing list from the College Board for anyone scoring higher than the equivalent of a 1300 SAT score on the PSAT.

NOTE: Unlike the SAT and ACT exams, it is NOT necessary to register individually for the PSAT. All RRCA students, grades 9 – 11, are automatically registered for these exams and they will be administered at RRCA during the School Day.

SAT/ACT

Colleges and universities require the SAT or ACT as part of the admissions process. Most colleges will accept either test. Carefully check your admission information from prospective colleges and universities to verify what tests and scores are required for admissions. Plan to take at least one SAT I and ACT test during your junior year to be prepared to apply to schools with early deadlines in the fall of your senior year. If the college requires "official" test scores, it will be necessary for you to have your test scores sent directly to the colleges. Both SAT and ACT registration bulletins provide information on how to send "official" test scores.

SAT I - Take a minimum of one SAT test during your junior year and a second one in the early fall of your senior year. Almost all colleges will take a "best combination" of score (your highest verbal and highest math). Again, it is important to know the testing requirements for the schools that you plan to apply to in order to determine if the college or university will accept the best combination of scores or your highest test score on any one given test date.

The New SAT, which includes a writing section with essay, was administered for the first time in the spring of 2005. All colleges are handling the writing section of the SAT differently, so it is important to check with the colleges that you are interested in to find out how they will look at the essay.

SAT II- More selective colleges require the SAT II tests as part of the admission process in addition to the regular SAT I scores. Again, it is important for you to know the requirements for the schools to which you plan to apply. The SAT II are subject tests. Each subject takes one hour in length and you may take three (3) subjects on any given test day. Exams for the SAT I and SAT II tests are given on the same day. Please plan your testing calendar carefully! It is recommended to take the SAT II exams as soon as you have completed the subject, but no later than the November test date of the senior year.

ACT - The ACT covers four content areas with math scoring only one fourth of the composite grade. Some students perform better on the ACT. Therefore, it is recommended that you take both the SAT and ACT exams and then use the exam that best represents your abilities and achievements. The ACT added an optional writing section to the ACT in the February 2005 Test Administration. You can log into the ACT website to see which colleges will require the writing component.

TEST PREPARATION

It is strongly recommended that you take some form of test preparation before taking the SAT or ACT. Both organizations have Test Preparation materials that can be purchased at your local bookstores. The SAT has a full-length practice test available online for the new SAT. You can also register for online test preparation at www.collegeboard.com or at www.act.org.

THEA

Students who wish to attend a Junior college may take THEA (Texas Higher Education Assessment -formerly known as the TASP test) instead of the SAT or ACT. To register for the THEA you will need to contact an admissions counselor at the college that you wish to attend and set up a testing time or you may register online at www.thea.nesinc.com.

You will be exempt from the THEA if you have an SAT score of 1070 with a minimum of 500 on both the Math and Verbal section or a composite score of 23 on the ACT with a minimum of 19 on both the Math and English sections. You will also find a full-length practice test and study guide materials at the THEA website.

REGISTERING FOR SAT I/ACT/SAT II

It is **YOUR** responsibility to register for SAT/ACT testing. The Secondary Office has all of the necessary registration forms however; it is **recommended that you REGISTER ONLINE**. Please refer to the registration packets for further information or visit the following websites.

www.collegeboard.org

www.act.org

The **RRCA school code is 446026**. You must include this code in order for RRCA to receive your scores and include them on your official transcript.

2013-2014 SAT Test Dates

SAT Date	SAT Subject Tests Available	Registration Deadline	Late Registration Deadline	
			additional fee applies Mail	Phone/Online
Oct 5	SAT & Subject Tests	Sep 6	Sep 20	Sep 23
Nov 2	SAT & Subject Tests	Oct 3	Oct 18	Oct 21
Dec 7	SAT & Subject Tests	Nov 8	Nov 22	Nov 25
Jan 25	SAT & Subject Tests	Dec 27	Jan 10	Jan 14
Mar 8		Feb 7	Feb 21	Feb 24
May 3	SAT & Subject Tests	Apr 4	Apr 18	Apr 21
Jun 7	SAT & Subject Tests	May 9	May 23	May 28

2013 -2014 ACT Test Dates

Test Date	Registration Deadline	(Late Fee Required)
September 21, 2013	August 23, 2013	August 24–September 6, 2013
October 26, 2013	September 27, 2013	September 28–October 11, 2013
December 14, 2013	November 8, 2013	November 9–22, 2013
February 8, 2014*	January 10, 2014	January 11–24, 2014
April 12, 2014	March 7, 2014	March 8–21, 2014
June 14, 2014	May 9, 2014	May 10–23, 2014

Check your calendar and register NOW!

Registered for SAT on _____ Registered for SAT on _____

Registered for ACT on _____ Registered for ACT on _____

COLLEGE CODES

You may have your scores for the SAT and ACT sent directly to the colleges of your choice at the time of testing. The codes for colleges and scholarship opportunities are listed in the registration bulletin or on the respective websites. PLEASE NOTE: The SAT and ACT tests each have their own respective codes. Please check that you are using the correct codes for colleges and scholarship programs.

OFFICIAL SCORES

Some colleges and universities require that you send them your OFFICIAL test scores. This means that you must contact the colleges and ask if they require official test scores. This can change from year to year so it is your responsibility to have the correct information regarding official scores. Once you are through testing, you can arrange to have your scores sent by contacting the College Board and/or ACT. **If you Request scores after you have tested you will be charged a fee.**

STANDBY TESTING

If you miss the late registration deadline, it is possible to take the test as a standby. However, you will be allowed to test ONLY after all examinees who hold tickets for that specific center or who have center changes have been seated and it has been determined that the test center has sufficient testing materials. **DO NOT RELY ON THIS OPTION.** There is a substantial additional fee for standby testing.

SAT & ACT Score Comparison

Many students wonder what their ACT score would be equivalent to on the Current or New SAT. The chart below contains comparative scores for all three tests.

It is important to note that a student that scores well on the ACT is not guaranteed to have similar success on the SAT and vice versa. (Scores between the Current SAT and the New SAT should be consistent.) For example, say a student earns an ACT composite score of 31; colleges will view this score as being in the same range of a 1360 – 1400 on the SAT. However, it does not mean the student will actually earn that score if he took the SAT. This relationship is merely a way of looking at the competitive equivalent of the two tests, and is not meant to be a predictor of student performance.

ACT <i>If you scored...</i>	SAT <i>It's about the same as a...</i>
36	2400
35	2340
34	2260
33	2190
32	2130
31	2040
30	1980
29	1920
28	1860
27	1820
26	1760
25	1700
24	1650
23	1590
22	1530
21	1500
20	1410
19	1350
18	1290
17	1210
16	1140
15	1060
14	1000
13	900
12	780
11	750

This is only a comparison guide. Some colleges may weigh one test higher than the other.

UNDERSTANDING YOU

Believe it or not, before you can make any decision on your career and your future, you must begin by getting a better understanding of yourself. The self-concept is composed of the way you see yourself, the way you think others see you, and the way you would ideally like to be. It begins in infancy and changes as you mature. Your parents, peers, schools, neighborhoods and other aspects of your environment have greatly influenced the development of your self-concept.

For example, you have learned to prefer certain activities over others. Those activities which have been reinforced by parents, peers, or significant others become interests. This leads to the development of skills in the activities you are interested in which leads to the adoption of a set of values. All of these factors combine to help create your self-concept and personality.

Interests are the activities you like and enjoy doing. They are usually learned through experiences and exposure to different activities. Very often, you become interested in those things you do best. Interests are easy to measure and it is desirable to consider careers which are appropriate to your interests. Some people feel that your interests are the best predictors of what you will be doing ten years from now. Your interests probably changed rapidly during your adolescent years, but they normally tend to stabilize somewhat in the mid-twenties.

A skill is an ability to do something well. For example, many of you probably are interested in music, but few have the skill involved to perform in the field for a living. Skills are learned and can be improved through practice, if you are motivated, you normally can develop skills in any activity. It is extremely important that you build a career on your strengths as it may determine your success or failure. If a career requires a skill you are weak in, you might wish to set goals that will help you develop your weakness into strengths.

Values are what you believe in, what you consider worthwhile and desirable. Values reflect your opinions, attitudes and aspirations, direct your behavior, and affect all of your decisions. They can be learned and are the result of many influences including parents, peers, schools, churches, jobs, and the media.

In order for work to be satisfying it should be compatible with your values.

RESEARCHING COLLEGE OPTIONS

The Internet provides a plethora of information regarding the college selection process. It is possible to complete college searches to determine size of school, in state/out of state, private/state, majors offered, and other options of campus life. Here are some questions that you may want to ask yourself before you begin the search.

I've thought about majoring in:

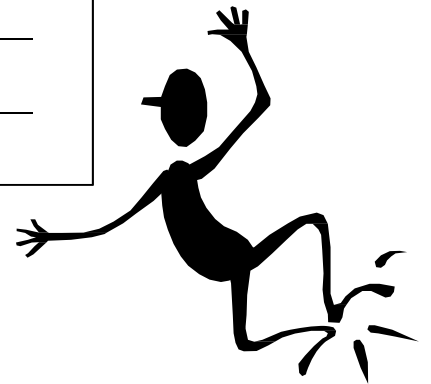
I prefer to be in: a metropolitan area; medium city; rural area; or location doesn't matter.

I would enjoy a campus with about: 20,000+ students; 10,000 to 15,000 students;
5,000 to 10,000 students; less than 5,000 students. _____

I would like to attend college in: Texas; Southwest; Northeast; Midwest; California;

Location is not important to me. _____

College activities that are important to me include:



Great sources to use for college searches are:

FastWeb	www.fastweb.com
Peterson's	www.petersons.com
College Answer (financial)	www.collegeanswer.com
Princeton Review	www.princetonreview.com
The College Board	www.collegeboard.com
ACT	www.act.org
College for Texans	http://www.collegefortexans.com

In addition to the Internet, there are varieties of hard copy resources available to help you.

The best way to learn about a college is to visit the campus. Another source of valuable information is to talk to someone who is currently a student there. Find out if a RRCA alumni attends the colleges and universities that interest you and try to see them when you make a campus visit or ask them questions during the holidays when they are home.

CONTACTING THE COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

Please make sure that you initiate the contacts with the colleges and universities. There will be opportunities for your parents to talk with college admissions representatives at a later date. **NEVER ALLOW ANYONE TO MAKE CONTACT WITH THE COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY ON YOUR BEHALF.**

VISITING CAMPUS

You will learn a lot about a college by just being on campus for a few hours. Each of you have a "comfort zone" when it comes to people, places, and things. You have 2 College Days your junior year and 3 days for College Visits your senior year. Plan your days carefully! Remember to complete the "Pre-Notification of Absence" form which must be submitted a MINIMUM of one week prior to the day you plan to leave. Remember, you should have completed your study of the college via Internet and hard copy materials prior to the visit. The visit is to verify that your impressions are accurate.

Always contact the admissions office on campus at least two weeks before the planned visit to schedule your specific appointment. If you wish to visit a class or specific department on campus, please make your wishes known to the representative setting up your visitation. A tour of the campus does not necessarily include visiting a class.

- Maps are available from the campus web site. Get specific directions on how to get there and where to park. **BE ON TIME!**
- If you plan to play intercollegiate athletics, try to meet with the coach during this visit.
- It is difficult to make more than one thorough campus visit per day. It is possible to do two if the campuses are very close together; however, only one is recommended.

Before you leave the University campus, find out where the students “hang out” and go there and just sit and watch for about thirty minutes to an hour. Do the students look like you? Do they act like you? How do they treat each other? Are they carrying books? Do they look happy? Do you see yourself there? Why or why not? Now, write down the answer to these questions while it is fresh. You think that you will always remember, but if you are visiting several campuses, it’s nice to have notes for reference. Remember to write your “thank you” notes after a visit.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR ON A TOUR

General appearance of the campus (poor maintenance/vandalism/campus pride)

Student attire (very causal/sloppy)

Friendliness (eye contact/offer to help/hello’s)

Transportation (bikes/cars/foot/shuttles)

Faculty presence (office hours posted/open doors/student interaction)

Library (hour/easy access)

Laboratory and computing facilities (hours/easy access)

Fine arts facilities (studios/practice rooms/performances)

Dorm (wired for internet/singles/doubles/suites/coed/guaranteed housing)

CAMPUS SECURITY – what is the crime rate on campus?

QUESTIONS TO ASK ON A COLLEGE VISIT

1. What percent of applicants are accepted?
2. What percent of first year students return as sophomores?
3. What percent of entering students actually graduate?
4. What percent of graduates who apply to law school are admitted? Med school? MBA programs?
5. What percent of first year classes are taught by graduate assistants?
6. Stop several students and ask them about the school and their programs. Ask them if they were choosing a college today would this college be their first choice? Watch for their facial expressions and any hesitation in their voice.
7. Ask about internships in your major field.
8. What are the three most popular majors on campus?

TIPS FOR INTERVIEWS

If a college is far from your state, you may be asked to have your interview while making a campus visit or a local professional who is an alumni may interview you. Here are some tips for successful interviews.

1. Bring a copy of your resume. Do not assume that the interviewer has one.
2. Dress neatly.
3. Arrive early to get familiar with the campus.
4. Be prepared. Do your research on the college before you arrive so that you can ask informed, intelligent questions.
5. Show self-confidence with a firm handshake and good eye contact.
6. Converse! Be engaging! An interview is a two-way conversation. Be prepared to hold up your end of the conversation. Answer the questions that you are asked and stay on the topic.
7. Take advantage of the opportunity to discuss issues, activities, or goals that may not be presented in your application.
8. Write a thank you note to your interviewer.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Why are you interested in our college?

What do you expect to gain from a college education?

How have you prepared yourself for college?

What academic areas most interest you? Why?

What extracurricular activities brought you the most satisfaction? Why?

How have you spent your summers?

How do you spend your free time during the school year?

How would you describe yourself to someone who does not know you?

What has been the greatest personal challenge in your life?

Who are your heroes or heroines?

Why are you a good candidate for college?

THANK YOU NOTES

Remember to write a “thank you” to admission counselors and anyone who was especially helpful to you on the campus tour. **Always** write a note to your interviewer.

EARLY DECISION/EARLY ACTION

After making your campus visits, if there is one school that is **THE TOP-NUMBER ONE** on your list, you might want to think about applying Early Decision/Early Action. While these terms look and sound similar, they are very different **LEGALLY**. The university will determine if the procedure is Early Action or Early Decision. It will be one or the other.

EARLY ACTION – If you apply for Early Action, you are declaring to the university that you have submitted all of your forms by the required deadline and that you are seriously considering attending that school. You may apply to more than one school on Early Action.

EARLY DECISION – is a legal, binding contract. **“I pick you...if you pick me...I’m coming!” YOU ARE REQUIRED TO ONLY APPLY TO ONE INSTITUTION AS AN EARLY DECISION CANDIDATE.** You may apply to only ONE college that has Early Decision as on “early admit” and you need to realize that Early Decision is a binding contract! Take this step very seriously and make it work to your advantage - not against you.

SELECTING A COLLEGE MAJOR

While it is not necessary to determine your life vocation before applying to college, you may want to make an introspective study. What do you enjoy doing the most? When are you the happiest? What do you believe you are being "called" to do?

You may want to do some career testing during your junior or senior year.

THE APPLICATIONS

ONLINE

If the college will accept the application online, it is a good idea to send it via the net. If you send them a hard copy, you will be at the mercy of someone at the university (usually a work study student) to enter the data for you. In other words, you have more control over the application if you submit it online. Print yourself a copy to preview and to keep before you submit the application to the university. Occasionally, the college will waive the registration fee if you apply online. **Remember to keep track of your log in and password.**

For Texas Schools use: www.applytexas.org

For the U.S. Common Application use: www.commonapp.org

For applications for individual colleges, search the Internet for their school website.

There are samples of the Texas Common Application and the U.S. Common Application in the addendum section.

SNAIL MAIL

If you must mail the application, please use a “working copy” and then submit a nice fresh clean neatly printed, or preferably typed, application. Make a copy!

Note: the last day to make a transcript and recommendation request to the Secondary Office for applications with a December 1st deadline is November 8th.

RECOMMENDATION GUIDELINES

- Meet face to face with the person you ask to write a letter of recommendation and bring a copy of your student activities sheet to that meeting.
- DO NOT PUT REQUESTS IN TEACHERS' BOXES.
- Allow a minimum of 15 working days for any recommendation to be processed from your teacher or guidance counselor.
- Follow up with a “thank you” note to the person writing the recommendation.

WHO SHOULD WRITE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Follow directions for each school!

By the end of your junior year, you should have a good idea of the applications and their specific requirements regarding letters of recommendation. Carefully follow the directions for each college. Some schools will require specific teachers to write letters while others will offer you a choice. Most colleges will want you to use only teachers from your junior or senior year for teacher recommendations. If a college requires a “School Report”, please bring that form to the Secondary Office as soon as you receive it or print it from your computer.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL AID

Students and parents often refer to scholarships and financial aid as one. Both are usually administered out of the College's Financial Aid Office and this can be confusing because it is like having apples and oranges in the same crate.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarships are based on merit. A scholarship is an award that represents achievement. Most require either a high class rank or a high SAT or ACT score. All legitimate scholarships are awarded. There are multiple scams stating that thousands of dollars in scholarship money goes unclaimed. **DO NOT PAY ANYTHING TO ANY COMPANY WHO PROMISES SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES. IF IT IS LEGITIMATE, IT WILL BE FREE.**

Your best source of scholarship money will come from the college or university that you decide to attend. **TRANSLATION: APPLY EARLY.** The Deadline for scholarship applications usually falls long BEFORE the deadline for admission. Remember, you are working with three offices on each college campus:

- 1) Admissions
- 2) Scholarship/Financial Aid
- 3) Housing

Typically, you may not be able to work with #2 and #3 until your application is complete and on file at the university.

SCHOLARSHIP SEARCHES

Although your best source of scholarship money will come from the college that you ultimately attend, it may be necessary to apply for scholarships at several different institutions before making a final decision on which school to attend. In addition to the sources affiliated directly with each college, there are also private sources. Check with employers for scholarship opportunities for children of employees or you can also search websites such as:

www.fastweb.com
www.collegeanswer.com
www.princetonreview.com

FINANCIAL AID

Financial Aid is based on need, not merit. You must file a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) after January 1 of your senior year in order to be considered for Financial Aid. This is a lengthy process so have your tax returns ready to go! Paper FAFSA forms will arrive in the Secondary Office in December, however, once again, I suggest that you fill out your application on line. (www.fafsa.ed.gov). The FAFSA form says that you can estimate your tax information, but if you make an estimate this will only slow down the process. Filing early is important! Once the grant money is given away, it is gone.

Financial Aid comes in several forms:

- 1) Federal Pell Grant
- 2) Federal Supplement Grant
- 3) Federal Work Study
- 4) Federal Perkins Loan
- 5) Federal Stafford Loan
- 6) Federal Plus Loans for Parents

Once your FAFSA is on file at your college financial aid office, they will evaluate it and notify you about programs for which you qualify.

The current year application is not available yet, however, there is a sample of last year's worksheet in the addendum section.

The Top 10% Scholarship Program

The Top 10% Scholarship Program was created by the Texas Legislature to encourage high performing students who graduate in the top 10% of their class to attend a public college or university in Texas. Students with financial need who are ranked in top 10% of their high school class are eligible to apply for the scholarship of up to \$2000.

The FAFSA and TAFSA (Texas Application for State Financial Aid) should be completed in time by March to have a priority consideration for the scholarship. For more information, call the Texas Financial Aid Information Center at 1- 888-311-8881 or logon to the website: www.collegeforalltexas.com.

NCAA CLEARINGHOUSE

Students wishing to play a sport at a Division I, II or III college or university must go through the NCAA eligibility process. Student athletes need to be aware that NCAA does not accept all courses that are taught through distance learning or online. These courses need to be comparable in length, content and rigor to courses taught in a traditional classroom setting. Students may not skip lessons or test out of modules. The course must be four-year college preparatory; therefore, credit-by-exam courses do not meet core course requirements.

Nontraditional courses completed prior to August 1, 2010, will be reviewed under NCAA standards in place prior to August 1, 2010. It is important to remember that all courses need to be rigorous and four-year college preparatory in nature. Students should be encouraged to take courses that are quantitatively and qualitatively the same as courses offered through traditional means, and to take courses that will prepare them for the academic rigors they will face at a four-year college or university.

Register and/or learn more with the NCAA eligibility center at
<https://web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/>

- Make sure you are still on course to meet core-course .
- Send a copy of your transcript to the NCAA. If you have attended any other high schools, make sure a transcript is sent to the eligibility center from each high school.
- When taking the ACT or SAT, request test scores to be sent to the eligibility center (the code is "9999").
- Begin your amateurism questionnaire. Complete amateurism questionnaire and sign the final authorization signature online on or after April 1st if you are expecting to enroll in college in the fall semester.

2010-2011 Yearly Cost of Attendance Sampler

College/University	Tuition and Fees	On-Campus Budget	Commuting Budget
Abilene Christian University	\$22,760	\$35,300	\$31,840
Angelo State University	\$6,140	\$19,838	\$19,838
Austin Community College	\$ 39.00 semester credit (In-district) \$137.00 semester credit (Out-of-district)	Not Applicable	\$15,494 Away from home \$ 9,440 At home
Baylor University	\$29,724	\$45,148	\$42,458
Blinn College	\$1,970 (In-district) \$2,960 (Out-of-district)	\$10,619	\$ 8,886 - With parents \$14,557 - Without parents
Concordia University	\$21,800	\$33,365	\$30,655
Huston-Tillotson University	\$12,430	\$23,554	\$23,004
Prairie View A&M University	\$ 6,320 (In-State) \$15,720 (Out-of-State)	\$17,420 (In-State) \$26,820 (Out-of-State)	Data Not Available
Rice University	\$33,819	\$48,582	Data Not Available
Sam Houston State University	\$7,000	\$18,586	\$17,138 Living at home \$21,146 Away from home
Southern Methodist University	\$37,230	\$53,666	\$48,430
Southwestern University	\$31,630	\$43,090	\$36,200
St. Edward's University	\$26,508	\$38,600	\$38,600
St. Mary's University	\$11,288 per semester (12-18 hours)	\$35,700	\$30,680
Stephen F. Austin State University	\$6,998	\$20,283	\$17,831 At home \$20,283 Off campus
Tarleton State University	\$6,248	\$17,825	\$12,962
Texas A&M University	\$8,712 (15 hours)	\$20,845	\$16,323 At home \$20,845 Off campus
Texas Christian University	\$30,090	\$41,100	\$32,040
Texas Lutheran University	\$22,890	\$32,840	\$28,470 At home \$31,730 Off campus
Texas State Technical College-Waco	\$3,390 (2 semesters)	\$13,294	\$14,596
Texas State University- San Marcos	\$ 7,830 (In-state) \$17,130 (Out-of-state) (Based on 15 hours)	\$19,810 \$29,110	\$17,450 \$26,750
Texas Tech University	\$7,785	\$19,863	\$13,991
University of Houston- Main Campus	\$8,532 (In-state) \$14,108 (Out-of-state)	\$16,418 \$21,949	Data Not Available
University Of North Texas	\$7,960	\$18,506	\$19,500
University of Texas-Arlington	\$8,954	\$21,384	\$17,058
University of Texas- Austin	\$9,300 (In-state) \$21,500 (Out-of-state)	\$24,000	\$15,600
University of Texas- Dallas	\$10,744	\$24,184 (Off Campus)	\$19,100 (Living with
University of Texas- San Antonio	\$8,410	\$20,771 (On Campus) \$22,035 (Off Campus)	\$16,049 (Living with parents)
West Texas A&M University	\$6,208	\$17,342	\$17,342

Academic College Success: Choosing College Classes

The start of college is a very exciting time. Before you know it, sometimes even before you're on campus, you're making a lot of decisions — fast. Choosing your courses is one of the first. Picking classes in high school may not have been a big deal, but college is different. Colleges can offer hundreds, even thousands, of classes. There are lots of options for you to choose from. Some colleges don't expect you to determine your course schedule on your own. Some do. Either way, here are some tips and strategies that can make it easier.

Review the Course Catalog

Use the online catalog, or request a paper one (your college may send you one automatically). You'll find a variety of lists, including core requirements (courses all students must take), requirements for different majors, and the courses offered within each department. Lists generally begin with introductory-level courses and end with more-challenging seminars. Note the classes that interest you. If you don't know what you want to major in yet (like most freshmen), think about taking classes in areas that spark your interest. Have you always wanted to learn about space? Try an astronomy class. Do different cultures intrigue you? Sign up for cultural anthropology. If you already have an idea of what you want to major in, consider taking some of the general requirements in that field.

Take advantage of your advisor

Some colleges offer academic advisers — counselors who help students decide what classes to take. If you are assigned an academic adviser for your first year, set up an appointment before registration. Bring all your questions about choosing courses to the meeting. If your adviser can't answer everything, seek the advice of department chairs and professors of classes you're considering.

Learn how to schedule your classes

Picking a class schedule is like putting a puzzle together. You need to identify the classes you want to take, figure out which days and times they meet and adjust for any overlaps — you can't be in two places at once. Typically, you take four to six courses a semester, depending upon how demanding they are. Remember to plan not only for the time you'll spend in class, but for time you'll spend studying — either on your own or with a study group. When you schedule study time, keep in mind that most college classes don't meet every day. You may also have a choice of time slot for a class. If you are not a morning person, it may be better to take physics in the afternoon if it is available. Make sure you have a reasonable workload, spread out somewhat evenly over the week. Most students want to take some classes each day, not a crushing load on one or two days. Don't worry if you find your schedule needs adjustment after the first few classes. Colleges give you the opportunity to add or drop classes for a few weeks into the semester.

Get the Requirements out of the way

Almost all colleges have core requirements to ensure that students explore subjects outside their major. These requirements range from math and history to philosophy and lab sciences. The number of required courses, and subjects, varies from one college to the next. You should fulfill these requirements as soon as possible so that you can spend your later semesters concentrating on courses in your major. For more advanced courses you may need to complete prerequisites — for example, you have to take Basic Calculus before you take Advanced Calculus.

Find a Balance of Courses

You may be eager to jump into difficult classes your freshman year, but give yourself a break. Take easy courses as well as hard courses. You may not realize how challenging college courses can be, and how much reading and other work they require. Taking too many hard courses at once can put a real strain on you, and it may show in your grades. Take subjects that require different kinds of work. For example, some classes, such as English literature, require a lot of reading, while others, such as journalism, require a lot of writing. And math and science courses have you solving problem sets. Choose a variety of subjects, so you're not stuck having to read five books or writing five research papers in one week.

Use AP Credits and Placement Exams

Before you register, find out if you've already fulfilled any of your core requirements. For example, if you score high on the AP Chemistry or AP Physics exam, you may not have to take a core lab science course. Taking a placement exam could free you from taking the required language course.

Take a Writing Course

It's in your best interests to take a writing class during your first semester, even if you're not required to do so. You can apply the writing skills you develop in this course to all your other courses throughout college, and in whatever career you choose.

Make a Plan for Registration

You need to register for classes before your first semester begins. Be sure to meet any deadlines you are given. The earlier you register, the more likely it is that you can get into the classes you want. You can be sure that some of the classes will be full or that you'll have to choose between two classes that are held at the same time. So, after you come up with your dream schedule, make a list of alternative classes. Your preparations can make registration easier, and help you start your first year off right.

Academic College Success: Get to Know Your College Professors

Cultivating Relationships with Faculty

College students often have the opportunity to work closely with their professors. Most professors enjoy talking to students who show a genuine interest in their subject, and some of the best teaching occurs in after-class discussions. You are missing a great opportunity if you don't approach your professors outside the classroom. Here are some of the areas they can help you in.

Understanding Course Work

Professors genuinely want to help you learn. If you have a question after attending a lecture or doing some reading, ask your professor about it after class or during office hours. You get the information you need to better grasp the material, and your professor sees your interest and enthusiasm.

Your Motivation

Even if you have a perfect understanding of the class material, your professors can still help you push yourself to do your best. For example, they can give you suggestions for related reading or help you explore and choose topics for an assignment.

Letters of Recommendations

When it comes time to apply for internships, jobs or graduate school, you'll probably need professors to write letters of recommendation for you. They can write much better letters if they know you and your work.

Networking Opportunities

Your professors may be able to help you plug into a professional community, or even find an internship or job. For example, let's say you really enjoy contemporary fiction, and you're considering becoming a book editor. Your creative writing teacher may be able to tell you about local author readings, invite you to book parties or put you in touch with a publishing house.

Benefit from this Resource

Granted, some of your professors may have more time or be more approachable than others. One might be happy to answer a question after class; another might become an invaluable mentor to you. But whatever role they play, they're there to help you learn. They're a resource that you should use to your advantage.

Academic College Success: How to Take on College Studying

Develop Good Study Habits

In college, you'll need to build on the study skills that you learned in high school. The demands of a college class are probably more rigorous than those you are used to. You can succeed by knowing what to expect and how to handle it. Think of college as a full-time job, in which you spend 40 hours a week on class, labs, study groups and doing homework. Being organized and using your time well are essential. Learn more about time management, and use the guidelines below to develop your study skills.

Decide When to Study

Work out about how many hours you need to study every day. Then make a schedule.

- Figure out what blocks of time you have available throughout the day, in the evenings and on weekends.
- Consider what time of day you are most alert — there are morning people and night owls — and try to schedule your studying accordingly.
- Think about whether you do better studying for a few hours at a time or sitting down for marathon sessions.

Choose Where to Study

Where you should study depends on two factors: the environment in which you are best able to concentrate and the type of work you are planning to do.

- The best places to study have good light, comfortable temperature and enough desk space — usually your dorm room, your apartment or the library.
- For completing problem sets or brainstorming possible test questions, you may want to study with a group or at least in a setting where fellow students are available for discussion.
- When you are reading book chapters or working on a research paper, you are probably better off in a less social environment.

Improve Your Study Habits

Here are simple steps you can take to help you get a handle on studying:

- Have a routine for where and when you study.
- Choose reasonable and specific goals that you can accomplish for each study session.
- Do things that are harder or require more intense thought at your most productive time of the day.
- Take breaks if you need them so you don't waste time looking at material but not absorbing it.
- Get to know students whom you respect and can study with or contact to ask questions.
- Keep up with the workload and seek help when you need it.

Do the Reading

You need to do more than just read the chapters you are assigned —you are expected to understand them thoroughly. Here are some tips:

- Don't skim. Read all the material carefully.
- Break up difficult assignments into sections you can digest — chapters, subsections or even paragraphs.
- Look up any words that you don't understand.
- Take notes instead of highlighting — this makes you think through and rephrase the key points.
- Create a summary sheet of what you learned from each assignment you read.

Academic College Success: Time Management Tips

Organizing Your Life

Managing your time well is an important element of success — especially if you're a student. If you set priorities that fit your needs and lifestyle, you'll have a better chance of achieving your goals. Here are some tips for taking control of your time and organizing your life.

1. Make a To-Do List Every Day.

Put things that are most important at the top and do them first. And don't forget to reward yourself for your accomplishments.

2. Use Spare Minutes Wisely.

When you're commuting on the bus or train, use the time to get some reading done.

3. It's Okay to Say No.

If your friend asks you to go to a movie on a Thursday night and you have an exam the next morning, realize that it's okay to say no. Keep your short- and long-term priorities in mind.

4. Find the Right Time.

You'll work more efficiently if you figure out when you do your best work. For example, if your brain handles math better in the afternoon, don't wait to do it until late at night.

5. Review Your Notes Every Day.

Reviewing helps you reinforce what you've learned, so you need less time to study before a test. You'll also be ready if you get called on in class or have to take a pop quiz.

6. Get a Good Night's Sleep.

Your brain needs rest to perform at its peak. Lack of sleep makes the day seem longer and your tasks seem more difficult.

7. Communicate Your Schedule to Others.

If phone calls or text messages are proving to be a distraction, tell your friends that you are only available at certain times of day and not to expect a response at other times.

8. Become a Taskmaster.

Give yourself a time budget and plan your activities accordingly. Figure out how much free time you have each week before you add any commitments.

9. Don't Waste Time Agonizing.

Instead of agonizing and procrastinating, just do it. Wasting an entire evening worrying about something that you're supposed to be doing is not productive, and can increase your stress.

10. Determine Your Priorities.

You can't do everything at once. Establish the importance of each item. Then set realistic goals that are attainable.