

**THE SCHOLARS’
ACADEMY
COLLEGE HANDBOOK
2025-2026**

**THE SCHOLARS’ ACADEMY
COLLEGE OFFICE**



THE SCHOLARS' ACADEMY

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The college process begins when you choose to come to The Scholars' Academy, a college preparatory high school. The culmination of your hard work and dedication while at The Scholars' Academy will lead you to have many choices and opportunities when you apply to college. Throughout high school you will be called upon to reflect on who you are, what you have achieved and where you see yourself in the future. We strongly believe that the college process is a student-centered journey - with one hand held by the college office and the other by your families. With this support, you will choose the post-secondary option that is the best fit for you.

The information in this guide has been designed with you and your families in mind to be used as a reference guide. We hope that you will find it useful and that it will serve to make you an "educated consumer" when it comes time to choosing colleges and programs to apply to.

The grades you earn, the courses you take, and the activities you participate in are a reflection of who you are; we encourage you to always do your best. Remember, your academic record will have the strongest impact on your college and post-secondary options.

We know how hard you have worked to get to this point and we want to make sure that you will continue to thrive in your next academic and social environment. Embrace and enjoy this exciting journey and remember that we are here to help you navigate your way to college and beyond!

Sincerely,

The College and Career Office

HOW DO COLLEGES CHOOSE AMONG APPLICANTS?

1. ACADEMIC RECORD

Have you taken the most challenging coursework available (Honors & AP courses)? What is your Grade Point Average (G.P.A.)? Is there an improvement in your academic record of achievement from year to year (grades steadily improving, courses are increasingly challenging)?

Your high school transcript tells a story about you. Receiving slightly lower grades in more rigorous courses is better than higher grades in an easier program. Your transcript will be sent three times in senior year - in the fall (School Report), after the first term (Midyear report) and at the end of the year (Final Report).

2. STANDARDIZED TESTS (SAT, ACT)

Every student should sit for an SAT exam at least twice. In addition students may elect to take the ACT exam. Most colleges only require one or the other. For more information visit: collegeboard.org and act.org

3. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

*You will **need 1** letter of recommendation from a teacher. Colleges use these letters to learn about your potential, your character and to see what you are like in the classroom. You are responsible to secure a letter of recommendation during the spring of junior year. You should seek recommendations from teachers with whom there is a strong relationship. This should be a teacher from your sophomore or junior year.*

**If a student requires a second letter of recommendation, this will be addressed during the senior college meeting in the fall of senior year.*

4. YOUR COLLEGE ESSAY

This is your chance to differentiate yourself. The essay demonstrates your creativity, and your personality, as well as your writing skills. The college essay is often the deciding factor in competitive programs, so take your time and seek out feedback!

5. DEMONSTRATED SPECIAL ABILITIES/EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES/ SERVICE TO THE SCHOOL & COMMUNITY

Art, music, research, leadership, athletics... The activity resume in Naviance is helpful in presenting your extracurricular activities. Your activities should show "depth of interest." (For example if you are an aspiring journalist, start a blog, submit articles to local papers, or participate in the school newspaper.)

6. DEMONSTRATED INTEREST

Meet with college representatives,, and visit the campus. Virtual visits count! Make sure the college knows how much you want to go there! If a college you are considering offers interviews make sure to arrange one. For your interview, be prepared with good questions that demonstrate your in-depth knowledge of the school.

7. APPLICATION IS ON TIME, COMPLETE & ACCURATE

Meeting deadlines is essential!

You must have your SAT and/or ACT scores sent to each college by the deadline as well as your application. Make sure your teachers upload your recommendations to Naviance and that you have an active college list in Naviance before School Report Day/Week.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RAVES

The teacher recommendation is one of the most important parts of your application. Since you will want to have the best possible recommendation sent to each college, it is important that you choose the right teacher to ask and that you do so in a timely manner.

Directions for Filling out Your Teacher Recommendation Form(s)

Asking a teacher for a recommendation can be intimidating, and understandably so. Don't worry, however. Ultimately, they want to help you get into the college of your choice. Just be polite and complete the following steps, and this part of the college application process will be a breeze.

1. You **MUST** ask your teacher, in person, first.
2. Go to Naviance and click on the tab marked 'About Me'
3. Click on the link marked 'My Surveys' then "Surveys Not Yet Started". Click on 'Teacher Recommendation Questionnaire'
4. Fill out the form and submit.
5. After you complete the questionnaire, you must go to the tab marked "Colleges" then 'Apply to College'
6. Click on the link marked 'Letters of Recommendation' to add the request.
7. Submit your request to the teacher and select 'All Colleges'. The teacher will then receive an email request.
8. You must complete your forms and ask your teachers by **May 30, 2025**. YOU MUST COMPLETE THE FORMS ONLINE.
9. Any student who does not request and complete a teacher recommendation and form by the deadline will **NOT** receive a teacher letter of recommendation.

WAIVING YOUR RIGHTS - You will be asked to sign a statement waiving your right to read your recommendation, doing so assures the reader that the recommendation has been written objectively.

When choosing a teacher to ask for recommendations, consider the following:

- How well does the teacher know you? Will s/he write positively on your behalf?
- Do you get along well with the teacher?
- **Does the college or university specify that a recommendation must be from a particular subject?**
- Has the teacher taught you more than once? A teacher who has taught you over a two or three year period has seen your talent and personality develop.
- If you declare an intended major, try to choose a teacher in that particular field.
- Has the teacher worked with you outside of the classroom as well (i.e. mentor, coach, etc.)? They may have more knowledge about you as a person.

COUNSELOR RECOMMENDATION – All colleges require a counselor recommendation form (also known as the School Report - SR). *Some colleges may require a Counselor Letter of Recommendation.* This information can be found on the college/university website. We will use the Naviance Counselor Questionnaire and Parent/Guardian Questionnaire and other raves to further help to write your recommendation. Juniors must complete and submit the Naviance Counselor Questionnaire and Parent/Guardian Questionnaire by **May 30, 2025**.

RAVES - Raves are brief descriptive statements (2-3 sentences) written about the student. Students may ask any level (9th-11th grade) teacher to write a rave for him/her. Students may also ask school support staff or outside of school personnel, coaches, or employers to write raves. (Ex: A supervisor at your job, the director of your summer camp, your dance instructor, etc.) If you decide to ask a teacher to write you a rave, it **cannot** be the same teacher who you ask to write your recommendation. Juniors must obtain and submit 2 raves via [Google Form](#) by **May 30, 2025**.

TERMINOLOGY OF ADMISSIONS OPTIONS

Early Decision – You make a commitment to a first choice institution where, if admitted you will definitely enroll. You may only apply to one school ED. Application deadlines are in November. You will be notified of the decision in December. You may apply to other non-binding schools early action or to rolling decision schools. If you are admitted ED you must withdraw all other applications. If you are admitted you must attend - ED is a binding agreement.

Early Decision II – A second round of ED. Deadlines are in January. You will be notified of the decision in February. You must also apply to other schools regular and rolling decisions simultaneously. You can apply ED II if you are denied or deferred ED I by another school.

Early Action – You apply early and receive a decision well in advance of the institution's regular response date. You are not committed to attend if accepted.

Restrictive Early Action (also known as *Single Choice Early Action*) – You apply to an institution of preference and receive a decision early. You may be restricted from applying ED or EA or REA to other institutions. You must check with individual schools for their policies. If offered admission, you have until May 1 to accept the offer. You are not committed to attend if accepted.

Regular Decision - Regular decision is the normal process by which students apply by published deadlines. Most colleges have application deadlines in January with notification in March & April.

Rolling – You can apply to rolling decision schools beginning in September continuing through the spring. You will usually be notified of the decision within weeks of completing your application. With rolling decision schools we suggest you apply as early as possible to increase your chances of gaining admission. You are not committed to attend if accepted.

WRITING YOUR COLLEGE ESSAY

The College Essay is a chance for your voice to come through in the college application. The essay helps colleges “see” you as a thinking and feeling person, rather than a set of statistics. Except for the interview, the essay is your only chance to share your thoughts, insights, and opinions; to highlight your accomplishments; and to convey your maturity and outlook on life. ***Office hours with Scholars’ Academy English teachers are available by appointment outside of school hours in the fall of senior year. Teachers will provide feedback to students in a one on one session.***

CHOOSING A TOPIC

Many colleges and universities will either give you a topic to write about or present several rather specific topics from which you must choose. Other colleges may simply “suggest” broad general topics to give you total freedom to write about something that interests or concerns you. Here are a few general hints about the most effective way to approach your topic:

- Narrow your topic and try to be as specific and illustrative as possible.
- The easiest topic to write about is you!
- The essay you write should be unique; it should be an essay only you could have written.
- The essay should demonstrate self-reflective thought and insight.
- Don’t be shy or modest, although you should not exaggerate. If you choose to write about yourself, remember that seemingly minor incidents and facts often reveal the most about your character and outlook.
- Do not be afraid to write about something you think is a little different. A unique topic or approach is often refreshing to a college admissions officer who has been reading applications all day. Further, an unusual or offbeat essay is an excellent way to show your creativity.

PREPARING TO WRITE

Before you begin writing, spend some time organizing your thoughts. Develop a framework for your essay so it will have a smooth and logical progression from one idea or incident to the next. Consider your purpose in writing, what you want to convey, and the tone that you think is most appropriate for the topic. Decide on a style that is comfortable for you.

WRITING THE ESSAY

You do not have to get it right the first time! Instead, write the first draft with the main focus and content and try to communicate your thoughts. Then set it aside for a day or two, reread it with a fresh perspective, and make any necessary changes. This is also the point at which you should consider matters of organization, style, grammar, spelling, and tone. Once you have rewritten your first draft, show it to your counselor, teacher, family or friends. While the final product and final “voice” should be yours, they may be able to offer suggestions for technical or other improvements.

SOME DO'S AND DON'TS OF WRITING YOUR COLLEGE ESSAY

Do:

- Do start early. Leave plenty of time to review, reword and rewrite. There is always room for improvement
- Do match yourself to the college. Be specific about what this particular school can do for you and what you will bring to its student body and campus.
- Do think “small” and write about something you know about
- Do reveal yourself in your writing and write about your greatest assets and achievements. You should be proud of them
- Do *show* rather than *tell*. Give examples and illustrate your topic to help bring it to life
- Do write in your own “voice” and style
- Do focus on the positive aspects of the story, topic, event, etc., in which you are writing about
- Do try to be positive

Don't:

- Don't repeat information given elsewhere on your application
- Don't exaggerate or write to impress
- Don't write about topics that may be viewed as religious, too political, or controversial
- Don't use a flowery, inflated, or pretentious style
- Don't neglect the technical part of your essay (grammar, spelling, sentence structure)
- Don't go to extremes – too witty, too opinionated or too “intellectual”
- Don't ramble – say what you have to say and conclude
- Don't be negative

VISITING COLLEGES

Visiting college campuses is an important part of the college planning process. It helps you to form your own opinion regarding the academics, social life, and physical environment of a school. We also encourage students to attend information sessions. All visit information is available on the Admissions pages of college websites. February and April breaks are excellent opportunities to visit colleges.

Here are some questions you may want to ask your campus tour guide or admissions representative:

For more suggestions please refer to the College Interview Page in this guide.

1. Who teaches your classes? (Graduate assistants or professors?)
2. Are research opportunities available to undergraduates? Internship opportunities?
3. Is there a core curriculum?
4. What are the most popular majors?
5. Tell me about housing. Are some dorms better than others? Do students live off campus?
6. What percentage of students study abroad?
7. What happens here on weekends? Do many students leave campus on the weekend?
8. How active is student government?
9. Are the arts supported here?
10. What do you think is the greatest shortcoming of this college?
11. What do you like best about your experience and education here?
12. Why did you choose this school?
13. If you require services or accommodations, ask what supports are available.

COLLEGE VISIT SUMMARY SHEET

Name of College _____

Location _____

Date of Visit _____ Person(s) met with _____

Your Impressions	Notes
My tour of the campus was....(guided, unguided, too short, too long, etc.)	
My tour guide was...(perky, robotic, friendly, etc.)	
Particular highlights...	
Particular low points...	
As far as I can tell, the atmosphere at this school is...(intense, relaxed, lively, etc.)	
The weather was...	
Student Body...(diverse, I do/don't feel like I would fit in..., etc.)	
Dormitory...(nice, clean, small, etc.)	
Walking around campus made me feel...(at home, overwhelmed, excited, etc.)	
Academics... (Do they have majors I am interested in? How flexible are the requirements? Are there opportunities to do research, internships?)	
Campus Facilities and Social Life	
Overall Impressions	

THE COLLEGE INTERVIEW

Most colleges **do not** require an interview. Of those that do, each college has its own interview procedure, which varies from school to school. If you are selected for an admissions interview, you should make an appointment with your advisor immediately. Your advisor will meet with you to help you prepare and further discuss the interview process.

NAVIANCE

Naviance is a web-based research and planning tool that manages individual students as they move through the college planning, application, and decision process. Through Naviance, counselors, students and parents can communicate about upcoming deadlines and important notices. Additionally, Naviance builds a history of Scholars' Academy application trends and acceptance histories. This data helps students and counselors grasp emerging trends in application results to better guide college planning. Naviance will be your most important resource for college planning. ***Juniors must complete the Counselor Questionnaire, Teacher Questionnaire by May 30, 2024.***

Parents should complete the Parent/Guardian Questionnaire by May 31, 2025.

HOW DO I REGISTER AND LOG-IN?

Parents/Guardians: Your child must register you as a parent (with your name and email address). After your child has added you to their account you will need to email Ms. Sultzer (dsultzer@schools.nyc.gov) or Mr. Lavanco (mlavanco@schools.nyc.gov) to receive your registration code. Parents/Guardians can then go to Naviance and enter their registration code under *New User* and then create a username (your email address) and password. You can use Naviance to view your child's account, to complete the *Parent/Guardian Questionnaire* and to research colleges if you are added to their account.

WHAT'S NEXT?

I. Complete the ***About Me*** Section by May 31st of junior year

- a. *Profile* – Enter personal information, update email address and add parents
- b. *Teacher Questionnaire* - **Due May 30**
- c. *Counselor Questionnaire* – **Due May 30**
- d. *Parent/Guardian Questionnaire* – **Due May 30**
- e. *2 Raves*- **Due May 30**
- f. *Résumé* – List all of your extracurricular activities

II. Use the ***Colleges*** Section to research schools

- a. *College Search* - This section contains the tools you will use to learn about specific college choices. You will be asked to fill out a brief questionnaire. The search engine will produce a report of the colleges you might consider.
- b. *Compare Me & Scattergrams* - View Scholars' Academy application history for individual colleges and see how you compare to other applicants.
- c. *College Visits* – View to see the list of college representatives who visit Scholars' Academy.

OTHER POSTSECONDARY OPTIONS

We recognize that college is not for everyone. You have options after high school. They may include the military or vocational training. Many community colleges offer academic and certificate programs that enable students to enter the workforce with a specific skill set. SUNY offers many programs in [Skilled Trades](#). The NYC DOE also offers a vocational program, free of charge, for students interested in construction, plumbing, electrical and more.

1. Kingsborough Community College - <https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/departments/GainfulEmployment.html>
2. Queensborough Community College - <https://www.qcc.cuny.edu/academics/programs-of-study.html>
3. SUNY Skilled Trades: www.suny.edu/trades
4. The School of Cooperative Technology: <http://www.co-optech.org/index.html>
5. U.S. Army - <https://www.goarmy.com/>
6. U.S. Navy - <https://www.navy.com/>
7. U.S. Marines - <https://www.marines.com/>
8. U.S. Air Force - <https://www.airforce.com/>
9. U.S. Coast Guard - <https://www.uscg.mil/Join/>
10. The National Guard - <https://www.nationalguard.com/how-to-join>

THE SAT VS. THE ACT

The ACT is curriculum-based and has more straightforward questions; it concentrates on grammar, punctuation, syntax, assesses more advanced math skills, and has a science section. The SAT is more nuanced and puzzle-like, and assesses critical thinking, reasoning and problem solving skills. The ACT has score choice so you can take it more than once and send only your best score. The SAT allows for a score choice option *(Colleges vary on score choice options. Some allow you to choose which scores to send but others insist on all scores being sent. Check with the College Board or the college's website check a school's score choice policy.)*

There are SAT/ACT optional schools. Schools for which ACT and SAT's are optional will often substitute other criteria (e.g. an additional writing sample) for standardized test scores. Fairtest.org keeps a list of these schools. The College Board offers SAT tutorials for free: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/practice>. Students can sign up to take a free practice ACT exam near their home. For more information and to register visit www.princetonreview.com/college/free-act-practice-test#!practice Fee waivers for the SAT's and the ACT's can be obtained from the College & Career Office for students who are eligible for free/reduced lunch. Each time you take the SAT or ACT you are eligible for 4 free score reports.

ACT/SAT Score Comparison Chart

SAT	ACT	SAT	ACT
1600	36	1130-1150	23
1560-1590	35	1100-1120	22
1520-1550	34	1060-1090	21
1490-1510	33	1020-1050	20
1450-1480	32	980-1010	19
1420-1440	31	940-970	18
1390-1410	30	900-930	17
1350-1380	29	860-890	16
1310-1340	28	810-850	15
1280-1300	27	760-800	14
1240-1270	26	720-750	13
1200-1230	25	630-710	12
1160-1190	24	560-620	11

NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION (NCAA)

If you are interested in playing NCAA Varsity athletics in college you will need to register with the NCAA clearinghouse online: <http://www.ncaa.org/>. The NCAA lists the established eligibility requirements on their website. You will need to be proactive in contacting college coaches and letting them know that you are interested. You will need to be able to supply coaches with: an athletic resume, a tape demonstrating your abilities (usually a whole game is required), and your game schedules for the summer and senior year. It is important that you participate in the appropriate tournaments, camps, and summer programs.

SUMMER OPPORTUNITIES

Admission representatives are looking to see that you have had productive and enriching summers. They observe how you pursue your areas of interest during your free time. For example, if you are interested in becoming a doctor, consider interning or volunteering at a local hospital. Many colleges and universities offer summer enrichment and leadership programs. You can look into summer programs by visiting the individual colleges or university's website. Summer courses are also available in CUNY's College Now Program. We also share opportunities through the Grade Wide Google Classroom, and students can apply for work through [SYEP](#).

FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIP INFORMATION

Financial aid comes from many different sources. College is one of the biggest investments you will ever make—don't jump in without doing your homework. Learn about college costs, applying for scholarships and other types of financial aid, choosing the best aid package, taking out education loans, and paying the college bill. Every college has a Net Price Calculator on their website. Students are ***strongly encouraged to use this tool to get a better understanding of what their costs for that particular college will be.***

Cost of Education (CE)

- Tuition and fees
- Books and supplies
- Room and Board
- Personal (e.g. laundry, clothing personal items, medical, recreation)
- Transportation

THE NEW FAFSA
36 questions
SAI (Student Aid Index)
Lowest SAI is -\$1500
Information must be provided by parent “supporting” the child- Parent Contributor

Financial Need (FN)

There are 3 types of financial aid (Grants, Scholarships & Loans), which must be applied for every year you attend college.

Grants: Grants are generally awarded on the basis of need alone. Federal grant programs (Pell, Supplemental Education Opportunity Program-SEOG) vary with federal budgets and are awarded based on need. Grants do not have to be repaid.

Scholarships: Scholarships may be awarded on the basis of need and /or academic achievement or other criteria. Scholarships do not have to be repaid.

Loans: The U.S. Dept. of Education loan programs are offered based on the completion of the FAFSA. These include Federal Perkins Loan, Federal Stafford Loan, and Federal Direct Plus Loan. Parents may use alternative/private loans as well. Loans must be repaid.

RESOURCES FOR COLLEGE PLANNING

COLLEGE SELECTION

College Board	www.collegeboard.com
College Net	www.collegenet.com
FastWeb College Search	www.fastweb.com
Campus Tours	www.campustours.com

COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

Common Application	www.commonapp.org
SUNY Application	www.suny.edu/student
CUNY Application	www.cuny.edu/apply

STANDARDIZED TESTING

SAT	www.collegeboard.com
ACT	www.actstudent.org
Princeton Review	www.princetonreview.com
Kaplan	www.kaplan.com

FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIPS

Federal Student Aid	www.studentaid.ed.gov
Fin Aid	www.finaid.org
FastWeb's College Gold	www.collegegold.com
US Department of Education	www.ed.gov
Taxes for Students	www.irs.gov
Federal Direct Loans	www.ed.gov/DirectLoan
FAFSA	www.fafsa.ed.gov
Fast Web Scholarship Search	www.fastweb.com
Scholarships.com	www.scholarships.com
Financial Aid Calculators	www.finaid.org/calculators
EOP/ HEOP/ SEEK	http://www.highered.nysed.gov
NY Excelsior	https://www.ny.gov/programs

No student or parent should ever enter personal information like social security numbers, credit card accounts, birthdates, or home addresses, except as needed with verified professional sites like ACT, College Board, Common Application, CUNY, SUNY, Princeton Review and individual college websites. You should not respond to any request to pay for scholarship information!

APPLICATION FEES & FEE WAIVERS

Prepare for the cost of the applications now, so that the fees for college applications don't take you by surprise. The average cost of a college application is \$50, but can be as high as \$85 for each application. Applications for ten schools will cost approximately \$600. Costs for additional score reports for your SAT and ACT exams, in addition to the fees for the exams themselves should also be considered.

Fee waivers for exams are available for students who qualify for free or reduced lunch through College Board and ACT. These fee waivers are provided through the school. **Please make sure to complete your school lunch form each year for fee waiver eligibility.**

Colleges provide fee waivers for applications as well. You will need to have submitted lunch forms to the school every year, and you will need to have copies of your parents' tax returns to determine eligibility. Fee waivers for most college applications can be requested on Common App.

Additional Fee Waivers

- CUNY - Fee waivers for applications may also be available for CUNY schools through our College Office
- Common App - You can request to receive Common App fee waivers on your Common App Application. Counselors will certify and approve your eligibility during SR Day/Week
- College Board offers fee waivers for those students who meet the financial need criteria

Not every college accepts fee waivers. You must determine whether the fee waiver will be accepted by researching the college's website, or calling their admissions office.

Additional References

Acceptance, David L. Marcus (The Penguin Press)

Acing the College Application, Michelle Hernandez (Ballantine Books) *The Gatekeepers*, Jacques Steinberg (The Penguin Press)

What High Schools Don't Tell You, Elizabeth Wissner-Gross (Hudson Street)

College Essays That Made a Difference. 2nd Edition, The Princeton Review

On Writing the College Application Essay, Harry Bauld, Collins Reference

www.collegeessay.com

Visiting Colleges. 2nd Edition, The Princeton Review.

www.campustours.com

www.mycampusvisits.com

The Sports Scholarships Insiders Guide. Dion Wheeler (Sourcebooks, Inc.)

The Student Athletes Guide to Getting Recruited: How to Win Scholarships, Attract Colleges and Excel as an Athlete. Stewart Brown (Supercollege, LLC)

Make Summer Count: Programs and Camps for Teens. (Peterson's Guides)

www.campustours.com www.cogito.org

www.mycampusvisits.com www.house.gov/watt/intern03.htm

www.enrichmentalley.com www.volunteermatch.org