My Future, My Way: How to Go, How to Pay

A Workbook for Students in Middle and Junior High Schools

U.S. Department of Education
Federal Student Aid

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Federal Student Aid

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My Future, My Way: How to Go, How to Pay

Are you thinking about college or a technical or trade school? Start here to learn how to go and pay for your education beyond high school.

Sure, you can wait for your parents or teachers to provide this info, but why wait for others to tell you what's best for **YOUR** future?

Discover your college and financial aid options today!

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When Should You Consider College?

NOW is the time to explore your options for college and financial aid.

College means

- public and private four-year colleges and universities,
- two-year community colleges or junior colleges, and
- vocational or technical schools.

Pretend that you could create the perfect college. What type of school would be just right for you?

Answer the following questions to help you create your dream school.

1. Where is this college located (state, city)?

_____
_____
_____
_____

2. What types of students go there (American, foreign)?

_____
_____
_____
_____

3. What classes would you take (computer, theater)?

_____
_____
_____
_____

4. What type of social activities would be offered (sports, clubs)?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Read on to learn more about your school options. Maybe some of these options match what you want in your dream school!

About Four-year Colleges

Many students attend a four-year college after high school graduation. They earn a degree once they have completed a program of study. A four-year college usually offers a bachelor's degree in the arts (e.g., English, history, drama) or sciences (e.g., biology, computer science, engineering).

About Two-year Colleges

A two-year community college or junior college awards an associate degree once a student has completed a two-year course of study. Some two-year colleges grant certificates to students who have met course requirements and are ready to practice in their career fields.

You can start at a two-year college then transfer to a four-year college if you're concerned about college costs (community or public junior colleges usually cost less than four-year colleges). A two-year college is also a good option if you want to boost your grades before going to a four-year college.

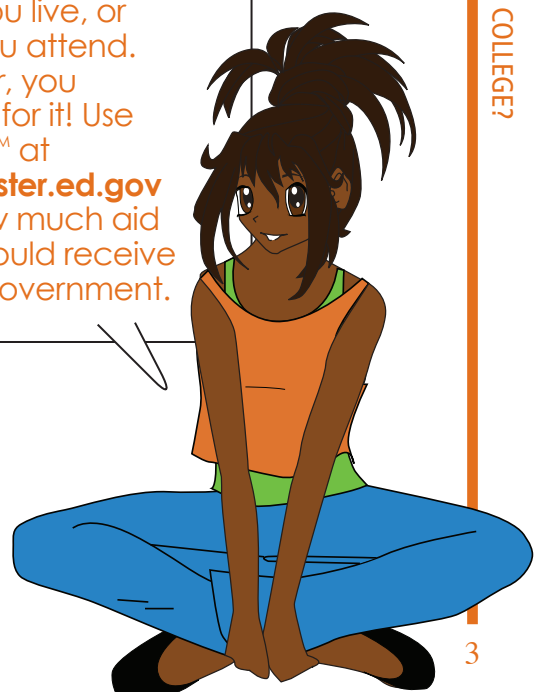
About Vocational or Technical Schools

Vocational or technical schools offer programs that are two years or less. These schools provide students with hands-on experience related to their future career interests. Typically, students receive a certificate for a particular skill or trade upon completion of a program.

Want to learn more about these types of schools?
Visit **www.studentaid.ed.gov/early**; click on **"When Should You Consider College?"**

So, what exactly is financial aid?

Financial aid is money to pay for college, technical, or trade school. This money can come from the U.S. government, the state where you live, or the college you attend. But, *remember*, you have to apply for it! Use *FAFSA4caster*℠ at **www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov** to find out how much aid you possibly could receive from the U.S. government.



Activity Page

Select an answer based on the information you read in "When Should You Consider College?" Answers are on page 32.

1. When should you consider college?

   ❑ now
   ❑ today
   ❑ this minute
   ❑ all of the above

2. Where can you earn a bachelor's degree?

   ❑ junior college
   ❑ four-year college
   ❑ community college
   ❑ vocational or technical school

3. Where can you earn an associate degree?

   ❑ community college
   ❑ four-year college
   ❑ high school
   ❑ vocational or technical school

4. What is financial aid?

   ❑ help with learning finances
   ❑ money for shopping
   ❑ money to help you pay for college
   ❑ money you don't have to apply for

Why Think About College Now?

As a middle-school student, you probably have a lot on your mind: ***Will I get my school project finished on time? What's for dinner? What should I do this weekend? Will Mom or Dad notice that I exceeded my cell phone's daytime minutes this month (yikes!!)?***

But have you seriously thought about college?

Here are some reasons why you should start thinking about college now.

YOU SAY: It's too early to think about college!

WE SAY: The steps you take now will help determine your college options later. Start planning now!

YOU SAY: No one in my family ever went to college.

WE SAY: Be the first! Set a good example for others to follow by meeting people and learning interesting stuff in college.

YOU SAY: I can't afford it!

WE SAY: We at the U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid (and others), can help meet the cost! Almost two-thirds of college students get some type of financial aid.

Other Myths vs. Reality

MYTH:
Only students with good grades go to college.

REALITY:
Good grades and high test scores can definitely help when applying to college. But college admissions staff also take into account your background and school- or community-based activities.

MYTH:
College will be the same as middle or high school.

REALITY:
College is much different from middle or high school. Making new friends, choosing your own schedule, and possibly living away from home are all a part of the college experience.

Still not sure if college is for you? Still think now isn't the time to start thinking about college? Read on!

MYTH:
I need to get a job as soon as I graduate from high school.

REALITY:
Sure, you can get a job with decent pay after your high school graduation. ***Or*** you can invest in your education to have a great career with better pay later!

MYTH:
I can't go to college because I don't know what I want to do with my life.

REALITY:
Most students decide what they want to do during or after college.

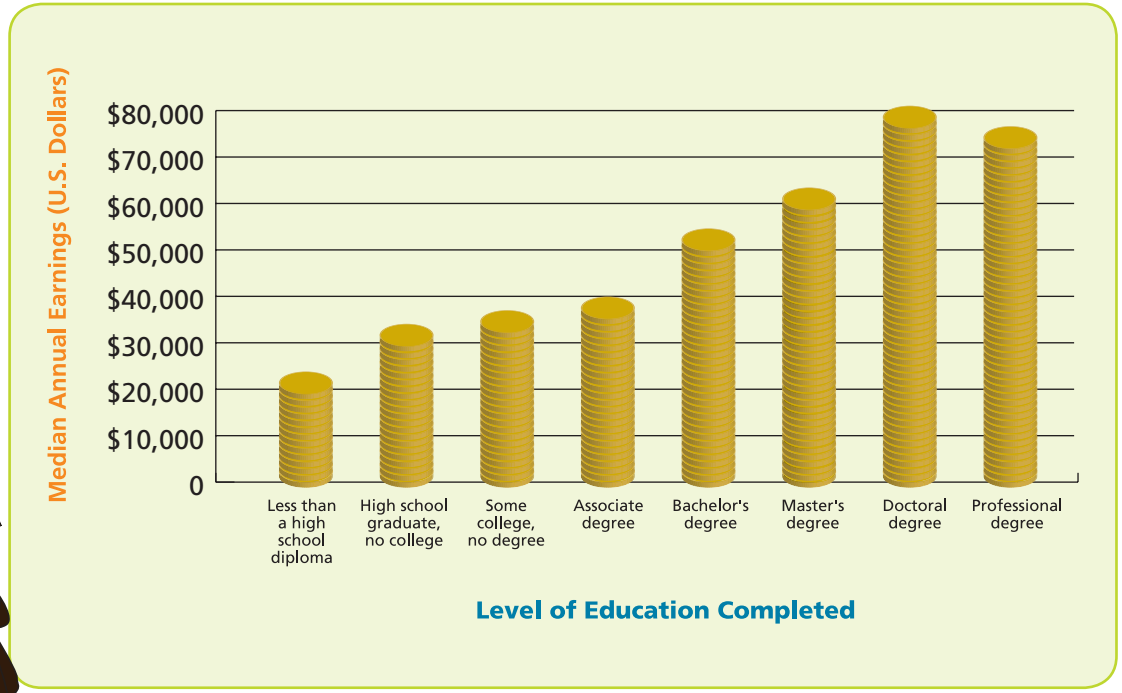
What Can a College Education Do for Me?

A college education will offer you more money, more job opportunities, and more freedom.

More Money

On average, a person who goes to college earns more money than a person who doesn't. Over a lifetime, a college graduate can earn over **$1,000,000** more than a high school graduate!

Earnings in 2007 by Educational Attainment of the Population 25 Years and Over*



*NOTE: The income is based on year-round full-time workers.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008.

Real-life Examples

People with a college education typically earn more money during a shorter span of time.

Buying Groceries

- Terry is a dental assistant (two years of college). Terry generally will earn enough money to buy groceries for a week after working only one day.
- Sam is a high school graduate and works as a salesperson in a department store. To buy the same groceries, it generally takes Sam three days' pay.

Buying a Car

- Jamie is a college graduate and works as an accountant. Based on his salary, Jamie will qualify for a three-year loan to buy a new four-door compact car.
- Chris never went to college and works as an aerobics instructor. Based on his salary, Chris will qualify for a five-year loan to buy the same car.

More Job Opportunities

A major benefit of a college degree is having more jobs to choose from. The table to the right shows just some possibilities available to college graduates.

Is your favorite job on the list?

If not, go ahead and add it, along with any other jobs you find interesting.

Two-year College (Associate degree)	Four-year College (Bachelor's degree)	More than Four Years (Graduate degree)
Bookkeeper	Accountant	Archaeologist
Childcare worker	Computer programmer	Architect
Computer and office equipment repairer	Conservation scientist	Astronaut
Dental hygienist	Engineer	College professor
Firefighter	FBI agent	Dentist
Mechanic	Federal police officer	Doctor
Nurse	Graphic designer	Judge
Paralegal	High school coach	Lawyer
Physical therapist assistant	Insurance agent	Minister, priest, or rabbi
Restaurant manager	Journalist	Pharmacist
Webmaster	Pilot	Principal
Zookeeper	Recreational therapist	Psychologist
	Social worker	Scientist
	Sportscaster/news reporter	Urban planner
	Teacher	Veterinarian
	Writer	

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008.

NOTE: You can also train for these jobs at a four-year college. Why do that? Because more education usually means more earnings!

NOTE: You don't need a two-year degree to be a manager, but managers with a degree may get hired faster and earn more money during their careers.

TWO-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE

Associate degree

- Bookkeeper
- Childcare worker
- Computer and office equipment repairer
- Dental hygienist
- Firefighter
- Mechanic
- Nurse
- Paralegal
- Physical therapist assistant
- Restaurant manager
- Webmaster
- Zookeeper

NOTE: You can also train for these jobs at a four-year college. Why do that? Because more education usually means more earnings!

NOTE: You don't need a two-year degree to be a manager, but managers with a degree may get hired faster and earn more money during their careers.

Restaurant Manager

Dental Hygienist

Zookeeper

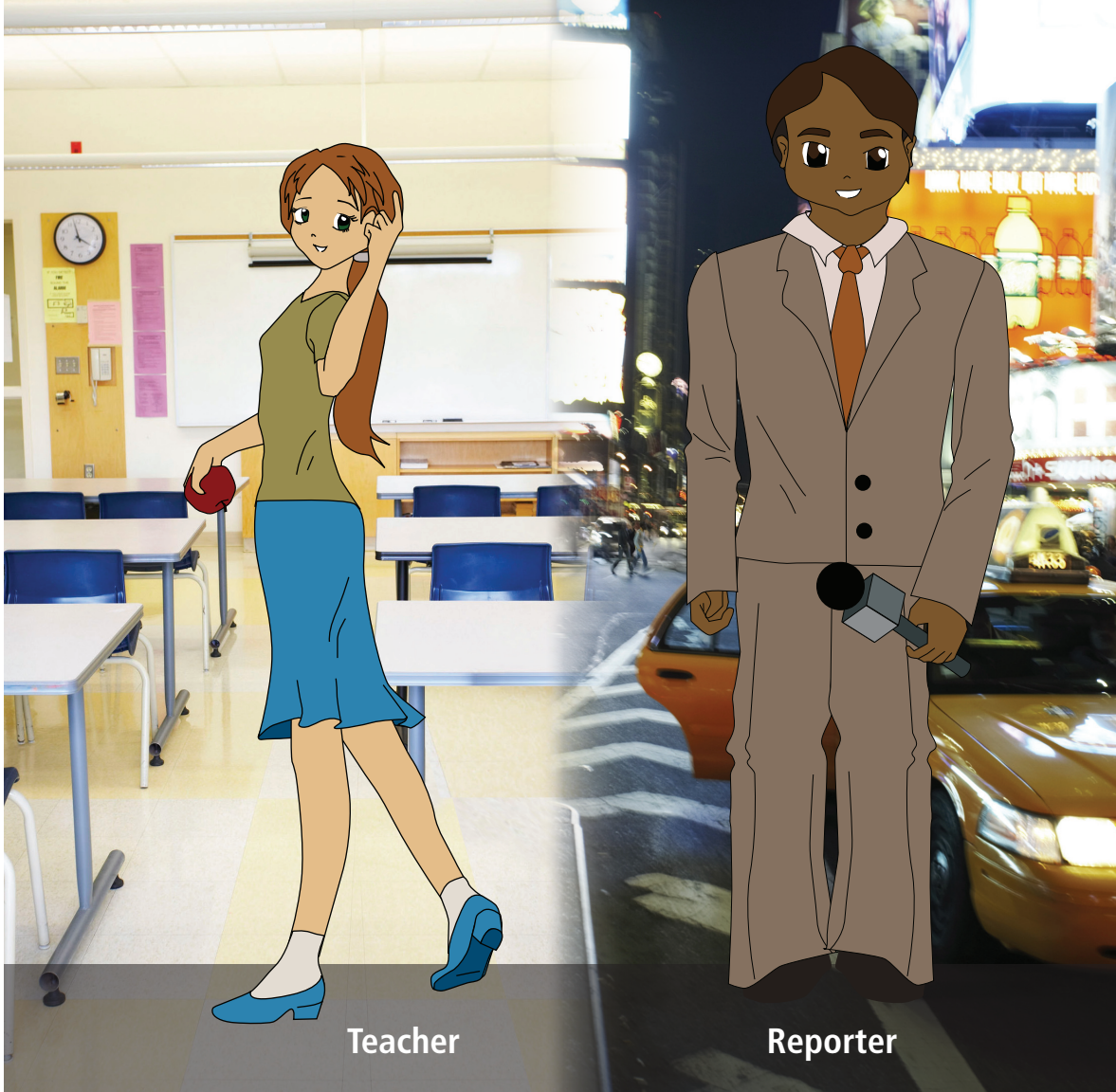
Mechanic

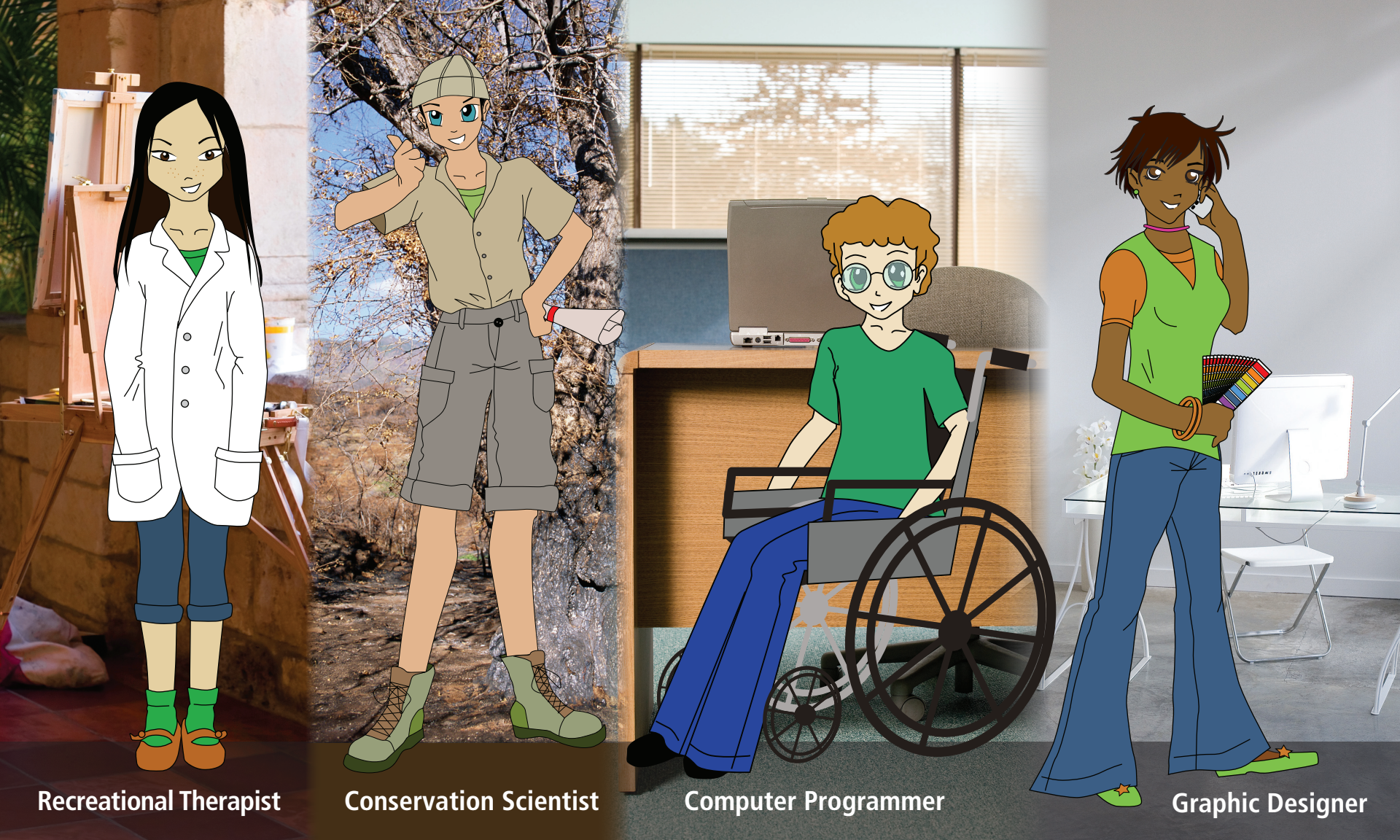
Nurse

FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE

Bachelor's degree

- Accountant
- Computer programmer
- Conservation scientist
- Engineer
- FBI agent
- Federal police officer
- Graphic designer
- High school coach
- Insurance agent
- Journalist
- Pilot
- Recreational therapist
- Social worker
- Sportscaster/news reporter
- Teacher
- Writer



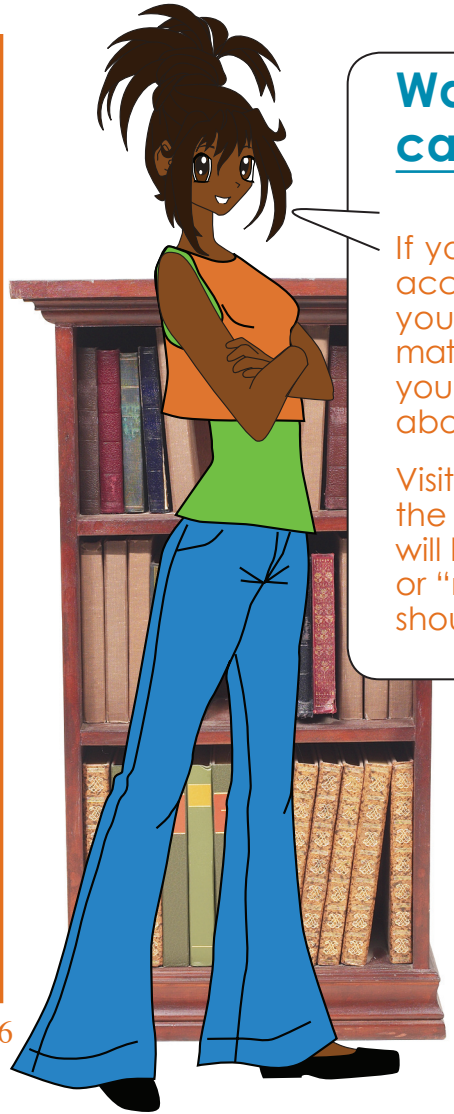

Recreational Therapist
Conservation Scientist
Computer Programmer
Graphic Designer

MORE THAN A FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE

Graduate degree

- Archaeologist
- Architect
- Astronaut
- College professor
- Dentist
- Doctor
- Judge
- Lawyer
- Minister, priest, or rabbi
- Pharmacist
- Principal
- Psychologist
- Scientist
- Urban planner
- Veterinarian

Minister
Veterinarian
Astronaut



Want to learn more about career options?

If you're 13 or older, create a MyFSA account at **www.studentaid.ed.gov** so you can check out ***Career Finder*** and match your interests with careers. If you're younger than 13, talk with your parent about creating an account for you.

Visit **www.bls.gov/k12** to find out whether the job you want is "hot" (meaning there will be plenty of work for you in the future) or "not" (meaning, uh-oh, maybe you should consider another job)!

More Freedom

As a college student, you'll experience freedom as you never have before, by

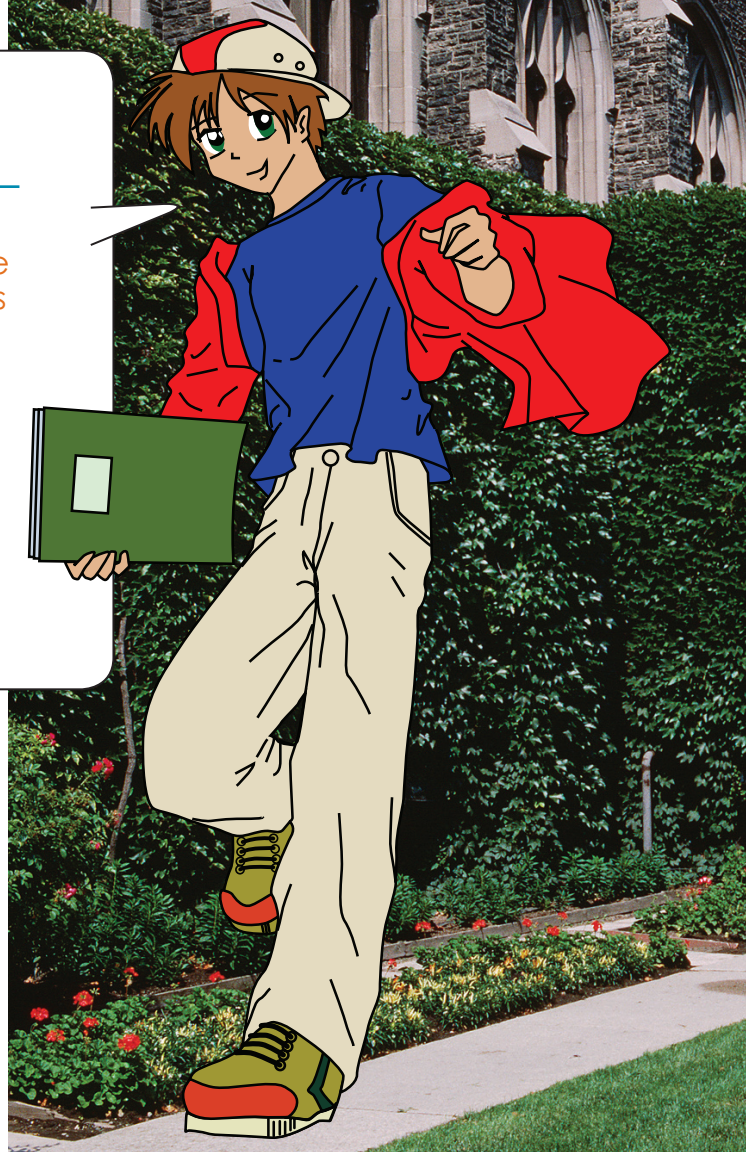
- studying more on your own instead of in the classroom,
- meeting people from all over the country and world,

- studying abroad (it pays to learn a foreign language), and
- choosing your own unique courses, such as, "The Roles of Medicine and Magic in European History," "Music and Your Brain," "Television in American Culture," "Writing for the Theater," or "Computer Graphics."

Want more info about college life?

Search the Internet for college Web sites. Many schools' sites have virtual campus tours. They also have online course catalogs so you can check out their course offerings.

To see the real thing, drop by or call your local library to check whether they have course catalogs from local colleges.



Activity Page

List five careers that interest you, the salary range for each career, and the level of education you will need for each career.

Aren't sure about the salary range or education level? Do a little investigating at **www.bls.gov/k12**.

Charting Your Career

Career	Salary Range	Education Level
Example: Teacher	$34,000–$72,000	Four-year college
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Where Do I Start?

Part of preparing for college is taking the right classes for middle school. Courses such as English, algebra, foreign language, and technology will better prepare you for more challenging courses in high school.

But college preparation is about more than just classes and grades. It's also about becoming a person who can succeed in a competitive environment.

Here's what you can do **NOW** to get ready for college (feel free to add to the checklist!):

6th GRADE

- ❑ Speak with your school counselor or librarian and other adults (your teachers, relatives, and family friends) who have interesting jobs.
- ❑ Develop strong study habits that help you earn good grades and high test scores.
- ❑ Read at least one book every month, just for fun.
- ❑ Participate in class activities.
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____

7th GRADE

- ❑ Research which high schools or special programs will most benefit your interests.
- ❑ Begin taking advanced courses such as Algebra I and a beginning foreign language class. (But, remember, take only the most difficult courses ***you can handle***.)
- ❑ Talk to your counselor or teachers about courses you can take in high school.
- ❑ Get involved in school- or community-based extracurricular activities.
- ❑ Start reading magazine or newspaper articles.
- ❑ Keep a journal to develop good writing skills.
- ❑ Do well on standardized tests.
- ❑ _____

8th GRADE

- ❑ Keep doing your best in school—study hard, earn good grades, and participate in class.
- ❑ Ask your counselor about challenging and interesting courses you can take in high school.
- ❑ Continue to explore different career options.
- ❑ Start saving money now to help pay for college.
- ❑ Continue taking advanced courses such as Algebra II and an intermediate foreign language class.
- ❑ Talk to your older sisters and brothers and other young people who are attending college. If you don't know any college students, ask your counselor to help you contact them.
- ❑ _____

9th GRADE

- ❑ Talk to your school counselor, your parents, and anyone who has an interest in your future about your college and career plans.
- ❑ Take challenging core classes (e.g., English Literature, geometry).
- ❑ Start planning for college by learning how to go and ways to pay.
- ❑ Go to career information events. Ask employers what kind of education they expect their employees to have.
- ❑ Ask your parent(s) to help you learn more about financial aid.
- ❑ Explore opportunities to volunteer in your school or community.
- ❑ _____

Want to find out more steps for college preparation?
Visit **www.studentaid.ed.gov/early**; click on **"Where Do I Start?"**

Who Can Help Me Go to College?

College Support Team

Getting ready for college may seem like a lot to handle, but *you don't have to do it alone*!

Parents, teachers, counselors, coaches, and friendly folks from your community or place of worship are all good people to go to if you have questions. Think of them as your **college support team**.

Any adult with whom you have a connection is a good addition to your college support team. If they don't have the answers themselves, they may know where to look.

Talk to Your Team: Tell Someone You Know That You Want to Go!

Start discussing your plans for college today with your family and with people at school. They will not know you need support and encouragement unless you let them in on your plans. Once everyone knows the plan, you can work together to reach your college goals.

Activity Page

List four people who can serve on your college support team, their relationship to you, and the various roles they can play on the team.

Your College Support Team

Name	Relationship	Role
Example: Patricia	Mom	Will help me research colleges and show me how to save for my education
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

How Will I Pay for College?

College Costs

When it comes to college costs, remember

- Some colleges cost less than other colleges.
- Lots of financial aid is available—there are more opportunities now than ever before!
- You and your family have time to start saving for college.

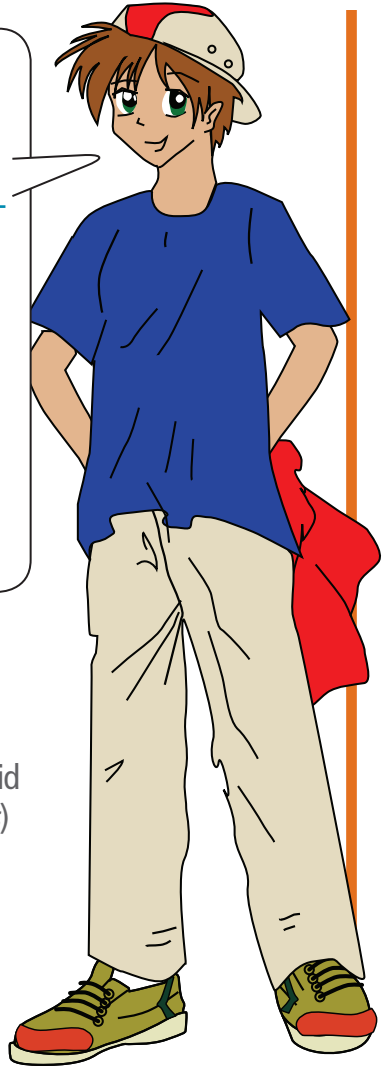
The bottom line is that if you want to go to college and are willing to work at it, you can find the money to pay for it.

While it's very important that your family prepare financially for college (save, save, save!), **don't forget—you don't have to pay for college all by yourself!** The U.S. Department of Education has ***more than $100 billion*** **(yep that's $100,000,000,000—with 11 zeros!)** in financial aid for students who qualify.

Want an idea of how much of that $100 billion you might be eligible for?

No need to wait until your senior year in high school when you can find out now!

Use *FAFSA4caster* at **www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov** to get an estimate (just an informal calculation) of how much financial aid you possibly could receive. Then, learn what types of aid are available.



Types of Aid

There are two basic types of financial aid:

1. "Gift" aid: money that does not have to be paid back (for example, *grants* and *scholarships*)

2. "Self-help" aid: money that you work for or that you will need to pay back later (for example, *work-study* or *loans*)

Definitions:

Grants and *scholarships* are money that does not have to be paid back. To receive grants, you usually have to demonstrate financial need. To receive scholarships, you usually have to demonstrate a talent or skill and have to maintain a certain level of performance (e.g., good grades) to keep receiving it.

Work-study is a job that helps you pay for your education through working.

A *loan* is money that must be paid back, usually with interest. Although you have to repay a loan, you still should consider a ***federal*** student loan as a good way to pay for college.

Financial aid can come from colleges, companies, private scholarship funds, or the state you live in, but a lot of it comes from the U.S. Department of Education. The money that comes from the government is called **federal student aid**.

Federal Student Aid

Most federal student aid is based on **need**. After January 1 of your senior year of high school, you should complete and submit your ***Free Application for Federal Student Aid*** **(FAFSA)** at **www.fafsa.ed.gov**. Based on the info you provide, the FAFSA℠ determines your Expected Family Contribution, or EFC, a number that most colleges, states, and some scholarships use to figure out how much help you need.

Keep in mind that the U.S. Department of Education, colleges, and scholarship providers can only give you aid if you **APPLY** for it. ***You*** need to take the action!

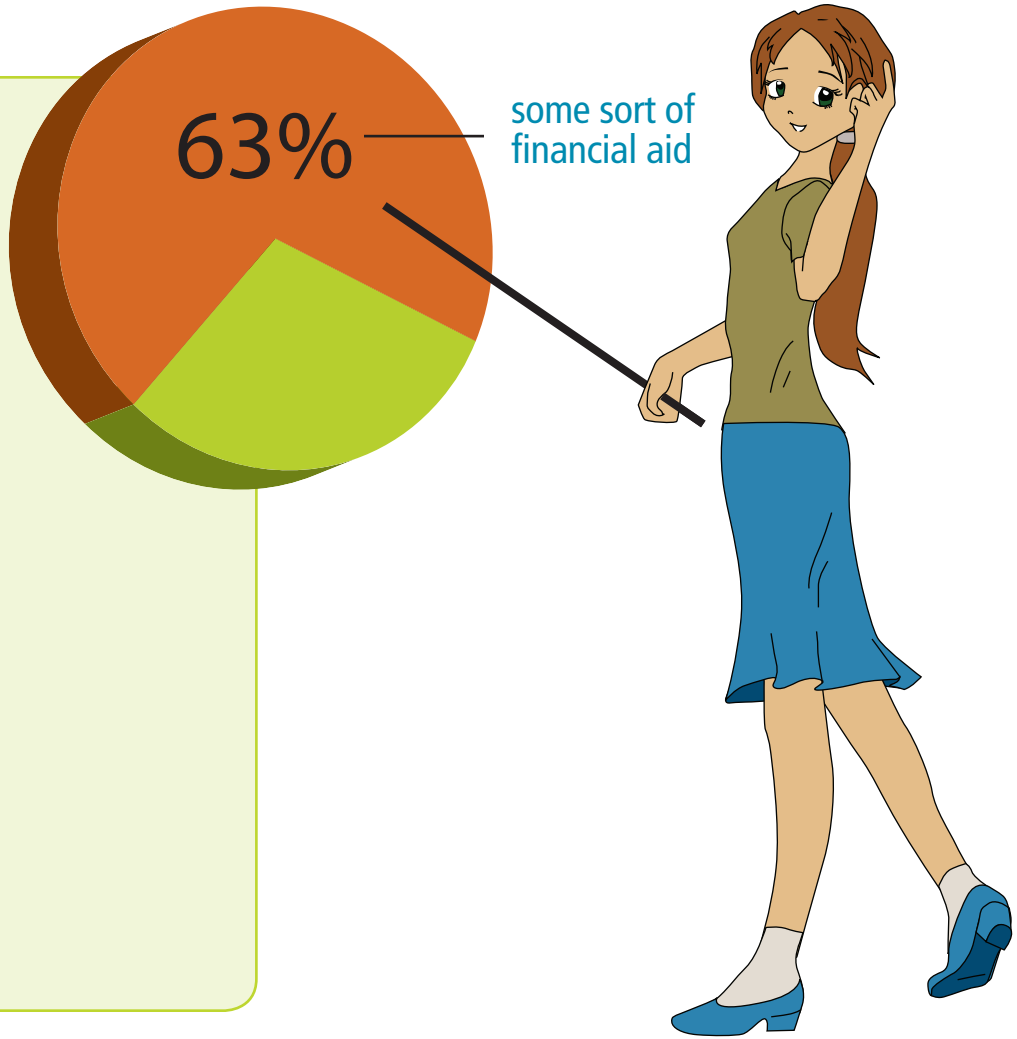
Wonder how other young people used financial aid to fund their education?
Learn more at **www.studentaid.ed.gov/early**; click on **"How Will I Pay for College?"**

Or visit **www.college.gov** and click on **"how to pay."**

Did You Know?

- 63 percent of all college students pursuing bachelors' degrees received some sort of financial aid.
- 52 percent of public college students and 73 percent of private college students received grants.
- 45 percent of public college students and 56 percent of private college students took out educational loans.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2005). 2003–04 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NSPSAS:04) Undergraduate Financial Aid Estimates for 2003–04 by Type of Institution (NCES 2005-163).



More About Scholarships

Scholarships may reduce the cost of college by paying for all or part of your education. Unlike most federal student aid, many scholarships are not "need-based" (i.e., aid awarded to a student on the basis of financial need) and are available for all kinds of students based on

- good grades;
- certain religious, ethnic, or cultural background; or
- athletic, artistic, or creative abilities.

A number of civic groups, foundations, businesses, and community organizations offer scholarships. Some colleges also have special scholarships or fellowships for incoming students. Students who receive scholarships generally have to maintain a certain grade point average or GPA.

There are **tons** of scholarships out there. The most important thing is to find out what your options are. Keep in mind that no scholarship is too small!

If you're 13 or older, create a MyFSA account at **www.studentaid.ed.gov** to use our **Financial Aid and Scholarship Wizard!** If you're younger than 13, talk with your parent about creating an account for you.

Another Way to Pay for College: Serving Our Country

When you serve our country—during or after college—there are opportunities for aid that will cover either some or all of your educational costs:

- **AmeriCorps**—this community-service program provides help with college costs and student loans to members who successfully complete service.
- **U.S. service academies**—the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Army, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Merchant Marine, and U.S. Navy provide free education for students who commit to serve in the military upon completion of their education.
- **Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC)**—this campus-based program offers scholarships in varying sizes to students interested in serving in the military after college.

Activity Page

See how much you remember about financial aid! Unscramble each financial aid term based on its description. See page 32 for the answers.

1. Job that helps you pay for college through working

   u t y s d - k w o r

   _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

2. Financial aid award that you don't have to repay; usually based on need

   n a r g t _ _ _ _ _

3. Form you must complete to be eligible for federal student aid; also determines EFC based on information you provide

   A F S A F _ _ _ _ _

4. Financial aid award that you must pay back, typically with interest

   n o l a _ _ _ _

5. Financial aid award that you don't have to repay; usually based on good grades, talents, or skills

   p i c l o r h a s s h

   _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

6. Number that most colleges, states, and some scholarships use to determine how much help you need to pay for college

   F E C _ _ _

Now What? Next Steps

Take the next steps in learning about education beyond high school and learning how to pay for it!

- Stay in touch with members of your college support team. Routinely discuss with them your college and career plans.
- Visit **www.studentaid.ed.gov/early** for additional information and resources.
- Talk with a college student about his or her college experience. If you don't know anyone in college, ask your teacher or counselor to introduce you to a college student.
- Visit **www.college.gov** to answer the questions, "why go?" "what to do?" and "how to pay?"
- Review the "Five Important Questions About Paying for College" handout included in this workbook with your counselor and get answers to these questions.
- Start saving a portion of your allowance, birthday money, and any other money you receive for college. No matter how much or how little you save, every cent makes a difference in affording your higher education!
- Have fun! As you put into action all of the ideas from this workbook, you'll learn so much—about college, about careers, and even about yourself!

Five Important Questions About Paying for College

Please discuss the following questions related to funding your education beyond high school with your guidance counselor. See page 32 for possible answers you could receive from your counselor.

1. **What scholarships are available in my state or school district?**

2. **How can my grades affect my financial aid opportunities?**

3. **Why should I fill out a FAFSA when I'm a high school senior?**

4. **What else can I do to learn about financial aid opportunities?**

5. **How can I discuss paying for college with my family or college support team?**

Answers

Page 4

1. all of the above
2. four-year college
3. community college
4. money to help you pay for college

Page 28

1. work-study
2. grant
3. FAFSA
4. loan
5. scholarship
6. EFC

Page 31

1. Answers will vary depending on your state or school district.
2. Your grades are important particularly if you plan to receive scholarships. High school students who receive scholarships from the community or colleges generally have earned good grades. Scholarship providers feel more comfortable helping these students pay for college because they have demonstrated that they take school seriously.
3. You should fill out the FAFSA during your senior year to find out whether you qualify to receive federal student aid. Also, colleges, states, and some scholarship providers use your Expected Family Contribution, or EFC (determined by the FAFSA), to figure out how much financial help you need.
4. To learn more about financial aid opportunities, attend college fairs to speak with school representatives, visit your local library to find books on scholarships, and explore student-friendly Web sites that offer college and scholarship searches.
5. Begin your discussion with your parents or college support team by explaining your interest in college and your future career goals. Ask your parents or support team to help you develop ways to start saving for college (e.g., assisting you in finding a summer job and opening a savings account).

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