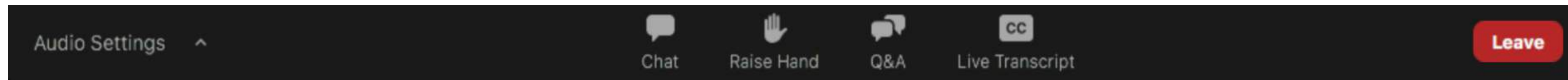


# College Admissions & MEFA Pathway



# How to Participate



The *Audio Settings* allow you to control the volume levels

Use the *Raise Hand* feature if you need to get the presenter's attention

Use the *Live Transcript* feature if you want to see closed captions

Click *Leave* to exit the webinar

The *Chat* feature is disabled. To communicate with the host, please use the *Q&A* section

Have a question during the webinar? Type it in the *Q&A* section

# About MEFA

State authority created by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1982, helping families plan, save, and pay for college.





# About MEFA Pathway

FREE college and career planning tool

Resources for students include:

- Skills, values, & interests assessments
- Career exploration
- College search
- Financial aid and scholarship information
- Personalized digital portfolio

Resources for counselors include:

- Work-based learning tools for schools to post employment-related opportunities and track student skill growth
- Single sign-on with Google or Clever
- Integration with Common App & Parchment

**MEFA** | pathway™



Visit [mefapathway.org](https://mefapathway.org) to get started

# Webinar Topics

- Current Trends
- Your College List
- Campus Visits
- The Application Process
- Financial Aid
- Free Resources



# Trends in College Admissions

- Students applying to a greater number of schools
- Demonstrated interest a factor
- Social media
  - *A 2023 Kaplan study\* found that 67% of admissions officers “believe that checking out applicants’ social media posts to learn more about them is “fair game” to help them make decisions about who gets in.”*
- Cost a bigger factor
- More ways to interact with colleges virtually
- More test-optional schools
- More applications at test-optional schools, resulting in more selectivity
- Longer waitlists

\*<https://kaplan.com/about/press-media/kaplan-survey-college-admissions-officers-applicant-social-media>

# Encourage Students to Stay Organized!

Using a system can help keep track of applications and deadlines, such as MEFA's College Application Manager:

[mefa.org/college-application-manager](https://mefa.org/college-application-manager)

## College Application Manager

As you explore schools and build your college list, keep track of your details here. Remember that deadlines are critical when applying to college and requesting financial aid, so set yourself reminders to ensure you submit all applications on time. If you're applying to more than ten schools, make a copy of this chart.

School Name	Admissions Deadline*	Send SAT, ACT, or Neither	Required Financial Aid	Financial Aid Deadline*	Notes
1. Example University	November 1st	SAT	FAFSA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CSS Profile <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>	February 1st	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>High school visit: Oct 1st</li><li>Strong nursing program</li><li>4-hour drive away</li></ul>
2.			FAFSA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CSS Profile <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>		
3.			FAFSA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CSS Profile <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>		
4.			FAFSA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CSS Profile <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>		



# Researching Colleges

College Navigator: [CollegeNavigator.gov](https://CollegeNavigator.gov)

College search with admissions, academic, & cost info

College Scorecard: [CollegeScorecard.ed.gov](https://CollegeScorecard.ed.gov)

College info including average net price, student debt, grad rate, & alumni salary

Big Future: [bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search](https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search)

College search with info on academics, applying, & paying

MEFA Pathway: [mefapathway.org](https://mefapathway.org)

College search and matching tool based on preferences

**SEARCH FOR COLLEGES**

**Location:**  
Where do you want to be?  
Considering attending college somewhere entirely new to you? Or do you like being a short car or bus ride from home? Explore options and think about how location will impact your college experience.  
Select the regions where you'd like to attend college: (Select as many as you wish)

Midwest Northeast Southwest Southeast West

**My College List**

Your college list represents schools that you have found to be a match for you based on your interests and career goals. From here you can add more colleges using the College Search tool. And you can keep track of your favorites by adding them to your Digital Portfolio.

You have **14** Colleges on your list [ADD MORE COLLEGES](#)

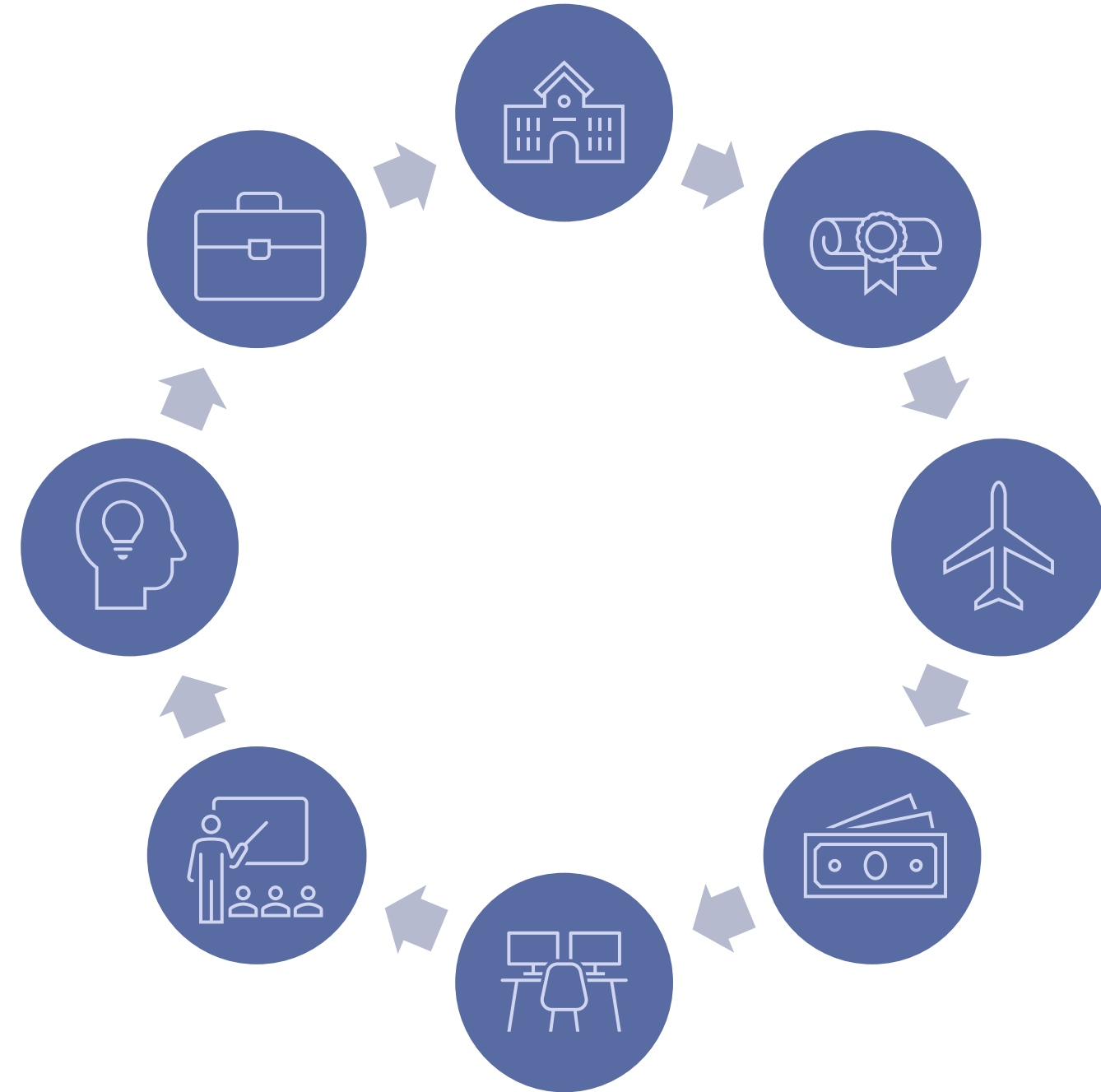
College Name	City	State	Added By	Remove	Add to Favorites
Bridgewater State University	Bridgewater	MA	Student	x	♥
University of Vermont	Burlington	VT	Student	x	♥
Curry College	Milton	MA	Student	x	♥
Brandeis University	Waltham	MA	Student	x	♥
Wentworth Institute of Technology	Boston	MA	Student	x	♥
Northeastern University	Boston	MA	Student	x	♥
Florida Gulf Coast University	Fort Myers	FL	Student	x	♥
Framingham State University	Framingham	MA	Student	x	♥
Central Washington University	Ellensburg	WA	Student	x	♥
Bay Path University	Longmeadow	MA	Student	x	♥
Lasell College	Newton	MA	Student	x	♥
Hampshire College	Amherst	MA	Student	x	♥
University of Massachusetts Lowell	Lowell	MA	Student	x	♥
Fitchburg State University	Fitchburg	MA	Student	x	♥

Show: 15 30 50



# College Factors to Consider

- Institution size & location
- Academic fit
- Intended major
- Learning style
- Campus culture
- Activities
- Study abroad programs
- Career & internship services
- Affordability



# Informal & Formal Campus Visits

## Informal Visits

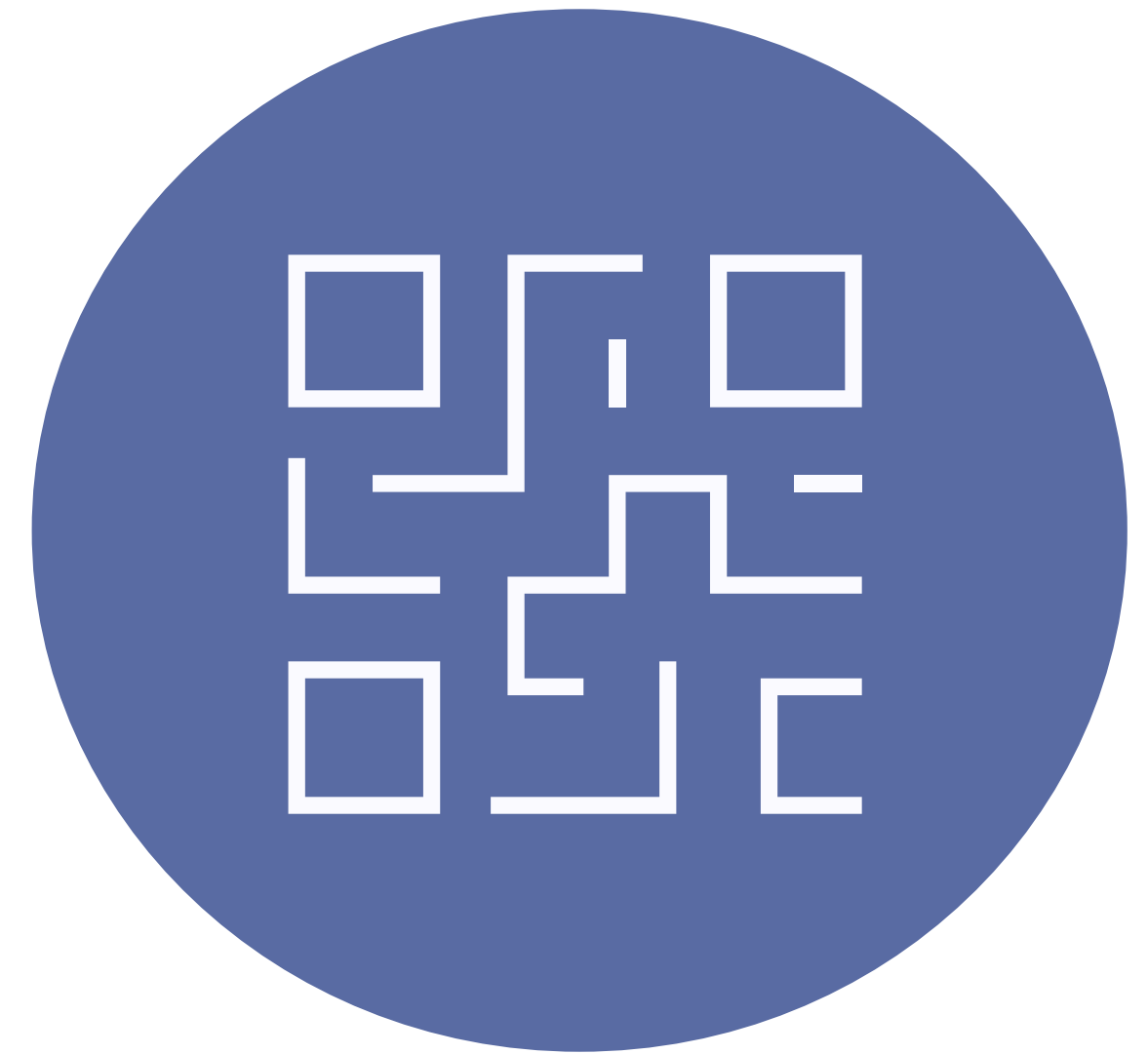
- Size
- Setting
- Culture

## Formal Visits

- Academics
- Activities
- Housing
- Food
- Q&A

# College Fair Tips

- Sign up
- Check out the college list beforehand
- Have a plan of attack before you start
- Take advantage of information sessions
- Schedule 1-on-1 meetings with colleges if available
- Check [nacacfairs.org](https://nacacfairs.org) & [neacac.org](https://neacac.org) for upcoming events



# Assess Prospects for Admission

Develop a final list with colleges of each type:

- Likely
- Possible
- Reach



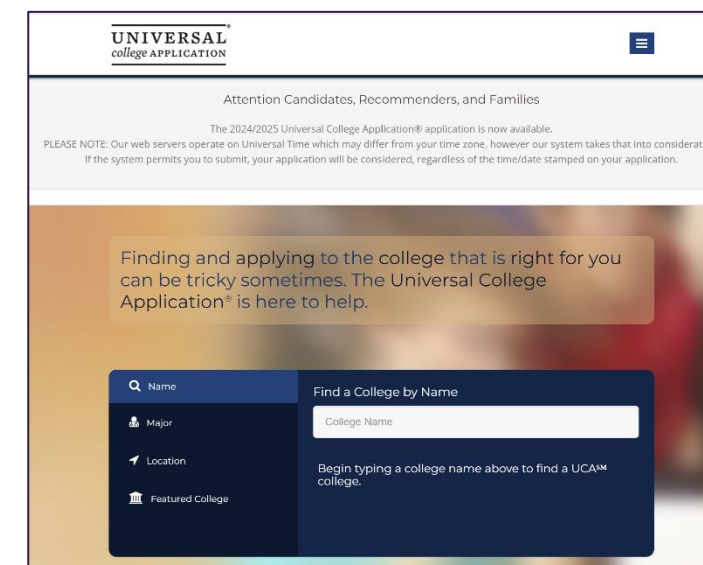
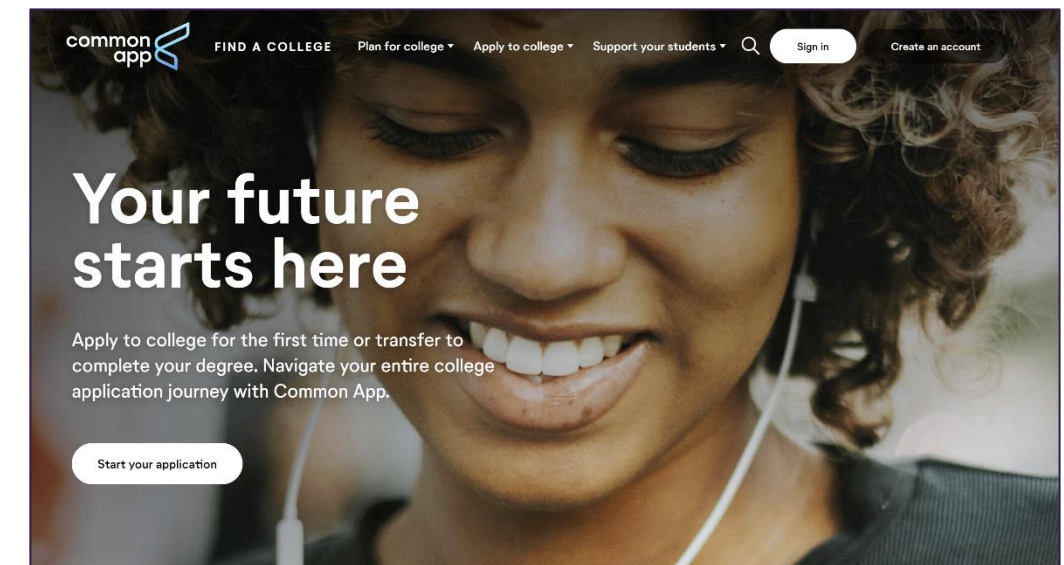


# College Application Types

- Regular Decision: Usually an early Jan deadline
- Early Action: Deadlines in Nov & Dec, non-binding agreement
- Early Decision: Deadlines in Nov & Dec, binding agreement
- Rolling Admission: Decisions on a rolling basis, Nov-May
- Open Admission: Admits most students for most programs anytime

# College Application Forms

- Common App: [CommonApp.org](https://CommonApp.org)
- Universal College App: [UniversalCollegeApp.com](https://UniversalCollegeApp.com)
- Coalition App: [CoalitionForCollegeAccess.org](https://CoalitionForCollegeAccess.org)
- College website application
- Paper application



# College Application Components

- Application requirements may vary at each college.
- Applications may include:
  - Application form
  - High school transcript
  - Standardized test scores
  - Letters of recommendation
  - Activity list or resume
  - Personal essay
  - Interview
  - Audition
  - Portfolio





# Academic Readiness

- Rigor
- Good grades vs. challenging classes
- Improvement over time
- Exceeding minimum requirements
- Relevance to college plans
- Sliding scale for MA public colleges & universities





# Standardized Tests

## PSAT

- Offers practice and assessment
- Register at [collegereadiness.collegeboard.org](https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org)

## SAT

- Measures college readiness
- Offers free test prep online
- Register at [collegereadiness.collegeboard.org](https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org)

## ACT

- Measures college readiness
- Offers free test prep online
- Register at [act.org](https://act.org)

## AP Exam

- Shows subject knowledge
- Register at [apstudents.collegeboard.org](https://apstudents.collegeboard.org)

[Fairtest.org](https://fairtest.org) provides a list of over 2,000 test-optional schools

# Activity List & Resume

Extracurricular activities

Showcase what you do and the depth of the activity

Include family responsibilities and employment

Highlight the impact on your community

The screenshot displays the 'ACTIVITIES' section of a resume-building tool. The interface includes a navigation bar with tabs for PERSONAL INFO, ACTIVITIES, HONORS & AWARDS, SKILLS & STRENGTHS, and EMPLOYMENT. The main content area shows a 'What's Next?' message and an 'ADD NEW' button. Below this, there are two activity entries: 'Swimming & Diving' under the 'Sports' category and 'Band - Concert' under the 'Arts/Music' category. To the right, a resume preview for Jennifer Bento-Pinyoun is shown, including her name, address, objective, employment history (Tree Department and Cashier/Bag), and a list of activities (Swimming & Diving, Band - Concert, and Special Olympics).

Students can use MEFA Pathway's *My Resume* tool to create a resume whenever needed

# Essays

## Tips for Students

- Your application essay says a lot about you
- Share something meaningful and personal
- Start writing early
- Try different topics and approaches
- Plagiarism is taken very seriously
- Leave time for careful proof-reading



# Common App Essay Prompts for Fall 2026 Admission

- Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
- Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
- Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
- Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
- Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
- Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.



# Letters of Recommendation

Adults who know students well can offer a helpful perspective on their strengths

- High school guidelines
- Best people to ask
- Timeline of when best to request





# Interviews

- A face-to-face conversation lets colleges see the person behind the numbers
- Only offered at a small number of schools
- Two types: Informational and Evaluative

## Tips for Students

- Be prepared to answer open-ended questions
- Know your reasons for applying to the college
- Ask thoughtful questions
- Cover the basics
- Relax and be yourself



# The Admissions Decision

Most colleges send decisions over email or post to their online portal

Deposit by deadline (usually May 1st) to secure a spot at a school

<b>Admitted</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student is accepted</li><li>• Student may also be accepted to begin at a later semester</li></ul>
<b>Deferred</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student is not accepted Early Action/Decision but will be considered in the regular applicant pool</li></ul>
<b>Denied</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student is not accepted</li></ul>
<b>Waitlisted</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student is not yet accepted and may not get accepted off the waitlist</li></ul>



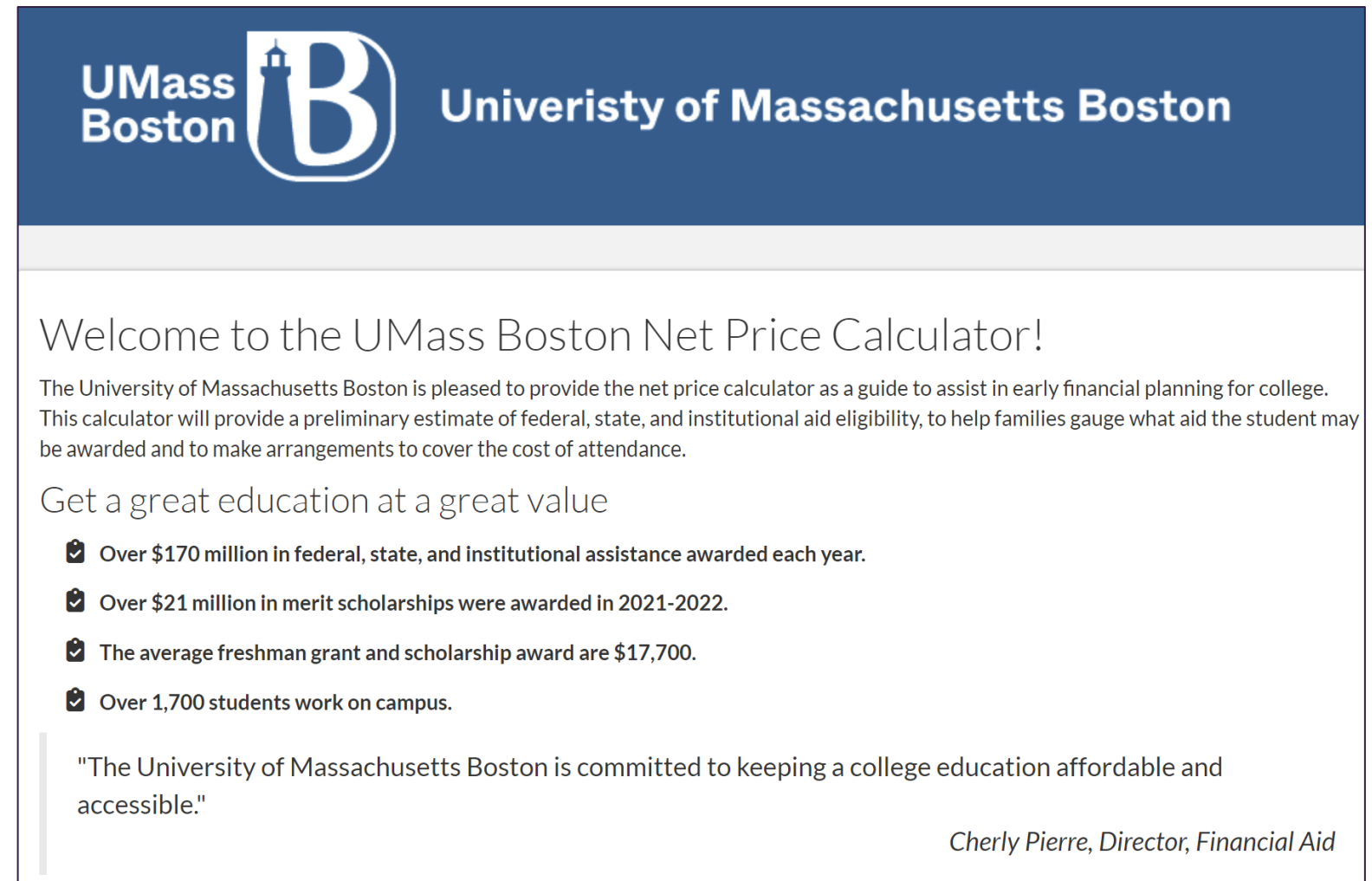
# Understanding College Affordability

- What is the Cost of Attendance?
- What financial aid applications are required and when?
- Need-based aid vs. merit-based aid: potentially different deadlines
- Start looking for private scholarships now




# Net Price Calculators

- Online tool found on each college's website
- Asks questions about family finances & student academics
- Provides personal, estimated net college price
- Displays federal & institutional financial aid
- Merit-based aid may also be calculated



The screenshot shows the top of the UMass Boston Net Price Calculator page. It features a dark blue header with the UMass Boston logo and the text "UMass Boston" and "University of Massachusetts Boston". Below the header, the page is white with a light blue border. The main content includes a welcome message, a brief description of the calculator's purpose, a list of four bullet points highlighting financial aid statistics, and a quote from the Director of Financial Aid.

**UMass Boston**  **University of Massachusetts Boston**

Welcome to the UMass Boston Net Price Calculator!

The University of Massachusetts Boston is pleased to provide the net price calculator as a guide to assist in early financial planning for college. This calculator will provide a preliminary estimate of federal, state, and institutional aid eligibility, to help families gauge what aid the student may be awarded and to make arrangements to cover the cost of attendance.

Get a great education at a great value

- ✔ Over \$170 million in federal, state, and institutional assistance awarded each year.
- ✔ Over \$21 million in merit scholarships were awarded in 2021-2022.
- ✔ The average freshman grant and scholarship award are \$17,700.
- ✔ Over 1,700 students work on campus.

"The University of Massachusetts Boston is committed to keeping a college education affordable and accessible."

*Cherly Pierre, Director, Financial Aid*

# Applying for Financial Aid

## Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®):

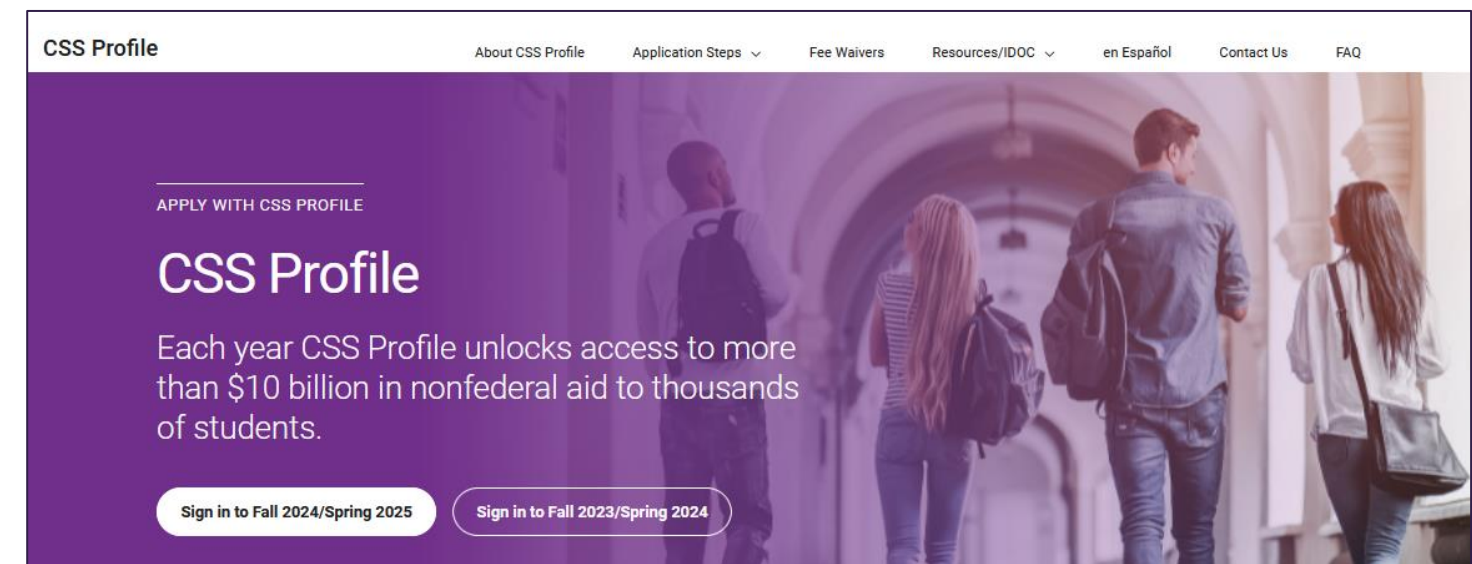
- Required by every college and university
- 2026-27 FAFSA will be available on Oct 1, 2025
- Will ask about 2024 income

## CSS Profile™:

- Required by ~200 colleges and scholarship agencies
- 2026-27 Profile will be available Oct 1, 2025
- Will ask about 2024 income

## College-specific financial aid applications

- Posted on each college's financial aid website





# Paying for College in MA: You Have Options

## **MassTransfer**

- Makes transfer from community college to a 4-year MA public college more affordable
- Benefits include guaranteed credit transfer, tuition credit, & freeze on tuition

## **MassEducate**

- Covers tuition and fee costs for all community college students in MA

## **Tuition Break**

- Reduction on out-of-state tuition costs at New England colleges for certain program

## **MA Tuition Equity Law**

- Allows undocumented students to receive MA state financial aid & in-state tuition rates

# Search for Scholarships with MEFA Pathway

- Search for scholarships based on specific criteria
  - Type of award
  - Area of study
  - State of residence
  - State where studying
  - Ethnicity
  - Type of school
  - Religion
- Students can build a scholarship list in MEFA Pathway to keep track of each scholarship’s status, award amount, and deadline

14 scholarships found SAVE SEARCH

Scholarship X Current Deadline - Yes X Nursing X Four-year College X Current HS Student X Full-time X Clear all X

Show: 15 30 50

**Back to School Nursing Scholarship Program** SAVE

AMOUNT	AVAILABLE	RENEWABLE	DEADLINE
\$2,500	1	No	Continuous

**Canadian Nurses Foundation Scholarships** SAVE

AMOUNT	AVAILABLE	RENEWABLE	DEADLINE
\$1,500	50	No	February 22

**Cynthia E. Morgan Memorial Scholarship Fund, Inc.** SAVE

AMOUNT	AVAILABLE	RENEWABLE	DEADLINE
\$1,000	1	No	February 25

You have 9 Scholarships on your list ADD MORE SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarship	Deadline	Status	Award	Remove
\$1,000 Creative Video Challenge College Scholarship	2019-03-31	Interested	1000	x
AvaCare Medical Scholarship	2019-12-15	Interested	1000	x
\$2,000 No Essay Scholarship	2019-12-31	None	2000	x
\$3,000 USA University Student Scholarship	Continuous	None	3000	x
\$500 Because College is Expensive Scholarship	Continuous	None	500	x

# Staying on Track Through Senior Year

## Spring/Summer Junior Year

- Research Colleges
- Visit campuses and college fairs
- Ask teachers for letters of recommendation
- Take the SAT/ACT
- Start writing the college essay

## Fall Senior Year

- Retake the SAT/ACT
- Secure letters of recommendation
- Finalize the college essay(s)
- Attend MEFA's *Financial Aid 101* webinar
- Complete all admissions applications
- Submit the FAFSA
- Submit the CSS Profile if required

## Winter Senior Year

- Submit admissions applications
- Apply for private scholarships
- Send in mid-year grade reports

## Spring Senior Year

- Receive admissions and financial aid offers
- Attend MEFA's *Financial Aid Offers & the College Bill* webinar
- Attend college open house programs
- Choose your college by May 1<sup>st</sup>

**View an extended timeline at: [mefa.org/college-admissions-and-financial-aid-timeline](https://mefa.org/college-admissions-and-financial-aid-timeline)**



# Connect with MEFA on Social Media



# Thank You!

## Questions?



**(800) 449-MEFA (6332)**



**[collegeplanning@mefa.org](mailto:collegeplanning@mefa.org)**