

YOUR COLLEGE CONNECTION



The Roadmap to Admissions Success

April 2026

Juniors—

Tour colleges.

Prepare for AP Exams.
SAT registration- April 17th
for the May 2nd test.

Seniors—

Final college decisions
should arrive by the
beginning of April.

Compare financial aid
packages and consider
college funding options.

Thank those who wrote
letters of recommendation.

May 2026

May 1st—

Common reply deadline for
college enrollment.

Notify colleges that you will
not attend.

May 8th—

ACT registration deadline for
June 14th test.

May 22nd—

SAT registration deadline for
June 6th test.

May 4th-15th—

AP and IB Exams.

Making an Impact Through Community Service

In a time when college admissions can feel like a competition, it's easy to think every activity needs to "look good" on your applications. Community service often falls into that trap, reduced to logging hours or checking a requirement. The truth is, most colleges don't *require* community service. The true value of service is the impact on your community and on yourself.

During adolescence, your ability to understand other people's perspectives is growing, along with your desire to find a place where you feel valued and connected. It's one of the most vital times to begin looking outside of yourself and contributing to others. As you move from childhood into adulthood, you're not just building a résumé; you're figuring out who you are and how you want to show up in the world. [Research](#) shows that helping others plays a direct role in your development. The parts of your brain involved in social connection are maturing, and you're more sensitive to the positive feelings that come from doing something meaningful. The psychology-based research on this is often connected to the concept of "mattering": the feeling of being valued and having value to add, which is a fundamental human need, essential for well-being.

The most meaningful service starts with genuine interest. A student who loves art might bring creativity into a children's hospital. Someone involved in a youth group might organize a project like mentoring younger students. One student refurbished donated computers for foster youth.

Another created a reading program at a shelter. Try out community service not because it looks impressive, but because it matters to you.

If you're not sure where to start, think about your involvement through three simple lenses: initiative, impact, and insight. Initiative means you took action, whether starting something new or stepping into a larger role. Impact is whether your efforts helped others in a meaningful way. Insight is what you gained and how the experience shaped your perspective and confidence.

Real service begins with awareness. What brings you joy? What genuinely interests you? Once you identify that, use what you're good at to help meet that need. A strong writer might help someone tell their story. A student who loves animals, sports, or music can find ways to give back through those interests.

There is no "best" type of community service. What matters is that it feels important to you. When you're connected to what you're doing, you're more likely to stay involved, take initiative, and grow from the experience.

A consistent contribution to a meaningful service activity might help admissions officers better understand how you show up in the world and what you value. But more importantly, it helps you develop initiative, create impact, and gain insight. It builds a sense of purpose and direction, something that will carry you far beyond the college process and into whatever comes next.

College Admissions Strategies

Focus on Majors: Crop and Soils Science

Career Paths for Crop and Soils Science Majors

- Sports Turf Manager
- Plant Breeder / Geneticist
- Soil Scientist / Environmental Consultant
- Controlled Environment Agriculture Specialist
- Agricultural Data Scientist
- Seed or Crop Technology Developer
- Golf Course Superintendent
- Food Systems and Sustainability Analyst
- Agronomist
- Soil Conservationist
- Precision Agriculture Specialist
- Plant Pathologist
- Sustainable Agriculture Consultant
- Urban Agriculture Manager
- Crop Production Manager
- Horticultural Scientist



Most students hear the words *crop and soil science* and picture farms and tractors. But the field is far broader and more interesting than many people realize. It connects to professional sports, environmental sustainability, space exploration, and even the foods and drinks people enjoy every day.

Take professional sports. When millions of people watch the World Cup, the focus is on the athletes and the goals scored. Few viewers think about the field itself. Yet the playing surface is the result of decades of research. At [Michigan State University](#), more than 70 years of turfgrass research will help shape the playing surfaces used during the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

In fact, many of the people who manage fields for major stadiums, golf courses, and international sporting events studied turfgrass science in college. Programs like the [Center for Sports Surface Research at Penn State](#) train students who go on to maintain fields used by professional teams.

Students who major in crop and soil science take a mix of biology, chemistry, and environmental science courses. Classes often include topics such as plant physiology, soil fertility, plant genetics, crop production systems, and soil microbiology. Students learn how nutrients move through soil, how plants respond to stress, and how different growing conditions affect crops and turfgrass. Many programs also include hands-on labs, greenhouse experiments, and research farms where students analyze soil samples or study plant growth in real-world conditions.

Students interested in environmental issues may find this field especially appealing. Researchers at the [University of California, Davis](#) developed UC Verde Buffalo Grass, a drought-tolerant turfgrass designed specifically for hot, dry climates.

Crop scientists are also working on one of the biggest challenges facing the planet: how to grow enough food for a growing population while protecting natural resources. Researchers at universities such as [Cornell](#) and [Texas A&M](#) are studying plant genetics to develop crops that can tolerate heat, resist pests, and grow with less water and fertilizer.

The field even reaches beyond Earth. Scientists working with NASA have developed systems that allow vegetables like lettuce to grow on the International Space Station. Universities such as the [University of Arizona](#) are studying how crops could be grown in controlled environments for long-duration space missions. The same research is now being used on Earth to support indoor agriculture and vertical farming.

Students who succeed in this major are often curious about how the natural world works and enjoy applying science to real-world problems. Strong observation skills, comfort working with scientific data, and an interest in environmental systems are helpful. Math is used in the field, usually in statistics or basic data analysis, but students do not need to be advanced mathematicians.

In other words, crop and soil science isn't just about agriculture. It's about understanding how plants grow, how soil functions, and how science can improve the world around us. For students who enjoy biology, environmental science, sustainability, or hands-on science, it can lead to careers that influence everything from sports fields to food systems to the future of farming on Earth and possibly beyond.

College Admissions Strategies

Financial Matters: How to Appeal a Financial Aid Award



The joys of opening offers of admission from colleges are sometimes tempered by the challenges of reading financial aid packages that fall short of your hopes for support. Many families read aid packages and are dismayed to see their Student Aid Index (expected family contribution) number to be more than they had anticipated or budgeted for. If this describes your situation, know that there is one more step you can pursue: an appeal. When you appeal your financial aid package, you are requesting a review of your family's circumstances and inquiring about additional financial support to help you meet the costs of attendance. It is important to keep in mind that while you are focused on funding your individual student's tuition, the Financial Aid Office is tasked with balancing a budget across the thousands of enrolled (and enrolling) students who need financial support. In other words, while they genuinely want to help you, that does not mean that they have the funds to do so.

A financial aid appeal is a formal request asking the college to take another look at your aid package. Financial aid officers have what's called "professional judgment," which allows them to adjust awards when a family's situation has changed or when the original forms didn't capture the full picture. Many families are surprised to learn that adjustments do happen.

Before appealing, take a close look at the award letters from every school your student was accepted to. The number that matters most is the

net price, the total cost of attendance minus any grants and scholarships that don't need to be repaid. Don't count loans or work-study in this calculation, since those aren't free money. Once you know the true out-of-pocket cost at each school, you'll have a much clearer picture of whether an appeal makes sense. For more context on how colleges typically meet financial need, you can explore data at CollegeData.com.

There are a few common situations where an appeal can be successful. If your family's financial situation has changed since you submitted the FAFSA due to job loss, reduced income, unexpected medical expenses, or the loss of a caregiver, the financial aid office may be willing to revisit the award. Be ready to explain what changed and provide supporting documents, such as an employer letter, medical bills, or insurance statements.

Another strong reason to appeal is if your student received a significantly better offer from a comparable school. Colleges are generally more responsive when the competing offer comes from a similar institution — one with comparable selectivity, resources, and financial aid philosophy. For example, a college that meets 100% of demonstrated need may not adjust its offer based on a school that doesn't follow that same model. It's also worth noting that some colleges explicitly state they do not match competing offers. That said, if the schools are truly comparable, sharing a competing award letter can sometimes prompt a second review. If your student's grades or test scores are strong relative to the school's averages, that could also work in your favor.

Start by contacting the financial aid office to ask about their specific appeal process. Some schools have a form; others prefer a written letter. This is one situation where it is entirely appropriate for a parent to take the lead, since

colleges understand that families manage the financial details. It's also helpful to understand what type of aid you're asking to have reconsidered. Need-based aid is determined by the financial aid office using institutional formulas that vary by school. Merit-based aid is typically handled through the admissions office and may offer more flexibility, particularly if your student has received stronger merit offers from comparable institutions. A thoughtful appeal reflects both the student's genuine interest in the school and the family's realistic explanation of what is financially possible.

Keep the tone respectful and the content factual. Address the letter to a specific person in the financial aid office, express gratitude for the admission and the initial offer, and then clearly explain why you're requesting a review. If you know how much additional grant aid would make enrollment possible, it's okay to say so. As Gail Holt, Dean of Financial Aid at Amherst College, puts it: "Be realistic about what you and the college can contribute. Show the college that this is a partnership that you want to be part of, but need just a bit more assistance."

If you're not sure where to start, SwiftStudent is a free online tool that offers sample appeal letters and templates for a wide range of financial situations.

Submit your appeal as soon as possible after receiving the financial aid award and well before the May 1 enrollment deadline. Financial aid budgets are limited, and the later you wait, the fewer funds may be available.

An appeal won't always result in more aid, but sometimes it does. Colleges understand that financial circumstances change and that forms don't always tell the whole story. If your student has their heart set on a school but the cost just doesn't work right now, a respectful, well-prepared appeal is simply asking the college: "Can we make this work together?" You might be surprised by the answer.

Dealing With College Denial

It's college-decision season. You open your email or log into your college portal to check your admissions status. But if the message you opened begins with "We regret to inform you..." it can feel like the air just got sucked out of the room, especially if this was your "first choice" college.

First, take a deep breath. The volume of applications keeps rising. This year, more than 1.2 million students submitted over 7.6 million applications through the Common App, an increase over last year. More applications mean lower admit rates at many schools. Remember that the "no" you received isn't a verdict about you as a person.

What makes it worse? Social media. You scroll and see classmates getting into what everyone calls "better" schools. It's hard not to measure yourself against that. But remember the quote, "*Comparison is the thief of joy.*" The minute you start comparing yourself to others, you can feel defeated. Remember, no one posts their rejections. You are comparing your full story to someone else's curated version. This is also a good reminder to think about what you post and how it might feel to others. Taking a break from social media may be a good idea.

Psychologists who study rejection remind us that we often assume rejection means there's something wrong with us.

But that's simply not how admissions works. Sometimes it's institutional priorities, space in a major, or geography. Whatever their reasons for the denial, it does NOT define your value as a student or as a person.

I want you to consider something else. Ask a few adults in your life this question: "When was the last time someone asked where you went to college?" Most will pause. Because in the real world, people care more about how you show up—your work ethic, your character, your skill set—than the name on your diploma.

As Frank Bruni wrote in his book, *Where You Go is Not Who You Will Be*, "College has no monopoly on the ingredients for professional success or for a life well lived." In other words, no single campus owns success. What matters is what you do once you get there.

Will you raise your hand in class? Go to office hours? Apply for internships? Join clubs? Start something? Build relationships? Those actions shape your future far more than an acceptance letter ever could.

Life has many paths that can lead to success. That's hard to see when you're 17, and everything feels immediate and permanent. But detours often lead somewhere meaningful. Be open to possibilities. The school that said yes to you saw something real in you. Now it's your move.



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