



COUNSELING DEPARTMENT



COLLEGE APPLICATION GUIDE

SENIORS – CLASS of 2026

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

College Admissions Timetable	Page 2
Factors in Competitive College Admissions.....	Page 5
Standardized Testing.....	Page 7
Deciding Where to Apply	Page 8
College Application Checklist	Page 10
College Admission Policies	Page 11
The Application Process	Page 12
Sample Résumé for College Applications	Page 15
Writing Your College Essay	Page 16
NCAA Eligibility	Page 17
Financial Aid Information.....	Page 18
Scholarships	Page 20
Sources for More Information on Federal Financial Aid Programs	Page 22

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS TIMETABLE - CLASS OF 2026

August/September 2025

- Settle in for a solid academic year. Colleges DO look at your senior grades!
- If you have not done so already, narrow your list of colleges to about 6-7.
- Update your Cialfo profile at <https://sja.cialfo.co> and move the list of colleges you selected in Cialfo over to your “Applying” list. You may also use this site to search for colleges and study SJA’s acceptance history at various universities. See your college counselor if you need help accessing this site.
- Become familiar with the application deadlines for the colleges to which you will apply.
- **Remind your parents to attend the Sr. Parent Meeting (College Planning/Financial Aid) on Tuesday, August 26 at 6:30 PM in the library to receive information on the college application process and financial aid.**
- Complete the Google Form to sign up for college talk visits with admissions representatives. The form can also be found on Google Classroom.
- Follow us on Instagram @SJACollegeCounseling
- Submit applications to colleges on rolling admission.
- Register for the ACT or SAT, if required. *Review testing dates and registration deadlines on pg. 12.*
- Prepare your résumé.
- Work on application essays.
- Make campus visits or take virtual tours, when possible.
- Request a social security number if you do not have one.
- Join College Counseling Google Classroom to receive much more information. Code: **gbedvyj**
- Turn in completed Student College Information Sheet to your college counselor.
- Ask teachers for a recommendation letter, if necessary. These requests should be submitted through *CIALFO*. Once a teacher has agreed to write the recommendation, you should give them the completed Teacher Recommendation Request form and a copy of your résumé.
- Prepare Early Decision/Early Action applications for submission before Oct. 15 / Nov. 1.
- Register for FAFSA ID at www.fafsa.ed.gov
- **The Gates Scholarship application is due online by September 15.** Apply at <https://www.thegatesscholarship.org/scholarship>

October 2025

- File the FAFSA at www.fafsa.ed.gov, beginning on **October 1**.
- **Attend the SJA College Fair on Friday, November 7, 1:00 – 3:00 PM.**
- Continue search for scholarship money or other financial aid. The Counseling Department will post on Google Classroom various scholarships.
- Visit college campuses or take virtual tours, when possible.
- Work on application essays and have them reviewed by a faculty member and/or your college counselor.
- Register and take the SAT/ACT.
- Register for CSS Profile if your college requires it. You can find the Profile at www.collegeboard.org. Application available October 1.

- The Coca-Cola Scholarship application is due online by October 31. Apply at www.coca-colascholars.org
- **October 15 is the preferred submission date for Early Action applications and the Priority Deadline for students applying to Engineering at Texas A&M University.**
- Submit all Early Decision/Action applications before November 1.
- **October 15 is the Priority Deadline for The University of Texas at Austin.**

November 2025

- **Attend the SJA College Fair on Friday, November 7, 1:00 – 3:00 PM.**
- Take or retake the SAT/ACT, if applicable.
- **Applications with December 1 deadlines, such as UT-Austin and Texas A&M, must be processed BEFORE Nov. 18, which is right before the Thanksgiving break. Plan to meet with your college counselor at least a week before the break to review your application and arrange for your application materials (transcript, etc.) to be submitted.**
- Continue to do your best with your studies, as some colleges require first-semester grades.
- Apply for applicable scholarships at UT-Austin and Texas A&M (Dec. 1 deadline).

December 2025

- Complete university scholarship applications, if applicable.
- Order graduation invitations and get measured for your cap and gown on **December 9** in the Library.
- **Applications deadlines for January 1-15 are due to your college counselor no later than the 1st week of December.**
- Take SAT and/or ACT, if needed.
- Study hard for exams!

January 2026

- Finalize all applications for regular admissions deadlines in mid to late January and/or February.

February 2026

- Register for the draft if male and 18 years old. You must register within 30 days of your 18th birthday at www.sss.gov.
- Continue to work on scholarship applications.
- Don't get senioritis! Many colleges want to see your second semester grades. Remember: college acceptance letters are **provisional, based on satisfactory completion of secondary school.**
- Take Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA), if necessary.
- **Hispanic Scholarship Fund application is due online by February 15.** Apply at <https://www.hsf.net/scholarship>

March 2026

- Consider admission and financial aid offers.
- Take the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA), if necessary.
- Consider creating your LinkedIn account (18 years and older)

April 2026

- Take TSIA if you are attending a Texas public university and are not exempt. Contact your college counselor for exemptions or test information.
- **Provide the Counseling Office with documentation of acceptance letters and scholarship awards.**

May 2026

- May 1, 2026 is the **National Candidate Reply Date**. Notify the college you will be attending regarding your acceptance. Inform those colleges you are rejecting with a thank-you note.
- Provide your college counselor the college/university you plan to attend for the **SJA College Decision Day** scheduled for May 2026 (TBA). This information will also be used to send your final transcript and to publish your college choice in the graduation program.
- Register for freshman orientation at the college of your choice.
- Continue to provide the Counseling Office with written documentation of college acceptance and scholarship awards.
- May 22, 2026...Happy Graduation!

June 2026

- If your college plans change after graduation, please contact the registrar, Mrs. Torres, immediately so that your transcript may be sent to the proper school.

FACTORS IN COMPETITIVE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

From admissions officers everywhere, the advice is virtually the same. Here is what counts to them.

Your Transcript (Secondary School Report) - How have you done in the courses taken? Colleges would much rather see you taking a tough and challenging load that is in line with your ability than improving your grade point average by taking “easy” courses. They will also ask to see your senior grades. Keep working!

ACT/SAT Scores - Scores on the SAT or the ACT are used by admissions committees as one measure to compare students from different schools. Standardized test results ultimately reflect the student’s ability to take timed, multiple-choice tests and, as such, cannot represent the individual student’s cognitive abilities. **For Class of 2026, standardized tests remain optional at most colleges and universities due to Covid-19.** Discuss this with your college counselor.

Many able students have low test scores. A combination of high grades and low test scores can be explained by many factors. HOWEVER, high scores and low grades are the worst possible combination, since it almost always describes an able person who does not work productively and is therefore perceived by admissions officers as a greater risk.

The Essay and the Application - The essay is often the most overlooked aspect of college admissions by students. Students are expected to spend a considerable amount of time in the preparation of the essay. It is your chance to become more than a name for the admissions staff. Your choice of topic for the essay is far less important than its presentation. It should be personal and honest, thoughtfully and carefully written, and should discuss something of importance to you. Proofread everything carefully. You are presenting yourself through this document and a carelessly completed application will not win you points; an imperfect but genuine effort will.

The Counselor Statement - The school’s recommendation for a student is written by the college counselor, who will attempt to present an assessment which is fair and accurate, and which emphasizes achievements and talents. The counselor won’t ignore major difficulties as they are reflected on the transcript but will tell the story to your advantage in so far as is possible.

Teacher Recommendations - Each college has its own specific requirements for teacher recommendations, but in most cases two are requested: one from a history, English or foreign language teacher, and the other from a math or science teacher. In some instances, colleges are very specific, asking for recommendations from your current English and math teachers, whereas in other cases they may give you your choice or require none at all. If you have a particular strength in the arts or athletics or any extracurricular activity, you may want to have your teacher or coach write on your behalf, but in all other instances you should not give the colleges more than they ask for. Read the application carefully. Teacher recommendations speak to your abilities and accomplishments as a student and need to be positive. Thus, you should choose carefully the teachers you ask and be sure they feel comfortable writing a recommendation for you. Don’t assume that your chosen teacher will automatically accept your request. Have back-ups in mind. Be sure they are teachers you’ve worked with in your junior or senior year, and remember to phrase your request as a request, not a demand. Submit your request for a recommendation through *CIALFO*. **NOTE: Teachers are just like you - they need adequate time if they are going to**

write well. Be SURE to contact your teachers AT LEAST 3 WEEKS before you need to submit the letter of recommendation and provide them with a copy of the Teacher Recommendation Request Form and your résumé to help them write about you.

Extracurricular Activities and Work Experience (Your Résumé) - Your involvement in activities does not carry as much weight as your transcript unless your talent or skill is exceptional. If you are an accomplished musician, you may impress a committee in your audition, especially if you are the bassoonist they need for next year's orchestra. If you are one of the nation's best high school basketball players, your 78.5 grade point average may be overlooked. For the majority of students, the list of high school activities indicates a high level of involvement; only rarely is it exceptional. Capable involvement is seen as a good thing by college people if it means something to you other than simply compiling a list of activities, and if the time commitment does not detract from your academic record.

Geographic Distribution and Legacy Status - Recently, the Supreme Court banned affirmative action; however, while abiding to the court's decision, schools want to pursue lawful steps to promote diversity and inclusion. According to the Department of Education, they plan to issue most effective and promising strategies for colleges to lawfully cultivate diverse applicant pools and achieve diverse student bodies, since nothing in the court's decision denied the value of diversity and education. Conversely, according to a NACAC bulleting, some Higher Ed institutions are abolishing their legacy considerations in an effort to reduce any unfair advantage of applicants whose parents are alumni or who have close connections to faculty and donors.

Social Media – Be aware that colleges/universities do review social media postings of potential applicants. Using social media with no regard for who is reading it can result in rejection notices from colleges and future employers. Use social media responsibly to prevent a negative impact on your college admission decision.

Above all else, don't try to fool the colleges! **BE YOURSELF!**

STANDARDIZED TESTING

Admissions tests are considered by many schools to be an integral part of the admissions process, although some are making them optional. They are thought to “level the playing field.” A single test taken by students from across the nation gives colleges some comparative data to use in evaluating students from different high schools.

College Entrance Tests

- **ACT** - A test measuring understanding and ability in English usage, mathematical usage, reading comprehension, and science reasoning. Students usually take the ACT in the spring of their junior year, and/or in the fall of their senior year.
- **SAT** - A test that measures a student’s skills in evidence-based reading and writing and mathematics. The optional essay is required by a small number of schools. Students are encouraged to research their potential schools to see if the essay is required. Testing is usually done in the spring of the junior year and is often repeated in the fall of the senior year.

Advanced Placement Tests - Exams taken at the conclusion of study in an Advanced Placement course. College credit or advanced standing is awarded by certain colleges when students achieve sufficiently high scores.

The Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA) – A test that provides information about the reading, mathematics, and writing skills of students entering Texas public colleges and universities to determine if students are ready for college-level coursework. You must take the TSI Assessment if you are entering a Texas **public** school of higher learning (i.e., a college, university, or technical institute) as a full-time or part-time student in an associate or baccalaureate degree program. Test results are not used for admission purposes; you must, however, have test results prior to enrolling, unless you are exempt. Scores are good for 5 years.

TSIA Exemptions from SAT or ACT scores:

SAT exemption: A minimum score of 480 on the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (EBRW) will exempt a student from both the TSA reading and writing requirements; a minimum score of 530 on the mathematics test will exempt a student from the TSI mathematics requirements.

ACT exemption: A combined score of 40 on the English and Reading (E+R) test will satisfy both reading and writing TSI requirements, and score of 22 on the mathematics test will exempt a student from mathematics requirements.

How to Register for These Tests:

- SAT Reasoning Test: www.collegeboard.org
- ACT: www.actstudent.org
- TSIA: <https://www.utrgv.edu/p16/testing/index.htm> or contact the UTRGV Testing Office: Saint Joseph Academy MD building (956) 882-8875 or <https://www.tsc.edu/student-resources/student-services/testing-center/tsi-assessment/> or contact TSC Testing Office testing@tsc.edu (956) 292-3660

The School Code for St. Joseph Academy is **440915**.

DECIDING WHERE TO APPLY

College counselors are frequently asked, “What should my final list of colleges include?” Inherent in this question are two considerations: First, how many schools should I apply to, and second, what range of schools should be included with regard to admissions competition?

We discourage you from adopting the “shotgun approach” of applying to a multitude of schools. We also discourage you, regardless of academic ability, from “putting all of your eggs in one basket” by applying to only one institution or one selectivity level of college. As a general rule, we advise that you apply to approximately five to six schools which vary in terms of selectivity, but which have the most important features in which you are interested. As long as you do not overly limit yourself geographically, finding such a group of schools is not that difficult a task when you consider the large number of colleges and universities found in the United States. Generally, we recommend that your final list include schools from each of the following categories:

CATEGORY I: Your top choice schools. It is fine in this group to include a couple of “reach” schools. A “reach” school is understood to be one where your chances of admission are less than 50/50, perhaps more like 1 in 3.

CATEGORY II: Schools that possess the significant features you desire and at which the probability of admission is even or slightly better than even. These are categorized as “competitive” schools.

CATEGORY III: Schools that have most of the features you desire and at which the probability of admission is “highly likely” to “certain”. We refer to colleges in this category as your “safety” schools.

While there is no hard-and-fast rule, you usually include two or three schools from categories one and two and at least one or two schools from category three. Obviously, those schools that qualify as “reach”, “competitive”, and “safety” vary from student to student. Each of you has an individual academic profile and should select schools accordingly, making sure that choices range through all three categories. We would like to emphasize that you are strongly encouraged to apply to more than one “realistic” and/or “safety” school. This will insure acceptances and provide you with some choices.

A FEW NOTES OF CAUTION:

- Many students spend hours deciding on their few top choices and five minutes selecting one or two safer institutions. Please think carefully about all of your choices, so that if you were to eventually attend your fourth or fifth choice school, you would have a good chance of being happy and successful. Make sure that all of your choices are places where you could find the atmosphere and programs that suit you.
- Many of you feel that simply because a particular institution falls into category II as opposed to category I, it does not offer programs of equal quality. Such an assumption is, in many instances, incorrect. The selectivity of any institution is dependent on the size of its applicant pool which, in turn, may be affected as much by geographic location, popularity, and reputation as by actual academic quality. Many schools, for a variety of reasons, may be category II schools from an admissions perspective, yet offer programs equal in quality to your few top choices.

- There are many good schools throughout the country, and we encourage you to investigate options outside of Texas. A strictly regional approach can, in some instances, limit your ability to attain admission to the quality school you desire. You may, for a variety of reasons, be considered a more unique and attractive candidate by a school outside of the state than be a school equal in quality within the area.
- Many students and their parents still feel that you can select any one of the various state universities as a safety choice. This is no longer the case if, in fact, it ever was. You must realize that state universities are becoming more and more competitive. Many state universities have established quotas governing the number of out-of-state students admitted, thereby creating keen competition for a limited number of places.

COLLEGE APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Student	College #1	College #2	College #3	College #4	College #5
Type of Application					
Apply Texas					
Common App					
Coalition App					
College App					
Requirements					
Completed Application					
High School Transcript					
College Transcript - Dual					
SAT/ACT Scores					
TSI Scores, if applicable					
Essay(s)					
College Supplement					
Recommendation(s)					
Resume					
Portfolio, if applicable					
Interview, if applicable					
Fee					
From Counselor					
Secondary School Report					
Mid-Year Report					
TPHSC Form (For TX Public Universities)					
Deadline Options					
Early Decision (binding)					
Early Action (non-binding)					
Regular Decision					
Other Deadline					

COLLEGE ADMISSION POLICIES

Colleges and universities have varying admission practices. Information pertaining to the policy of a prospective school will be found on its website. Some of the more frequently mentioned practices are the following:

- A. **Early Decision:** Students who have demonstrated sound academic ability might apply for admission to their first-choice college very early in their senior year. Notification of admission is given usually in December. Restrictive policies vary with each school and must be checked carefully to see if Early Decision works to the individual's advantage. Generally, if you apply Early Decision, you must also sign a commitment to attend if accepted and to withdraw any applications submitted to other colleges. If you are a qualified candidate applying to a selective school, and you are certain of your choice, regardless of financial aid, it may be to your advantage to choose this option. Discuss this carefully with your counselor and your parents.
- B. **Early Action:** This plan allows students to indicate a first-choice college and receive a decision in the senior year well in advance of the normal response date in the spring. Students are not committed to enroll if accepted. In recent years, many colleges have filled a large portion of their classes with Early Action applicants. If you are a qualified applicant, this option may be advantageous to you. Discuss this carefully with your counselor.
- C. **Rolling Admission:** As soon as an application is complete (meaning that the forms, the fee, and all required credentials have been received and processed), a decision on that application is made and the student is notified. It is generally advantageous for students to apply well in advance of the posted deadline because it is impossible to know how quickly the available spaces are being filled.
- D. **Regular Decision:** This is the process whereby a college considers applications from prospective students and delays the admission decision until all applications from the entire applicant pool have been received. Decision letters are mailed to applicants, all at once, traditionally in March or April. The most selective colleges mail their decision letters in early to mid-April.
- E. **Deferred Admission:** Students who have alternate plans for the year following high school may apply to many colleges for deferred admission. The application process and timetable remain the same as for regular admission, but students should indicate that they do not intend to matriculate until the following year. An explanation of how the student plans to spend the year and the benefits the student expects to derive from it is usually required by the college.
- F. **Open Enrollment:** A term used by an institution that publishes a set of admission standards and pledges to admit any student whose credentials equal or exceed them. This is most often used by community colleges.
- G. **Wait List:** The process used by selective colleges who do not initially offer or deny admission but extend the possibility of admission to a later date (usually late May through July). Students should accept another college's offer since waiting list acceptances are very inconsistent. (Discuss all wait list situations with your counselor. Second semester grades and your method of reply can be critical to your acceptance.)

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Use the sample information below as a guide to complete each step in the application process.

1. Update your profile on the *CIALFO* system, at <https://sja.cialfo.co> Under the SCHOOLS menu, add the “SCHOOLS” to your “APPLYING” list. It is important that this list is accurate. Your counselor will be using this list to monitor your progress.
2. Complete the Student Information Sheet and see that your parents complete their Parent Information Sheet. Return all materials to your college counselor in-person, by email or via Google Classroom as soon as possible. **These forms must be completed and returned before applications can be processed.**
3. Collect information about deadlines, tests, and application requirements by clicking on the website icon for each college. You can make notes on the College Application Checklist found in this handbook.
4. Locate the applications you will need, as well as applications for financial aid, scholarships, and housing. **You will be applying electronically, but it is important that you NOT do so without consulting your college counselor. Once the application is submitted electronically, it is VERY difficult to make corrections, and a poorly presented application may seriously hurt your chances of admission.**
5. Write essays.
 - Choose your application essay topics carefully. Be SURE you are writing on the correct topic for the school(s) to which you are applying. Check the required word count since they may vary.
 - Pay attention to style, spelling, etc., as you would for a classroom essay.
 - Have your essay reviewed by a faculty member and your counselor.
 - Upload the essay to the application.
6. Decide whether or not you will submit test scores; if so, request that your official SAT/ACT test results be sent directly from the testing agency to the colleges where you are applying. **Remember that it usually takes 2-3 weeks for colleges to receive your scores after you request them – PLAN AHEAD.**
7. Request letters of recommendation (LOR) from teachers and counselor, if required. Provide them with any necessary forms and information. Please keep in mind that to write an accurate and vivid portrait of a student is demanding and time-consuming. Be sure to make your request **at least three weeks** in advance of your submission date. The first step is to speak to your teacher(s) personally to request the recommendation and provide them with a Teacher Recommendation Request form and a copy of your résumé. Then go to *CIALFO* and follow these steps:
 - Go to the Recommendations section (left toolbar).
 - Select the button that says REQUEST LOR.

- Choose the teacher(s) from the list.
 - If you choose, you can upload your resume and TEACHER RECOMMENDATION REQUEST form.
 - Then you click SEND REQUEST.
8. Finish your résumé.
- Using a word processing program, develop your résumé. You may use the sample format found on the next page or any other standard résumé format.
 - Transfer the information to your online application.
 - If you wish to send a supplemental résumé to a college, see your college counselor.
9. Complete the application carefully. Decide if you will be using the Common Application, the ApplyTexas Application, the Coalition Application, or a specific university application. Fill out the application online, saving frequently. If you have questions or need help at any point, see your college counselor.
- 10.
- Websites for applications:**
- www.commonapp.org (Many private and public universities across the USA)
 - www.goapplytexas.org (Only public and some private universities in Texas)
 - www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org (Limited)
 - Individual applications through their own college website
11. **Self-Reported Transcript and Academic Record (STARS)** allows applicants to record and submit courses, grades, and test scores as part of your college application to participating colleges and universities.
- Students will list courses and grades that have been completed, or will be attempted (e.g., senior year courses in-progress), for high school credit. Some colleges that require the STARS are Texas A&M University, University of Texas San Antonio and Baylor amongst others.
12. **At least two weeks before the deadline**, meet with your college counselor to review your application and arrange for the rest of your application materials to be submitted. Even if your application is submitted electronically, some other materials (transcript, letters of recommendation, counselor recommendation, résumé, school profile, and anything else you give us) will be mailed or submitted electronically from the school. **(Applications with Dec. 1 deadlines must be submitted to your college counselor before the Thanksgiving break; likewise, applications with Jan. 1 deadlines must be submitted to your college counselor by the first week in December!)**
13. When you have completed all of the steps above, see your college counselor for a final review of your application, submit the application online, and pay the fee with a credit card. The Counseling Office will submit the other required materials. During the entire process, it is extremely important that you do not throw documents away or delete emails! Test score reports, application instructions, information from colleges, financial aid forms and applications, correspondence with colleges – all of these are examples of materials commonly lost by applicants who are not organized.

Note: you MUST see your college counselor to review your application before it is submitted.

SAMPLE RESUME FORMAT

Your Name
Your Address
City, State, Zip
Your Telephone
Your e-mail address

Student at Saint Joseph Academy - Class of 2026

(THIS IS A SAMPLE. Create your own categories as needed to showcase your activities. Be sure to explain any activities or honors which the admission committee might not recognize. If you devoted an unusual amount of time or served in a leadership capacity, be sure that is brought to the committee's attention. See examples below):

Academic Honors

- **First Honors** 9, 10, 11, 12
All grades 90 and above

Leadership Activities

- **Student Council Class Representative** (2 hours per week, 36 weeks a year) 11, 12
Elected by students in my grade level; meet weekly to plan & organize major school events such as homecoming, MORP, Red & White Classic
- **National Honor Society** (1 hour per week, 36 weeks a year) 10, 11, 12
Selected by faculty; maintain 90 average in all classes; complete 40 hours of service throughout the year; organized canned food drive

Athletic Accomplishments

- **Varsity Cross Country** (15 hours per week, 20 weeks a year) 10, 11, 12
Placed 2nd at Regional Meet

Volunteer Activities

- **Missions Trip** (150 hours per week, 1 week a year) 11
Travelled to Appalachia to build and repair houses

Work Activities

- **Lifeguard at Municipal Pool** (40 hours per week, 8 weeks a year) 10, 11

Summer Activities

- **Clemson U. Summer Enrichment Program** (40 hours per week, 2 weeks a year) 11
Participated in summer engineering camp focused on robotics

WRITING YOUR COLLEGE ESSAY

Colleges require essays for admission for a number of reasons:

- to determine your writing ability
- to determine if you have anything to say
- to determine if you will be a good match for the curriculum it has to offer
- to get to know you better as a person

TIPS FOR WRITING YOUR ESSAY

1. Read prompt carefully in order to answer correctly.
2. Show enthusiasm - about yourself, about your life.
3. Have originality.
4. Avoid trying to be humorous unless you are good at it.
5. Be honest; be yourself. The essay is your chance to present YOU – the unique individual behind the grades and test scores.
6. **AI** can be a useful tool for brainstorming or research during your college essay writing process, but don't use it to write your entire essay. It will lack the essence of your human voice and authenticity.
7. Look at the application as if you were a member of the panel of judges.
 - Let it reflect yourself as nearly as possible.
 - Use your own language - your own style.
 - Write to convey your ideas clearly and easily; don't write to "impress".
 - Illustrate your points with specific examples and interesting details.
8. DON'T try to second-guess the Selection Committee.
 - MORE is not better - do not ramble just to have a longer essay.
 - Have someone proofread it for errors. **Don't** rely entirely on spell-check!
 - Ask a faculty member to go over your essay with you. Don't wait until the last minute to ask.
9. Keep in mind the basic rules of grammar:
 - Proper rules of paragraphs, including spelling and punctuation
 - Spend at least as much time in actually thinking about what to say as in the actual writing of the essay. The most important thing is to have a clear idea of what you want to say.
10. DON'T give your life story. ("I was born in...I have three cats and two dogs, etc."). Instead, tell about a unique incident in your life and how you felt about the incident - Did it change your life in some way?
11. DON'T just list all your high school activities. Selection committees are looking for experiences in your life which have been meaningful and unique. If you have been President of the National Honor Society, how have you used it? If you have been a camp counselor, how are you a different person because of that experience?
12. DON'T tell the university about them. For example, "I want to go to Rice University because it offers..." and then copy directly from the college catalog or website.

NCAA

If you intend to participate in Division I or Division II athletics as a freshman in college, you must be registered with and be certified as eligible by the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse. You can register online at www.eligibilitycenter.org. Click the link to enter as an NCAA College-Bound Student-Athlete and create an account to begin the registration process. There is a fee of \$100.00, which you may pay online.

You must also have your high school transcript sent directly from Saint Joseph Academy to the NCAA Eligibility Center. The center needs an official transcript from all high schools you have attended. You must request the transcript online through your NCAA account. The transcript will be sent directly from Saint Joseph Academy to the NCAA Eligibility Center. See your college counselor for help with this process.

You must also request that your SAT or ACT scores be sent directly from the testing agency to the NCAA Eligibility Center. You should go into your student account for SAT at www.collegeboard.org or for ACT at www.actstudent.org to request that the scores be sent. The code for the NCAA Eligibility Center is 9999.

Although there is no deadline for registration, you must be certified before receiving an athletic scholarship, or practicing and competing at a Division I or II institution. You should take care of this soon to avoid delaying any possible scholarship awards.

If you are seriously interested in being recruited to participate in college athletics, you must work directly with the Saint Joseph Academy Athletic Director and your coach throughout the process.

FINANCIAL AID

Due to the rising cost of attending college, more students are depending on financial aid to meet college expenses. Financial aid comes in the following forms:

- **Grants** which are based on financial need and do not have to be repaid.
- **College Work-Study Programs** students receive minimum wage or sometimes better for on-campus jobs.
- **Student Loans** which have reasonable interest rates and usually do not have to be repaid until after you leave college.
- **Parent Loans** which have reasonable interest rates; payments begin immediately.
- **Scholarships** which may be awarded according to need and achievement or may be awarded strictly on achievement.

GRANT PROGRAMS – EXAMPLES:

- **Federal Pell Grant** – awarded to undergraduate students based on financial need. The amount you would receive will be determined by your family size, the number of family members in college, and the income and assets of your parents, your siblings, and yourself.
- **S.E.O.G. (Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant)** – awarded to undergraduates with exceptional financial need – that is, students with the lowest Expected Family Contributions (EFCs). Priority is given to students who receive Federal Pell Grants. This program is administered by the university's financial aid office. The number of SEOGs awarded may depend on the availability of funds at a particular university.
- **TEXAS Grant** – may be awarded to Texas residents with financial need who completed the Recommended or Distinguished Achievement High School Program and who enroll in a Texas college or university as a freshman within 16 months of high school graduation. The maximum award varies by type of institution.
- **TPEG (Texas Public Education Grant)** – awarded to Texas residents, nonresidents, and foreign students enrolled at public colleges or universities in Texas. The maximum award varies according to financial need.

LOAN PROGRAMS – EXAMPLES:

- **Federal Direct Stafford Loans** – Student loans awarded on the basis of information provided on the FAFSA form. These may be subsidized or unsubsidized Stafford Loans. Loans are repaid beginning six months after graduation.

- **Federal Direct PLUS Loans** – These loans enable parents with good credit histories to borrow money to pay the education expenses of each child who is a dependent undergraduate student. Loan payments begin immediately after loan funds are disbursed.
- **Federal Perkins Loans** – Campus-based loan program. The funds are awarded by the institution to eligible students.

STEPS IN APPLYING FOR FINANCIAL AID

1. Notify the colleges under consideration that you are interested in financial aid. They may have their own financial aid forms and often have deadlines that are quite early in the year. Remember that scholarships are also part of financial aid. On the college's website, there is usually a "financial aid" button to click.
2. Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for the 2026-2027 academic year. The FAFSA is a student's ticket to obtaining grants, work-study, low-interest student loans and scholarships. The changes will impact everyone, both current and future students.
3. There are several important things to know as of now: FAFSA will be reduced to just 36 questions from 108, and it will be easier to import income data from tax records; the FAFSA is scheduled to open October 1, 2025; both the student and the parent must create a Student Aid Account to get an FSA ID before completing the FAFSA (the Social Security Administration will now require verification of FSA IDs before tax information can be accessed, so allow at least 3 days for process to occur); students and parents must log in to the FAFSA separately to complete their respective sections; if parents are divorced or separated, the parent who provided the most financial support must complete the application; the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) is now called the Student Aid Index (SAI) and the SAR (Student Aid Report) will become the FAFSA Submission Summary (FSS).
4. Some private colleges also require the CSS Profile. The forms are available at www.collegeboard.org. **Important: You should register for your PROFILE application in the fall semester.** The 2025-2026 PROFILE applications will be accepted starting on October 1. If you have any questions about PROFILE, please email help@cssprofile.org or call toll free at (800) 239-5888.
5. **File early!** If you file early, you have the best chance of receiving a larger portion of grant money in your aid package.
6. When the college financial aid office awards a financial aid package, you should acknowledge acceptance of the financial aid. However, if you decide not to accept the financial aid award, you should notify the college financial aid office of this decision.
7. Important: Even if you believe your family will not qualify for need-based aid, it is recommended that you complete a FAFSA. Some universities will not award merit aid unless there is a FAFSA on file.

SCHOLARSHIPS

The scholarship application process requires time, work, and dedication on the part of you and your parents. Many times those who are the most organized and the most diligent with the application process are the ones who receive the scholarships. You should do the following:

- **READ EMAILS from the Counseling Department!** We receive information on many scholarships for which you may be eligible, and we will share this information with you by email.
- Search the Internet. You were given a list of web sites in your Junior Handbook to get you started.
- Search the financial aid section of college websites for university scholarships.
- Check your email and google classroom regularly to get updates and new information.
- If your application requires a transcript or recommendation, see your college counselor.
- Investigate possible scholarship opportunities available via your parents' employment, the college or university you will attend, community organizations, and other sources.
- Check out the Free Scholarship Search at www.fastweb.com – over 1.3 million awards worth over \$3 billion are available through this website.
- **Don't give up too easily!** There is a lot of money available to students who are willing to devote the time to searching for it.

Helpful Hints on Applying for Scholarships

- **Complete the application carefully.**
Neat applications are easier to read; it makes a difference for a judge who has to go through a huge stack of applications.
- **Be creative when answering essay questions.**
Give as much information as possible, use humor, personal stories, poetry, whatever it takes to capture the imagination of the person reading that application.
- **Proofread your application form prior to submitting it.**
- **Submit all materials requested.**
Judges will disqualify any application that does not have the requested transcript, teacher recommendation, or any other form that is requested.
- **Submit letters of recommendation from people who know you well.** Get your favorite teacher, or the teacher who has really inspired you to succeed to write a glowing report about your accomplishments and all that you learned, both academically and in terms of your motivation and determination to succeed.
- **Sell yourself.**
Include every honor, recognition, project, and job or office position held that point to your talent, accomplishments, and involvement in various areas.
- **Work ahead of deadlines.**
This is especially true for the teacher recommendations and counselor approvals. They may have a lot of students they are trying to help with scholarship applications.
- **Be honest.**

Don't say that you were president of a club, or received all A's, or were recognized for certain accomplishments if that is not true. Scholarship committees can and will verify information. They want to know the best you are capable of now and in the future. That is what's important.

- **Believe in yourself.**

Don't worry about who else is applying for the scholarship. Put all your energies into turning in your best effort on this application. Scholarship judges look for the overall package, not the most popular kid in school.

- **Take advantage of the many scholarship opportunities and apply.**

Scholarship Scams

Warning Signs of a Scholarship Scam – visit <http://www.finaid.org/scholarships/scams.phtml>.

- **Application fee.** Some fees may be as low as \$2.00 or as high as \$5,000. Be cautious of any scholarship which requests a fee.
- **Loan fees.** An up-front fee is never required when you submit a scholarship application. Legitimate educational fees will deduct the fee from the disbursement check.
- **Other fees.** Never pay more than a postage stamp to receive information about a scholarship.
- **Guaranteed winnings.** No scholarship sponsor or scholarship matching service can guarantee that you will win a scholarship.
- **The unclaimed aid myth.** There is no verifiable list of unclaimed scholarship awards. Most financial aid programs are highly competitive, so there are no unclaimed scholarships.
- **We apply on your behalf.** In order to win any scholarship, you must submit your own application, write your own essay, and solicit your own letters of recommendation.
- **Unusual requests for personal information.** Do not disclose any personal information such as bank account numbers, credit card numbers, and social security numbers.
- **Masquerading as a federal agency.** Check the source of any organization. Just because it has an official looking government seal or logo, or it has a Washington, D.C. return address, it does not necessarily make that organization legitimate.
- **Claims of university, government, Chamber of Commerce or Better Business Bureau approval.** The federal government, U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce do not endorse or recommend private businesses.
- **Unsolicited opportunities.** You are contacted by scholarship sponsors in response to an inquiry. If you have never heard about an organization before, it could be a scam.
- **Notification by phone.** If you win a scholarship, you will be notified through the mail, not through a phone call.
- **A Florida or California address.** A disproportionate number of scholarship scams seems to originate from Florida or California addresses.

Where to Report a Scam

- National Fraud Information Center (NFIC) 1-800-876-7060
- Federal Trade Commission (FTC) 1-202-382-4357 or 1-877-382-4357
- Better Business Bureau (BBB) 1-703-525-8277
- U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) 1-800-654-8896
- U.S. Department of Education Office of the Inspector General 1-800-MIS-USED

Scholarships to Investigate

- **THE GATES SCHOLARSHIP**

The Gates Scholarship (TGS) is a highly selective, last-dollar scholarship for outstanding, minority, high school seniors from low-income households. Each year, the scholarship is awarded to 300 of these student leaders, with the intent of helping them realize their maximum potential. Deadline: September 15. Application is available at <https://www.thegatesscholarship.org/scholarship>

- **THE COCA-COLA SCHOLARS PROGRAM**

The Coca-Cola Scholars Program Scholarship is an achievement-based scholarship awarded to graduating high school seniors each year. Students are recognized for their capacity to lead and serve, and their commitment to making a significant impact on their schools and communities. Deadline: September 30. Application is available at www.coca-colascholarsfoundation.org

- **HISPANIC SCHOLARSHIP FUND (HSF)**

The Hispanic Scholarship Fund is the nation's largest provider of college financial aid to Latino students. It offers a diverse range of scholarship programs. To qualify for any scholarship awarded by, or through, the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, there are a number of general requirements that must be met. Deadline: February 15. Visit <https://www.hsf.net/scholarship> to fill out application.

- www.collegeboard.org/scholarship
- www.finaid.org
- www.scholarships.com
- www.studentscholarships.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID PROGRAMS

General information about the federal Student Financial Assistance Programs, assistance in completing the FAFSA, to obtain federal student aid publications.....1-800-4FEDAID (1-800-433-3243)

FREQUENTLY REQUESTED WEB SITES

The Student Guide to Financial Aid www.studentaid.ed.gov/resources

FAFSA www.studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa

FAFSA ID www.studentaid.gov/help/create-fsa-id

Help in completing the FAFSA www.studentaid.ed.gov/FAFSA

CSS Profile Application..... www.collegeboard.org/css

Appendix 1

**TESTING DATES FOR 2025-2026
SJA CODE: 440915**

TEST	HOW TO REGISTER	COST	TEST DATE	REGULAR REGISTRATION DEADLINE	* LATE REGISTRATION DEADLINE
SAT	Register online at www.collegeboard.com	\$68.00	Aug. 23, 2025 Sept. 13, 2025 Oct. 4, 2025 Nov. 8, 2025 Dec. 6, 2025 March 14, 2026 May 2, 2026 June 6, 2026	Aug. 8, 2025 Aug. 29, 2025 Sept. 19, 2025 Oct. 24, 2025 Nov. 21, 2025 Feb. 27, 2026 Apr. 17, 2026 May 22, 2026	Aug. 12, 2025 Sept. 2, 2025 Sept. 23, 2025 Oct. 28, 2025 Nov. 25, 2025 Mar. 3, 2026 Apr. 21, 2026 May 26, 2026 * Add \$44.00
ACT	Register online at www.actstudent.org	\$68.00 \$25.00 (Writing Add-On Fee)	Sept. 6, 2025 Oct. 18, 2025 Dec. 13, 2025 Feb. 14, 2026 Apr. 11, 2026 June 13, 2026 July 11, 2026	Aug. 1, 2025 Sept. 12, 2025 Nov. 7, 2025 Jan. 9, 2026 Mar. 6, 2026 May 8, 2026 June 5, 2026	Aug. 19, 2025 Sept. 30, 2025 Nov. 24, 2025 Jan. 23, 2026 Mar. 24, 2026 May 29, 2026 June 24, 2026 * Add \$40.00
TSIA	Register at www.utrgv.edu/testing or www.tsc.edu	ELAR \$32.00 Math \$16.00 \$10.00 each section	Go to Institutional Exams and register for a test. Go to Student Services and then to Testing Center	Dates vary every month	

Note: Students applying to SJA Dual Enrollment Programs must test in person.