Frequently Asked Questions about the College Application Process. Class of 2022

College Applications, Letters of Recommendation & Financial Aid

- **Application Fee Waivers**: You **MUST check with each college** to see what they require. Common waivers:
  - NACAC waiver
  - College Board Waiver  [https://tinyurl.com/y4zpfegs](https://tinyurl.com/y4zpfegs)

- **Apply Texas Application**

  **How should I apply to college in Texas?** Students can apply to colleges in Texas beginning Aug. 1st. You do this on the ApplyTexas application. [HERE](https://tinyurl.com/y4zpfegs) is a free resource that you can find answers to questions about the Apply Texas application by using the using CTRL – F function on your computer.

  **Do colleges on Apply Texas require letters of recommendation or a school report from my counselor?** It depends. The ApplyTexas online app has 2 year, 4 year, and public and private colleges to apply for. Most colleges don’t require these, but some of the private colleges do. Check the college website in the admissions page, to make sure you have all required materials turned in on time.

  **If a college is on ApplyTexas, Common Application, or they have their own application, which one should I use to apply?** That is up to you, but I would research this for all the colleges you plan to apply to and pick the one that will make your life easier. You just need to make sure that you let us know:
  - how you applied to each school in your Naviance account
  - when you add the college to your application list
  - when you request your transcript

  The option to select for any of the Texas Public colleges you apply to on ApplyTexas, in Naviance is “direct to the institution”.

- **Common Application**

  **What is the senior class size?** The senior class (2022) total is (544) students.

  **Should I list my class rank?** Common App asks about class rank under the Grades portion of the Education section. By default, your class rank will not be reported on your transcript sent to Common App schools.

  **Which GPA should I list?**
  - The only GPA we report on your transcript is the **weighted GPA (the one listed in your Naviance account, not the one on your report card each 6 weeks)**.
  - Select the GPA scale. Choose ‘4.0’ on a weighted scale. This may not, initially, make sense, but the theoretical maximum GPA is 4.8 on a 4.0 scale, reflecting the number of required un-weighted courses as well as 1 additional grade point for pre-AP, AP, and advanced courses. All courses are included in the cumulative GPA.

  **Are there any senior year courses I shouldn’t list?**
  - Common App allows you to list up to ten senior year courses.
• Do not include an off-period if you have one.
• If you have more than ten courses, which is possible because of semester courses, prioritize your list.
• Your core classes should be listed first followed by electives.
• Credit value for a year course is 1.0; semester courses should be listed as 0.5.
• If the college application requires you to transcribe your high school transcript (like Texas A&M), then you can request a pdf copy from your counselor via email.

The Essay
• Your senior English class will actually have this as one of your first assignments.
• Most 4-year college applications require an essay. Here is some good advice for writing your college essay.
• Remember: topics may vary from year to year, and even sometimes college to college.
• Take your time. At this point in your high school career, it is the one piece that is 100% in your control.

New for some colleges. The additional essay regarding COVID-19. Here are some tips to consider if you are asked to answer this question on the Common application.

Which counselor should I list on the Common Application, and how can I find their contact information?
• List your school counselor or Austin High College counselor.
• Remember to also follow up with them in person to make sure they know you will need a school report and letter of rec from them.
• You MUST fill out the Austin High School Counselor Recommendation Request google form to get a written letter of recommendation.

How do I request a Counselor or teacher Letter of Rec? Click on the name of the counselor you are asking and fill out the form completely & follow up with them via email as well.

1. Click on the link, fill out the form completely
2. Follow up with your Counselor by email when form is completed

A copy of the student brag sheet for teachers is HERE

What does it mean to 'waive' or 'do not waive' access to my recommendation letters?
You will see this on the Common App FERPA Release & Authorization section (under Assign Recommenders in the My Colleges tab) and perhaps some application forms. Waiving access to your recommendations means you will never, in the future, be able to see them. Colleges prefer that you choose this option because they consider those letters to be the more truthful assessment of you and your abilities and hence, they are given more weight in the admissions decision. If you choose, however, not to waive your access, you can see your recommendation in the future, but ONLY at the school at which you decide to enroll (after you are enrolled). Consider this: by that time, you've already been accepted...so really, what's the point?

Requesting transcripts for Common Application colleges:
• Do this in Naviance by making sure they are listed in your college tab correctly, and by filling out the counselor google form above.
• For Common App colleges:
  o a school report, counselor evaluation (recommendation), and school profile accompany the transcript to each college. The counselor that the students requests a letter or school report from will be sending these along with the transcript to common application colleges.
The registrars can only send the transcript right away to colleges that are not Common Application colleges, because they don't require the additional materials to be sent.

How do I average Pass/Fail on Common App with Dual Credit courses?
Use the first semester grade. The explanation will be reflected on our school profile.

What is a CBO?
In the Education section of Common App, there is a question about community-based organizations (CBO) or programs that have provided you with free assistance in your application process. Examples include Breakthrough Austin, Educational Talent Search, Questbridge, and Con Mi Madre. If you have worked with one of these programs or any of the ones listed, answer accordingly.

Common App asks me if I wish to self-report standardized test scores. Should I?
- Though you may need to submit an official SAT and/or ACT scores via collegeboard.org or actstudent.org after you are accepted and intend to go to one university, you have options.
- If a college allows you to self report your test scores, report your scores ONLY if you are satisfied with them, and are not applying to a college that is test optional. Remember, TEST OPTIONAL is really test optional, and you should not feel pressure to submit scores that are not representative of you.
- This section also allows you to report scores for your SAT Subject tests (if applicable) and AP scores you are most proud of. We recommend only listing AP scores of 3, 4 or 5, but it is not required.

What about SUBJECT TESTS?

The Activities section allows me to list only ten activities, clubs, internships, etc., but I have more. What should I do?
There is an Additional Information option in the Writing section where you can list anything that you couldn’t include in the Activities section or if you need to elaborate on any piece of your application.

What is Austin High’s school code?
The code (referred to as the CEEB or ETS code) is 440-320. You'll need to list this code on just about every college application and when you’re signing up to take SAT, SAT Subject tests, or ACT.

How many colleges should I apply to?
A majority of Austin High students apply to 4-6 colleges. If you research a good financial fit, academic fit, and other criteria that are important to you, you should not need to apply to more colleges. Each college has a net price calculator, make sure you understand your cost before you decide to apply. Typically, the more colleges you apply to, the more stress (and expense) is involved. My suggestion to those students applying to more than the recommended amount, would be to plan, organize, and prioritize your process accordingly. Be aware of all of your deadlines and create those checkpoints along the way. You want every application you send to be the strongest representation of you as possible.

I see that the colleges I'm applying to will visit Austin High this fall, but I've already been on their campus and have heard the admissions presentation. Do I still need to attend the info session?
Yes, even if it's just to pop in and say hello to the admissions counselor (many will be virtual in 2021-2022) More likely than not, the person visiting our campus is the first reviewer of your application. They could be very influential in your admissions decision. Introduce yourself, express your strong interest, get their business card, and follow up with a thank you email. Demonstrated interest is important for some schools, and a small gesture could go a long way, especially now without campus visits.
I heard Austin High no longer has to report class rank to colleges. What does that mean for me?
In accordance with the AISD Board of Trustees’ ruling, AHS is no longer required to report class rank on transcripts sent to colleges and universities. The primary exception to this, of course, is reporting class rank for students in the top ten percent of their class for admission to Texas public universities.

What other College applications might I be using to apply to college?
Austin Community College is actually on the ApplyTexas application, but many dual credit students have already completed an online ACC application on their website. If you plan to go directly to ACC after high school, for a year or two, you can also complete the online ACC application [HERE](#). Another application used is the Coalition Application.

**Recommendation Letters**

How and when do I ask for Teacher/Counselor Recommendations?
Before adding a teacher or counselor recommendation request in Naviance (located in the college tab under colleges I’m applying to), you should follow up to your Naviance request in person to verify that they will write the recommendation on your behalf. You don’t need to ask teachers and your counselor until early in the fall semester of your senior year. Be sure to ask at least a month in advance of your first application deadline.

How many recommendation letters do I need?
The more selective colleges and universities (Common Application member schools) typically require two to three letters of recommendation as part of the application process. These come from:
- High School counselor or college counselor
- Two classroom teachers (typically one Math or Science and one English or Social Studies)—teachers from core academic subjects in the junior year are preferred.
- Letters from mentors or members of the community are usually permitted (check with your specific colleges), but these are considered supplementary letters and are sent in addition to (not in lieu of) your counselor and teacher recommendations. Same thing goes for letters from fine arts elective teachers.

Note: when you ask a teacher or a counselor to write your recommendation, they will write one letter and send it to all of your schools. You do not need to ask 5-6 teachers to write for different schools.

I’m only applying to public institutions in Texas. Do I need a recommendation letter?
Texas public institutions, e.g. UT, Texas A&M, etc., do NOT require recommendation letters, but these letters, in some cases, can help strengthen your application file. Be aware that some schools, like Texas A&M University, will only read two recommendation letters. Also, some Honors programs, like UT Business Honors or Natural Sciences Honors, do require a teacher recommendation. In order for a recommender to send letters to Texas A&M or UT Austin, you must submit your application on applytexas.org, and then set up your account in UT or A&M portals, and there is a spot to put the email address of the person you are requesting a letter from. They will receive an email to upload the letter.

Once my teachers and counselor have agreed to write my letter, what do I need to give them?
Please read the welcome message on Naviance.

In the fall of your senior year, the recommendation request option will be available in Naviance. At that time, you will be given instructions to add your teachers and counselors in the system so they, in turn, may send documents on your behalf electronically via Naviance.

How much time should I give to my recommendation writers?
Please give your teacher, counselor, or college counselor a minimum of 2 – 3 working weeks (not calendar weeks) before the deadline to complete their part of your application. This is especially true for December 1 deadlines (Thanksgiving holidays fall before this due date) and January 1 deadlines (winter holiday break falls before this due date).

**What are you looking for exactly in my brag sheet responses?**
Students—this shouldn’t be cause for stress. Think about it as good practice for your college application essays. We’re especially looking for things that won’t already be presented in your application. We want to provide a new, interesting glimpse of you as a student and individual. Parents—this is your chance to brag, brag, brag since most students tend to be pretty modest in their responses. We love the brag sheets, especially parent brag sheets. Give us lots of examples and anecdotes; they make your letters come to life!

**Financial Aid**

**What does the FAFSA stand for?**
Free Application for Federal Student Aid—note the word “free”. Never pay to complete the FAFSA. Stay away from sites like fafsa.com that charge you to complete the application…this is a scam. After all, what’s not ‘free’ about ‘free’ application? The official FAFSA site is: fafsa.gov. Use only this site to complete the FAFSA.

**When do students apply for financial aid?**
Students apply for financial aid during their senior year. The FAFSA is available October 1st of the senior year. CSS/PROFILE is typically available October 1st of the senior year as well – early decision and select early action schools may require this by November 15.

**How will I know if I qualify for aid?**
You can do this estimator before you actually apply for aid. [HERE](http://collegeforalltexas.com)

**What’s the difference between the FAFSA and the CSS/PROFILE?**
The FAFSA is the federal application a family completes to determine eligibility for need-based aid, i.e. grants, loans, and work-study. The CSS/PROFILE, required only by a select group of schools, determines a family’s eligibility for need-based institutional (grant) money provided by the college itself. The CSS/PROFILE is a much more comprehensive document asking more detailed information than the FAFSA. ([FAFSA is free, the PROFILE is not](http://collegeforalltexas.com) unless you qualify based on income). The initial set-up and first school application costs $25; each application after that is $16 for the CSS/PROFILE. One more thing: the FAFSA only asks for the custodial parent information; the CSS/PROFILE usually asks for both parents regardless of which parent the student lives with.

**I’m a non-citizen, can I apply for financial aid?**
Undocumented students are not eligible for Federal Aid, but if planning to attend a college in Texas, you may complete the Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA), which may qualify you for state-funded grants (free money) like the TEXAS Grant at public universities or the Tuition Equalization Grant (TEG) at private universities. As a Texas resident, you are also eligible to pay in-state tuition costs if you have resided in the state at least 3 years prior to high school graduation. The TASFA is a paper application. For a copy or go to this website: [http://collegeforalltexas.com](http://collegeforalltexas.com). There are also a number of scholarships which don’t require citizenship to apply, usually listed in the scholarship list on Naviance. For a list of 4 year colleges that meet 100% of financial need, you can search [HERE](http://collegeforalltexas.com).
How do I know which application my school requires or accepts?
All schools accept the FAFSA if you are applying for need-based aid. A list of the schools requesting the CSS/PROFILE is available on the College Board website: https://profileonline.collegeboard.com
If a school requests the CSS/PROFILE, they almost always want you to submit the FAFSA as well.

We got our EFC from the FAFSA. What does this mean?
When you submit the FAFSA, an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) is calculated. Your family's taxed and untaxed income, assets, and benefits (such as unemployment or Social Security) are all considered in the formula. Also considered are your family size and the number of family members who will attend college during the year. Schools use the EFC to determine your federal student aid eligibility and financial aid award. The general rule is that the closer the number is to zero, the more need-based aid a student will receive.

**Note:** Your EFC is **not** the amount of money your family will have to pay for college **nor** is it the amount of federal student aid you will receive. It is a number used by your school to calculate the amount of federal student aid you are eligible to receive.

We make too much money to qualify for need-based financial aid. Do we still have to fill out the FAFSA?
We recommend you do! There are scholarships that often require it to be on file with the school. It is never a bad idea to fill out a FAFSA. If you don’t apply, the only aid available will be merit-based scholarships, and perhaps a parent loan. The state of Texas is requiring all seniors to fill out a FAFSA, TASFA, or a waiver for graduation. [HERE](#) is the information.

What happens once I apply for financial aid as a senior?
To receive a financial aid award, a student must first be accepted to the college. And even then, most students won’t receive their aid letters until sometime in Feb-April, unless applying for early decision and select early action programs. If applying early decision (which is a binding decision to one school), the student will receive their tentative financial aid award at the same time they receive an acceptance letter.

I’m thinking of applying early decision, what does my financial aid timeline look like?
If applying early decision, you are usually required to submit your financial aid application (CSS/PROFILE or comparable school form) by November 15. If accepted, you will receive the financial aid award at the same time you are notified of your acceptance (mid-December). If the financial aid works for your family, you’re essentially done once you accept the award and pay your enrollment deposit. Since early decision is a binding agreement, you do not have the option of applying to other schools and comparing financial aid awards. I will end by saying Early Decision is a risk if you need to weigh all financial aid offers from other schools, and this is a determining factor in your decision to attend!