

# THE COLLEGE CONNECTION NEWSLETTER

FOR HIGH SCHOOL JUNIORS AND SENIORS

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## WHAT ARE THE MAJOR DIFFERENCES WITH THE NEW FAFSA?

1. **Delayed Release:** The FAFSA will be accessible "by 12/31". (usually in October).
2. **Get FSA ID** Families can create an account on [studentaid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) now. Both student and one parent needs an account to complete the FAFSA.
3. **Shorter Form:** The new FAFSA is much shorter, with about 30 questions instead of around 100. Some answers will be auto-filled using federal tax data.
4. **Increased Pell Grant Eligibility:** More students will qualify for Pell Grants based on family income and household size.
5. **Student Aid Index (SAI):** The Expected Family Contribution (EFC) is now the SAI.
6. **Simplified Tax Process:** Most students won't need tax forms. A streamlined process imports federal tax info directly from the IRS.

## DEFERRED OR WAITLISTED? HOW TO WRITE A GREAT LETTER OF CONTINUED INTEREST

This is an article for students who pick themselves back up when they fall down. We all fall down. What matters is if we get up again. When it comes to college admissions, here's how to get back on your feet

**Step 1: Emotions are ok** Some basics: You are a human. Humans have emotions. While we led with the "pick yourself up" part, and while you're probably there already if you're reading this, and while the "picking yourself up" part *is* indeed very important, still: you can cry. You can shout. You can sulk. Give yourself permission to have emotions — even if those emotions lead you to waste some time.

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## EARLY DECISION 2 – STILL AN OPTION

Notifications for Early Decision (ED), Restricted Early Decision (RED), and Single Choice Early Action (SCEA) were delivered in December. This year, as in previous years, there will be many more tears than fist-bumps. Here are some of the staggeringly competitive numbers of the ED applicant pool from Princeton Review's Best 389 College & Universities – 2024 edition:

- Brown University – 6,146 applied, 15 percent accepted;
- Columbia University – 6,299 applied, 12 percent accepted;
- Duke University – 4,070 applied, 22 percent accepted;
- Vanderbilt University – 5,044 applied, 18 percent accepted.

Students who were rejected or deferred will find themselves in phase two of their application process.

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## SCHOLARSHIPS

### TRIPLE V SCHOLARSHIP

Have you overcome adversity? Share your story and qualify for a college scholarship.

Applications are open



### JACKIE ROBINSON SCHOLARSHIP

The Jackie Robinson Foundation provides a multi-faceted experience designed to not only address the financial needs of students who aspire to attend college but to guide them through the process of higher education. Apply by January 10th



### NICHE SCHOLARSHIP

Covering the cost of college expenses for four years without writing a single essay? Sounds too good to be true.

It isn't with Niche. We are giving one student \$25,000 to help pay for tuition, living expenses, books, and other educational expenses. Apply by February 29th



### ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICAN SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The APIA Scholarship is our largest scholarship program, open to AANHPI undergraduate students attending any U.S. accredited university or college. Apply by January 9th



### BIG SUN SCHOLARSHIP

The BigSun Organization is proud to be able to help young athletes succeed in their academic pursuits. Deadline June 19, 2024



### COLLEGE APP SCHOLARSHIP

To encourage students to spend more time preparing for the Common App, Scholarship Guidance has created an annual scholarship to reward students.



**FUN FACT: Most majors require at least a one-semester internship and more than one internship is encouraged.**

## SENIOR CHECKLIST

- Attend virtual college meetings
- Keep your grades up.
- Complete the CSS Profile
- File the FAFSA
- Research scholarships.
- Watch those application deadlines
- Check your email and portals

### DILLER TEEN TIKKUN OLAM AWARDS

Every year, the Helen Diller Family Foundation awards up to 15 Jewish teens with \$36,000 each for their leadership efforts to change the world. Apply by January 5th



### HORATIO ALGER ASSOCIATION

Manages 70 of the largest need based scholarship opportunities in the country for high school juniors who have faced or overcome obstacles. Scholarships by state and by career.



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**Step 2: Do things > Write things**

The best way to increase your chances of getting in is to have new and exciting information to share with the school. Those things can include a great final set of grades, so do what you need to do to stay academically focused. In addition, what did you do since submitting your original application that could make your case now even more compelling?

- Is there an activity you've taken more initiative in?
- Is there an interest you've learned more about or dived more deeply into?
- Is there anything you've worked on that could demonstrate any of the 5 traits (ex: drive, intellectual curiosity)?

# Waitlisted vs. Deferred



If you're on the school paper, did you get a big story published? If you love tech, did you work toward a free, meaningful certificate, maybe in coding or marketing? So many things could make for strong "continued interest" fodder. Make sure you take a moment to account for everything you've done (or could still do) since submitting - no matter how small or unusual - as it could be just the thing to mention in your letter.

To write strong updates, bear in mind these rules:

- Focus on the impact you had. (How was the activity different than it would have been had you not been there?)
- Quantify your achievement whenever you can.
- Emphasize new traits, skills, or interests you've gained since submitting your original application.

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## MEET WYATT, YOUR FRIENDLY DIGITAL FAFSA ADVISOR



The education community is gearing up for the Better Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) arrival this December. At Common App, we are committed to providing resources to students that assist them in navigating the financial aid process. We're thrilled to share our partnership with Benefits Data Trust, **introducing Wyatt**—a digital advisor. Students can now text their FAFSA and financial questions, receiving personalized responses to guide them

through the application process. To get ready for the Better FAFSA, the **National College Attainment Network (NCAN)** and the **Federal Student Aid (FSA)** have compiled resources for members and partners.

COLLEGE NEWS

More than half of UC transfer students pay no tuition. Transfer applications are being accepted at all **UC campuses except Berkeley and UCLA** until January 15, 2024.

Inflation for U.S. colleges rose 4 percent in FY2023, the second highest rate since 2008.

**UC Berkeley** commits to transitioning to 50% plant-based dining by 2027 in collaboration with the Humane Society. This commitment aims to positively influence environmental sustainability, animal welfare and public health.

A **California State University** faculty union plans to go on a five-day strike from Jan. 22 to Jan. 26 — the same week most campuses return from winter break — unless its members reach a deal with the system by then.

**Lewis & Clark** is building on a Stanford-led research study to help first-year students process how they think about the transition to college.

Thanks to a \$1.25 million grant from a Lilly Endowment Inc., **Santa Clara University** will help establish the Institute for Parish Renewal. The grant supports highly collaborative ministerial training models that will benefit intercultural parishes across CA

**Chapman University** is recognized by The Wrap for the fourth year in a row as No. 4 in the annual “Top 50 Film Schools” Ranking

JUNIOR CHECKLIST

- **ACT** - Next test date is **February 10th**. You must register by January 5th. It takes 30 minutes to complete registration and you will need a photo.
- **Digital SAT** - Next test date is **March 9th**. You must register by February 23rd.
- **Attend College Fairs**
- **Meet with admission reps**
- **Tour college campuses**

A consortium, co-led by **University of California Irvine** just received federal funding to boost hydrogen infrastructure in CA.

Lillyanne Pham '20 and Jim Labbe '95 from **Reed College** were part of Oregon's first-ever experiment in giving community members direct say over how to spend public dollars.

**Stanford University** scientists are developing affordable sensors that can handle extreme conditions and provide data to inform wetlands conservation.

SCHOLARSHIP FOR DREAMERS

\$4,500 per year for four years for undocumented students with goals to attend college.



If you are interested in attending an **HBCU**, apply in the **Common Black College App**. Pay a one time fee of \$20 to apply to 65 HBCUs.



LIVE MÁS SCHOLARSHIP FROM THE TACO BELL FOUNDATION

\$25,000 scholarship for students 16+, no essay required just record a 2 minute video about your passion. Deadline to apply January 3rd



HSF SCHOLARSHIPS

More than 150 scholarships for Latino students with or without US citizenship.

AARL Foundation

The ARRL Foundation manages more than 100 scholarships established by generous donors ranging from \$500 to \$25,000. Apply by January 10th

## REVOLUTIONIZING COLLEGE APPLICATIONS: THE ROLE OF AI IN THE ADMISSION JOURNEY



The college application process is a pivotal moment in a student's life, filled with excitement, stress, and anticipation. Over the years, technology has played an increasingly significant role in simplifying and enhancing various aspects of our lives, and education is no exception. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a powerful tool, revolutionizing the way students approach the college application process. In this

article, we will explore how platforms like Khan Academy and College Vine are leveraging AI to provide invaluable support to students navigating the intricate journey of college admissions.

- **Khan Academy introduced Khanmigo**, a new experimental artificial intelligence (AI) guide, which a limited number of users will have access to. As a nonprofit educational organization, we see it as our responsibility to explore what AI could mean for the future of education. For learners, Khanmigo aims to mimic one-on-one tutoring experiences by providing tailored support, prompting critical thinking, and suggesting relevant resources. For teachers, we aim to have Khanmigo serve as an assistant that helps with administrative tasks to save time.
- **College Vine** takes a holistic approach to college admissions, guiding students through every step of the process. The platform employs AI to provide personalized advice and support tailored to each student's unique profile, aspirations, and challenges.

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For most other letters of continued interest, you should still write up all the impressive updates you can. You'll also want to **add a mini "why us" essay** - a quick love letter to the school. *Side note:* the "Why Us" essay is all about demonstrating your interest in actually attending (ie: your ability to improve the school's yield numbers).

**Structure for updates with a mini "why us":**

**Your first paragraph** should include:

- A statement that you remain interested in the school. **If it's true:** state that the school is your top choice, and you're excited to enroll if admitted.
- [As in the structure above, some variation on this sentence]: Thank you for taking the time to read my letter of continued interest.

In your **second paragraph**, lead with what's most compelling. If you have great updates, put them first. If you don't really have much to say update-wise, go straight into your mini-love letter.

**If you didn't already submit a formal Why Us essay**, take this opportunity to write a short, informal one.

In a nutshell, it involves writing about your ambitions and interests and showing the specific opportunities at the college that match those interests (ex: courses, research opportunities, professors, etc. ...). The reader should be left thinking you will have a **worse life outcome if you don't go to their school**. Dramatic? Maybe, but getting off the "maybe" list and into the "yes" list is a great time for a little drama.

**Step 3: What is the school asking?** Colleges are very different when it comes to letters of continued interest. It's always a good idea to improve your qualifications (as we described in Step 2 above). But it's a terrible idea to waste time writing an essay the college doesn't want. So make sure you know what's expected.

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Many will examine their lists more closely to reevaluate their thoughts on which schools are “reaches,” “targets,” and “safeties.” There is a relatively new wrinkle in college admissions is an admissions program called Early Decision II (ED II). Traditional ED programs have a November 1 deadline and a December notification. ED II deadlines are typically in January with notification by mid-February. This extra time allows students who were deferred or rejected from their first choice school to apply with a binding decision, and perhaps a boosted opportunity to another college. According to my latest research, 75+ colleges and universities offer ED II. [Here is a complete list.](#)

ED II allows students more time to prepare their strongest application. That may mean rewriting their Common Application essay or refining their supplemental prompts or it may mean another chance to take the standardized tests. ED II also gives students with strong performance in their first semester senior year another quarter or semester of grades to share with colleges. According to Sally Rubenstone, Senior Advisor at College Confidential ([www.collegeconfidential.com](http://www.collegeconfidential.com)) “Applying Early Decision does give students a bit of an admissions-odds boost at most colleges. Admission folks are usually willing to lock in strong-but-not-spectacular candidates whom they know will show up in September.”

Colleges really like Early Decision I and Early Decision II because accepted students are committed to attend, and that increases their yield numbers and the yield number impacts their rankings. Additionally, it helps the admissions office shape the class by allowing them to be pickier with the regular decision applicants. As an example, if a student’s big advantage is that they play the oboe and that was a hole the admissions office filled with an ED I or II applicant, it will be more challenging for that student to be accepted in regular decision. Rubenstone also shares that “there can be some financial disadvantages to applying ED in any round because an affirmative decision will eliminate your chance to compare multiple aid packages. But, on the other hand, if an ED school does not offer reasonable aid then it’s okay to wheedle out of the so-called “binding” commitment.”

## EARLY DECISION II

- ☑ Early decision 2 is binding
- ☑ Students can apply to only a single ED 2 college
- ☑ ED 2 has a later deadline than ED 1
- ☑ Financial aid offers for ED 2 less generous than ED 1



## PROCEED WITH CAUTION: RELYING ON CHATGPT FOR COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ESSAYS

*Internationalcollegecounselors.com*

While using AI-powered tools such as ChatGPT is undeniably convenient and efficient, using it to craft college admissions essays is extremely risky.

From the hundreds of essays we’ve read over the past year, the use of ChatGPT is not hard to spot. Most student essays that utilized ChatGPT felt extremely cold, were well above the student’s writing level, used words and phrases that teens simply would not use, and never captured a student’s character, personality, and unique perspectives.

Here are five specific issues from what we've seen:

1. While ChatGPT can generate a coherent, well-structured essay, the program undermines the authenticity and uniqueness needed to write narrative essays. AI, unless you're a robot, typically fails to capture the voice used by teens who write the essays themselves.
2. AI-generated content doesn't meet the standard for self-reflection and introspection. Crafting an admissions essay isn't only about presenting polished content, but also about articulating personal growth, as well as real passion and aspiration.
3. AI can miss the boat when it comes to contextualizing personal experiences and cultural nuances. This includes communicating a diverse background, experiences, and cultural sensitivities.
4. When writing about a college, a student needs to create a story which matches their aspirations. This means being specific about why they want to attend. An essay about the facts of the particular university is not going to work.
5. The ChatGPT essays have similar word choice, content and formatting. For our scholarship application this year, we received five student essays that were almost exactly the same!

While it may be OK to use AI to check grammar, students must invest time and effort in personalizing and refining their essays.

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**Step 4: Look into your odds (optional)** It's not possible to know your odds of getting accepted off the waitlist. It's never possible, actually.

**Step 5: Use our simple structure to write a great letter**

Before you get into an overly literary mode - dreaming up clever metaphors and such for this essay - make sure you know what the college wants to hear. All of these letters should be straightforwardly written. Moreover, some schools explicitly ask for updates only. MIT is an example of a school like that. In that case, your letter should follow this simple structure:

- Dear [admission officer name who wrote to you with your decision],
- Thank you for allowing me to submit these updates on what I've been doing since applying this fall. [Or words to that effect.]
- [List of **updates**.]
- Thank you again for your consideration.
- [Your name]

**If you did submit a formal Why Us essay**, here are some informal ways to write your love letter to the school.

- They'll be missing out. Think about what the students at the college will miss out on if you don't go there. Talk about what you'll bring to campus life and why you think you'll be a great classmate and contributor.
- Your unique contributions. Another way to get at the same material is to think about what you'll uniquely bring to this campus. What perspective, ideas, or skills do you have that few others do?
- Love letter. If you're contemplating writing yet another essay, you must be in love with this school. Tell them why. Make a list of all the things you've loved about the college and why they resonated with you.

**Connect your updates to your desire to attend that college**, if you can. Show a connection between what you do now and where you want to be in a few months.

