

The logo for Texas Gear Up features the word "TEXAS" in maroon, "GEAR" in blue, and "UP" in dark grey. The letter "U" is a simple block letter, while the letter "P" is a light green block letter with a white silhouette of the state of Texas inside its upper curve.

**TEXAS
GEAR
UP**

**COLLEGE
APPLICATION
PROCESS**

*PARENT
SPOT*

COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

There's no doubt that the process of applying to college can represent a challenging time for your high school student. It's a complex and unfamiliar path for most teens. Plus, they're also having to decide which college/university to attend and which major to pursue. And their last year in high school is one of the busiest in their entire educational journey. That's an awful lot for anyone to handle! So it's completely natural that students often feel overwhelmed and confused.

Research confirms that parents are the major influence on their students' college aspirations and planning. Yet many parents just don't feel they know enough about college to help their student. The good news? Parents definitely don't have to be "college experts" to be valuable sources of support and guidance in the college application process. Your main role is to encourage your teen and be his or her biggest cheerleader! In fact, your student already has access to "college experts" every single day—like their GEAR UP advisor and their high school counselor.

This guide will provide information and advice to help you encourage and assist your student in partnership with these experts. The guide isn't intended to be a comprehensive "how-to" on the college admission process. Instead, it presents different ways you can become a true resource for your student—whether it be through *consejos* (advice), strategizing on a plan, or developing the questions to ask the pros.



PREPARING FOR THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

Students can easily become overwhelmed with all the tasks that need to be done in applying for college, especially if they're applying to several. One way you can support your child is by helping him manage everything related to completing and submitting college/university admission applications. Your student will need to track all the must-know details—like what each college/university requires to apply for admission and the deadlines. And the requirements and deadlines will be different for every school, so organization is key!

On the next page, take a peek at a sample organizer that can help with all the details that need to be juggled during this process...



Use this organizer to keep track of college deadlines and requirements. Write dates when items are due and when tasks are completed. If not applicable, mark with X.

		COLLEGE #1	COLLEGE #2	COLLEGE #3
NAME OF COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY				
APPLICATION DEADLINE	DUE			
	DONE			
APPLICATION FORM	DUE			
	DONE			
LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION	DUE			
	DONE			
TEST SCORES (SAT/ACT)	DUE			
	DONE			
HIGH SCHOOL TRANSCRIPTS	DUE			
	DONE			
ESSAY	DUE			
	DONE			
FAFSA	DUE			
	DONE			
INSTITUTIONAL SCHOLARSHIP	DUE			
	DONE			
INTERVIEW	DUE			
	DONE			
VERIFY RECEIPT OF APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS	DUE			
	DONE			
USER NAME				
PASSWORD				

Your teen should begin submitting college applications early in the senior year of high school. But the fun starts before that, because there are several things he can do prior to kicking off the official application process...



BEGIN THE COLLEGE SEARCH

Ideally, students should start investigating colleges/universities prior to being in high school. But it's never too late! Your child can consult with his GEAR UP advisor and high school counselor about upcoming college fairs and college visits to check out the different types of colleges and universities. Both of you can also use all the college-finding resources on texasgearup.com (click on "FIND" in the Student Hub's "College Prep Tools" section).

This college/university search will provide your student (and you) essential information on the college application requirements, programs of study that the college/university offers, support services for students, and financial aid opportunities available.

The goal of college exploration is to identify colleges and universities that match your student in three areas: academic, social, and financial. In other words, the college/university should match your student's academic record and potential, his social and personal likes and dislikes, and your family's ability to afford the school (keeping financial aid firmly in mind, of course).

It's a good idea for your child to identify six colleges and universities that match. These "Final Six" should be broken down into the following categories:

"DREAM" COLLEGES

The chances of admission are not as high, but your student is excited about the possibility of attending and willing to work hard to meet the admission criteria.

"TARGET" COLLEGES

These colleges/universities match your student's academic credentials—he would enjoy himself and thrive at these schools.

"BACK-UP" COLLEGES (ALSO KNOWN AS "SAFETY" COLLEGES)

Your teen has an interest in attending and his qualifications meet or exceed the college/university's admission criteria.



EARN GOOD GRADES THROUGHOUT HIGH SCHOOL

Doing well academically throughout all four years of high school is certainly one of the best ways to prep for college. Taking challenging courses and earning the best grades possible will prepare your student to do better in college and will also improve his chances of getting admitted to his top college choices.



TAKE COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS

While college entrance exams are usually required in the college application process, your student doesn't have to wait until his senior year to take them. Your child can take the entrance exams—better known as the ACT or SAT—as early as freshman year, but they're normally taken during junior year. And remember that your student can retake the tests—but ideally no later than November of senior year. And there's more to come on the testing front later...



CREATE A RESUMÉ OR "BRAG SHEET"

All colleges and universities ask similar questions about a student's participation and contributions inside and outside the classroom. They're interested in what their future students are passionate about, leadership skills they may possess, and how they contribute to their communities. A resum  or brag sheet is the best way for your teen to record his activities and accomplishments so that he can easily answer these questions on the application. The finished product should include information like: courses taken, high school endorsement, extracurricular activities, school clubs and organizations, employment, community and volunteer services, awards and honors, and hobbies.

This one-stop information resource will also be useful with essays and personal statements, scholarship applications, and as a good reference to provide to teachers and counselors who'll be writing letters of recommendation. Get a look at a sample brag sheet on the next page for inspiration in creating a customized version with your teen.

MY BRAG SHEET (CONTINUED)

List all awards and/or letters earned

Award	Organization/Activity
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

List colleges you like and why?

Which colleges
have you visited?

List your hobbies.
Why do you enjoy them?

What are
your strengths?

How do you plan to contribute
to the community by attending college?

Careers you're considering

➤ COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS



BREAKING DOWN THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

As your student investigated and selected her “Final Six,” you may have noticed that there was a whole lot of information on the colleges and universities to keep track of. As the “organizer in chief,” your job is now to help your student manage the college application process and stay focused on the tasks and deadlines required by each of her “Final Six” colleges/universities.

Since all college applications are made up of several components, one approach to breaking the process down into smaller steps is to make a list of all the requirements. In addition, while the type and number of requirements can vary depending on the college or university, there are (thankfully!) some common elements to all applications that make them easier to break into smaller, more recognizable steps.

Here’s a snapshot of the most common application requirements by type of college/university:

	COMMUNITY/ TECHNICAL COLLEGE	PUBLIC UNIVERSITY	PRIVATE UNIVERSITY	HIGHLY SELECTIVE UNIVERSITY
APPLICATION FORM	●	●	●	●
COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS (SAT/ACT)		●	●	●
OFFICIAL HIGH SCHOOL TRANSCRIPT	●	●	●	●
FEE OR FEE WAIVER		●	●	●

Some colleges and universities may also have additional requirements like:

- » Essays
- » Letters of recommendation
- » Interviews
- » Portfolios





BREAKING DOWN THE TYPES OF COLLEGES

COMMUNITY/TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Offers associate degrees, certificates in a technical field, or students can take classes that transfer to a university; typically accepts all students that apply

PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

Offers bachelor's degrees and higher; funded by state and federal government; state residents pay lower tuition; doesn't accept everyone that applies

PRIVATE COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY

Offers bachelor's degrees and higher; not funded by state or federal governments; typically more expensive (though often offer larger scholarships); doesn't accept everyone that applies

HIGHLY SELECTIVE UNIVERSITY

Offers bachelor's degrees and higher; accepts less than one-third of their applicants; admission is determined by factors like: class rank, standardized test scores, and high school grade point average of entering freshmen



COLLEGE APPLICATION FORMS: THE BASICS

Now for the nitty-gritty... While each school is unique, their college application forms tend to request the same general information from your student

- » Personal and background info
 - Place and date of birth
 - Educational level of parent(s)
 - Family size and income
- » Educational history and future plans
 - Dates of high school attendance
 - Senior year coursework
 - Intended college major and type of degree
- » Extracurricular activities and clubs/organizations
 - Leadership positions/offices held
 - Dates of participation
- » Work/employment information and summer activities
 - Employer name and address
 - Dates of employment
 - Summer camps or programs (with dates)
- » Volunteer and community service
 - Name of organization or activity
 - Dates of participation/number of hours in service

Some colleges may also require short answer and/or essay questions to gather more information on your student to help them make admissions decisions.

Note that your student is NOT required to provide a Social Security number when completing his college application form—though it is highly encouraged if available. And your permission/signature is not required for your teen to complete and submit college application forms.



HOW DO YOU KNOW WHICH APPLICATION FORM IS REQUIRED BY THE COLLEGE?

Colleges/universities will identify the type of application form(s) they accept from students on the “Student Admission” sections of their websites. This information may also be found under headings like “first-time students” or “future students.”

- ▶ **AHEAD OF THE GAME?** If your teen is graduating from an early college high school or has earned college credits through dual-credit courses at the high school, she’ll still need to apply as “Freshman” or “New Student.” Once she’s admitted to the college, a college advisor can assist your student with determining which classes are transferrable and which will count towards a degree.



HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO APPLY FOR COLLEGE?

Yep, colleges and universities do typically charge students an application fee. The schools set their own fees, and you can find the cost in the same area of their websites as the info about the application forms they accept. Application fees are paid directly to the colleges, usually as an online payment. Indicating how you’ll pay is often the last step of the application—paying online, mailing a check, or requesting a fee waiver.

Most colleges accept application fee waivers, which are provided for students whose families have economic hardships. Colleges may have a different format for requesting one, so your teen’s school counselor or GEAR UP advisor can offer up information and assistance on the waivers. If your child used a fee waiver on the SAT, he can access his four fee waivers directly on his College Board account.



COLLEGE APPLICATION FORMS: THE MOST COMMON OPTIONS

The two most common types of college application forms are ApplyTexas and The Common Application. Be aware that some private universities may have their own unique application form. If that's the case, the school will have a link to the application on their website.

ApplyTexas (www.applytexas.org)

This application form is used by public universities and community colleges in Texas (and even some private ones). Most often, your student will set up her online account and complete her ApplyTexas application at school with the help of her GEAR UP advisor and/or counselor(s).

To set up an account, your child will need to answer personal questions—including name, date of birth, birthplace, address, citizenship status or legal residency, phone numbers, and emergency contact.

ApplyTexas will assign your student a username (the first four letters of her last name followed by a number). She'll then need to create a password—and it's helpful to use the same username and password for all her college and financial aid applications to make things a little less complicated. Just be sure to help your teen keep track of all the usernames and passwords she creates while applying for college and financial aid.

Once your student answers all the questions online, she'll be able to save and submit her application to her first Texas college or university. Then she'll submit additional applications one at a time to her other selected schools—simply by copying the first application. Just look for the link that says "Copy." It's really that easy!

As she applies to different colleges, she may be required to include essays or short answers to questions that are specific to that college. She should definitely prepare her answers first in Microsoft Word, then copy and paste onto the ApplyTexas site (but be sure to look at space limitations for each answer). Also, if the college says that the essay/short questions are optional, it's still recommended that your student complete them. This may allow her to apply for scholarships or specific programs offered by the school.

ApplyTexas provides students research options and important college info, including types of colleges, application deadlines, admission requirements, scholarship information, and links to college websites. You'll want to spend some time with your child researching the admission requirements and details for her "Final Six" colleges. It's also a great idea to help your student keep track of the college applications she's submitting, the dates she submits them, and the dates she submits any other required info.

The Common Application (www.commonapp.org)

The Common Application (usually shortened to "Common App") is used by more than 600 universities nationwide—both public and private. The questions on the Common App are very similar to the ones on the ApplyTexas application form.

Your student will probably complete and submit her Common App form online at school with the help of her GEAR UP advisor and/or counselor. She'll need some basic information to set up her Common App account—like date of birth, address, phone number, and a valid email address. Then that email address will become her username. Like ApplyTexas, the Common App doesn't require your signature or approval for her to submit college applications.

The Common App platform gives your teen the ability to add the colleges she's interested in to her "My Colleges" list so she's able to track her progress in applying to and fulfilling all the

application requirements for each of the schools—even offering up a "Requirements Tracker" worksheet. But that's not all! The Common App also has other features that'll allow your student to research colleges across the nation, including an application center with a chat option, tutorials, and links to college websites.

And there's even a little something just for you. The application's website has a section for parents with tips on how to help your teen with applying for college (plus some information on how to pay for college).

▶ **BUT WHERE'S THE FINANCIAL AID APPLICATION?**

Your student will need to apply for financial aid separately, either by completing the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** or the **Texas Application for Student Financial Aid (TASFA)**. The FAFSA can be completed starting October 1 of the senior year in high school. And the TASFA is to be filled out by Texas residents who aren't eligible for federal financial aid.



OTHER COLLEGE APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Colleges typically require students to submit additional information to help in their admission decisions. The most common requirements are your student's **ACT/SAT** scores and **high school transcript**. Some colleges also may require **essay(s)**, **letters of recommendation**, **interviews**, and/or **portfolios**. Get the full scoop on these other requirements...

COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS: ACT/SAT

The ACT and SAT are two different college entrance exams that measure how ready your student is for college and his potential for performing well in his college classes. The American College Test (ACT) is offered by ACT, Inc. and the SAT is offered by The College Board.

Most colleges accept either test, so your student should decide which one he feels he'll do best on. Taking both tests or taking practice tests to determine which he prefers and performs better on is a smart way to shoot for the strongest scores possible.

Your teen can take the ACT/SAT as early as freshman year, but the ideal time to take it is junior year. Then he can retake it if needed, but preferably no later than November of his senior year. He can find all the must-know test information and register to take the ACT at www.act.org and the SAT at www.collegeboard.org.

Check out TXGU's **ACT/SAT Testing 101** guide for more details on the exams—including differences and similarities between the tests, determining which is best for your student, test registration process, test preparation resources, and how to send scores to colleges.

HIGH SCHOOL TRANSCRIPTS

The colleges also require your child to submit high school transcripts as part of their applications. Those transcripts will help college officials evaluate your student's academic performance and the strength of his academic curriculum.

Although your student hasn't actually graduated from high school yet, he'll need to submit official transcripts when he's applying to college. After high school graduation, official final school transcripts will need to be sent to the college he ultimately decides to attend. Often these can be submitted electronically! (But if he's applying to a college right in your hometown, he's allowed to hand-deliver the official transcripts in a sealed envelope.) His GEAR UP advisor or school counselor can help your teen with submitting the required transcripts.

ESSAYS

Colleges may ask your student to submit an essay as part of the application process. This is usually done through whichever online application form the college uses (like ApplyTexas or Common App). The essay may be an answer to a specific question and/or a personal statement. Sometimes colleges may even want several essays or an essay and a personal statement. It's crucial that your student clearly understands the question(s) being asked or what he's supposed to write about.

The essay/personal statement may be the most important writing sample in your teen's educational career so far, because it'll showcase his writing skills and offer him the opportunity to "come alive" to the college as he shares thoughts that aren't found anywhere else. So, no phoning this one in! Definitely encourage your student to take the writing of his essay/personal statement seriously and to enlist the help of his teachers in proofreading and editing his writing.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

If letters of recommendation are requested, the college may specify who should write the recommendation on behalf of your teen (think an English teacher or a math teacher). And some colleges may actually have their own recommendation form that'll need to be submitted instead of a letter.

Usually colleges require that recommendations be completed by your student's teachers or counselors. Sometimes they may also ask for a recommendation from someone who knows your teen outside of school, like a mentor, coach, or minister.

Your child should consider the following to help her decide which teacher to request a recommendation from:

- » Did the teacher teach your student in a core subject (English, math, science, history)?
- » Does this teacher know your student outside the classroom?
- » Did your student do well or improve her grades dramatically in the teacher's class?
- » Will the teacher commit to doing the recommendation before the deadline?

Your student should provide the selected teacher/mentor with a copy of her resumé or brag sheet to help with the writing of the recommendation. She should also explain to the teacher/mentor the process for submitting the recommendation. (Some colleges require that the recommendation be submitted online or by using a specific form on the college's website.)

INTERVIEWS

Some of the highly selective colleges may ask your teen to do an interview with a college representative or alumnus (former student). This interview may be in person or via some type of online tool (like Skype). The college will provide all the must-know details beforehand. Your student should enlist her GEAR UP advisor, counselor, or teachers to help her prepare for the interview.

PORTFOLIOS

Some colleges may want your child to submit a portfolio with samples of her creative work, especially if she plans to major in filmmaking, graphic design, digital media, or gaming. It's a perfect opportunity to show off! The college will provide your student with all the specific requirements for the portfolio.

COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

Even after using this guide, you shouldn't feel that you have to be the "college expert" who knows all the answers. Instead, remember that your main job is to motivate and encourage your student. Be his or her #1 cheerleader!

Here are some specific ways you can support your teen with college applications:

- » Help your student stay organized with all the college application forms, requirements, and deadlines.
 - » Check on your student's progress for completing and submitting the application forms and required items.
 - » Encourage your student to explore all possibilities for different colleges.
 - » Let your student lead, but stay involved.
 - » Remind your student that you, the GEAR UP advisors, and the school counselors are all there to help every step of the way.
-