

College Prep Guide

This guide will have tips on how to prepare and apply for college!



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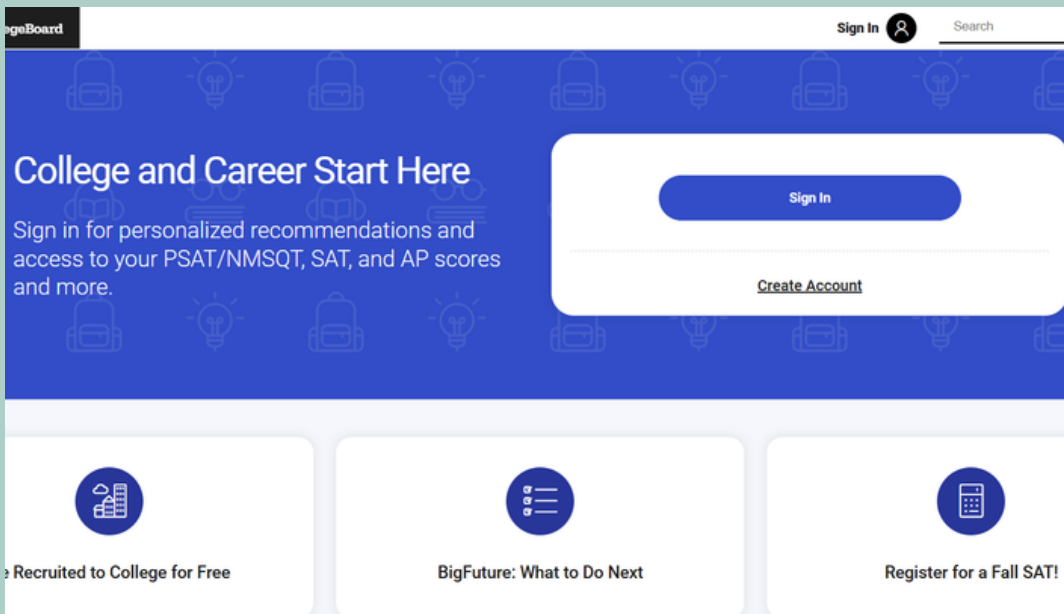
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11th Grade: Beginning the Search for the RIGHT School

Start by thinking about what you want from your future college campus. Look through College Board to explore different schools.

[Visit CollegeBoard.Org](https://collegeboard.org)



- Familiarize yourself with the majors that each campus offers. Are they offering a major you may be interested in?
- Request information and receive brochures and pamphlets from the schools.
- Make a list of deadlines based on schools of interests.

-make a list of at least 4 schools you will apply for

For more information on U.S Campuses visit:

- <http://assist.org>
- <https://www.commonapp.org/>
- <https://www.calstate.edu/apply>
- <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/>



12th Grade: Choosing and Applying to YOUR school

Now that you have researched the schools you will be applying to, begin starting the application processes.

Fall Semester



- Pick 4 people whom you can ask to write you a letter of Recommendation (**college-specific requirements/deadlines may vary**)
Match Support Specialists can write recommendation letters
- Review and revise your college applications and personal statements
 - Have 2-3 people review your personal statement
(see page 5 for a guide to personal statements)
- Request your transcripts be sent to your chosen colleges (talk to your high school counselor/college advisor)
- Send SAT/ACT scores to your chosen colleges (if applicable)
- Submit your applications on time (put a reminder on the calendar)
- Create a professional email
(ex. first&lastname2022@gmail.com)

CONFIRM YOUR LIST OF COLLEGES TO APPLY TO (8-10 SCHOOLS)

- **Safe Schools:** Schools you know you will get into (1-2 schools). You must like and also be willing to attend just in case.
- **Target Schools:** Schools you have a good chance of getting into. You meet the majority of the eligibility requirements or are close to.
- **Reach Schools:** Schools that you think may be more of a challenge to get into. Getting in is not a sure thing, but it's worth taking the risk.



- Create a master list or calendar that includes application, testing, and financial aid requirements and deadlines for each college
- Ask your counselor/advisor about the fee waivers for the CSU and UC applications.
- Ask for letters of recommendation for your college applications. Give each person an outline of your academic record & extracurricular activities.
- Find out if the schools on your list require you to take the SAT/ACT. Some schools, like CSUs, no longer require it. If it is required, register and take the test(s).

MAKE A NOTE OF ALL DEADLINES TO APPLY

- Request your transcripts be sent to your chosen colleges (talk to your high school counselor/college advisor)
- Send SAT/ACT scores to your chosen colleges
- Submit your applications on time
- Apply to Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at UCs and CSUs.
 - **UCs:** Indicate you are interested when you complete the online application
 - **CSUs:** Complete the EOP portion in the application

Research FASFA or Dream Act on College Board Begin searching for scholarship opportunities

Fastweb.com

Unigo.com

Hsf.org (Hispanic Scholarship Fund)

Uncf.org (United Negro College Fund)

Continue to do well academically. Do not catch senioritis!



Spring Semester



Continue to search for scholarships

Tips for Writing a Scholarship Essay

- Carefully read instructions.
- Make sure you understand the question before you start writing.
- Be sure to answer the question
- Brainstorm. Think about what you are going to write. Outline and organize around a thesis
- Write the first draft
- Proofread and make corrections
- Have 2-3 people review your essay
- Revise
- Repeat steps as needed



Remember...

- Check your emails periodically.
- Create usernames for the schools you've applied to for any important updates.
- Submit any additional documents your schools may require.

THINGS TO REVIEW

Review your acceptance letters.

Look at your financial aid package. How much aid is each school offering you? How much will you have to pay? (If the school is out of state, think about the additional expenses to come back home).



Ask yourself:

"Do I really picture myself on this campus or did you apply just to see if I would get in?"

Visit the campus if you have not done so or reach out to current students and ask questions about their current experience.

Check out these resources for online college tours:

<https://campustours.com/>

<https://www.youvisit.com/collegesearch/>

<https://www.campusreel.org/>

The #1 Destination for Interactive Maps and Virtual Tours

CampusTours builds video tours, photorealistic interactive campus maps, mobile walking tours and custom data-driven multimedia applications for education, non-profit and government clients worldwide.

College Search

More than 30 Million students have used CampusTours to find virtual campus tours and maps.

School Name
e.g. University of Arizona

Search by State/Province
Alabama

Search by Country
USA

[Advanced Search](#)



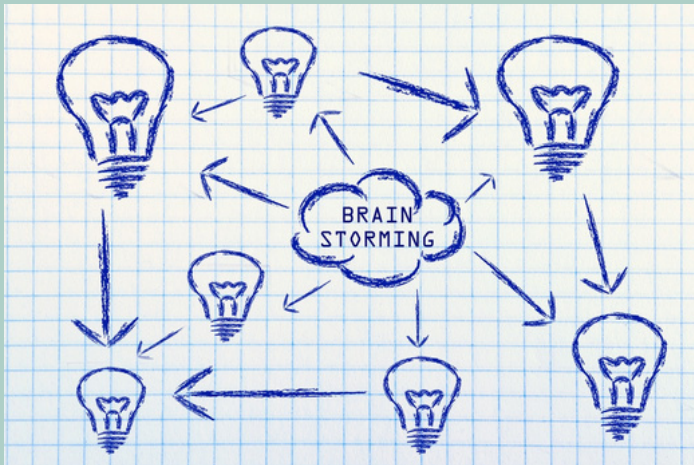
- Confirm admissions by the deadline. This is called the **Statement of Intent to Register (SIR)**
- Let other schools know you won't be attending
- Make sure your financial aid is going to the school you will attend



**Most importantly celebrate
your GRADUATION!**

Writing Your Personal Statement

The personal statement is your chance to explain to college admission readers why you are a good fit for their school.



Brain Storm:

The essay is where you become an individual and where you can share your personality, your goals, and experiences.

- Use this space to talk about your inspirations, and explain any difficulties you have experienced.
- In addition, you can explain any opportunities or obstacles that have affected your academic record.

Do's & Dont's

Dont's:

- **Don't** just list events and experiences
- **Don't** just tell a sob story
- **Don't** exceed the word limit
- **Don't** try to impress with vocabulary you don't know

Do's :

- Answer the prompt (prompts may vary)
- Share about you:
 - your experiences and how they have impacted you
 - your dreams and aspirations
 - Highlight your strengths
- Revise and edit!
- Check for grammar.

Common Application

Essay Prompts:

Choose 1 prompt; 650 words max. Below is the full set of Common App essay prompts for 2022-2023

- 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.
- **Visit:** <https://www.commonapp.org/apply/essay-prompts> for more information.



Show Growth Get Personal & DEMONSTRATE

CRAFT. [HTTPS://WWW.COLLEGEESAYGUY.COM/BLOG/W
HAT-DO-COLLEGES-LOOK-FOR-ESSAY](https://www.collegeessayguy.com/blog/what-do-colleges-look-for-essay)



- Gather all the prompts from your schools
- Start by Brain Storming your goals, qualities, difficulties, and inspirations (try it with a friend) Ask yourself why are you going to College?
- Make sure you are fully answering prompts



Financial Aid 101

Financial aid is **FREE** money. Financial aid will help pay for college so it is very important that you take some time to complete and submit these applications.

There are a few ways to get financial aid, all college campuses will require you to fill out one of the following applications:

FAFSA

determines students' eligibility for federal, state, and institutional aid.

<https://studentaid.gov/>

-OR-

CA Dream Act

determines undocumented students' eligibility for California student aid programs

(Cal Grants, Chafee Grant, and Dream Loans).

<https://dream.csac.ca.gov/>



Steps to Complete Application:

1. Create an account for the FAFSA or the CA Dream Act (Application opens October 1st)
2. Complete the CSS Profile (only for certain schools)
3. Create an FSA ID (FAFSA) or California Dream Act ID (CA Dream Act)
4. Gather Personal Documents (Social Security Number, Driver's License, or Alien Registration Card (if not a US Citizen))
5. Obtain 2021 Federal Income Tax Returns,
 - W-2, bank statements and records of investment (if applicable),
 - records of untaxed income (if applicable) (Student and Parent if student is dependent)



CSU CHECKLISTS

Applying to a California State University (CSU)

Use CSU Campus Match to see which school is best for you!

California State University Campuses:

CSU Bakersfield
CSU Channel Islands
CSU Chico
CSU Dominguez Hills
CSU East Bay
CSU Fresno
CSU Fullerton
CSU Humboldt
CSU Long Beach
CSU Los Angeles
CSU Maritime Academy
CSU Monterey Bay
CSU Northridge
CSU Pomona
CSU Sacramento
CSU San Bernardino
San Diego State University
San Francisco State University
San José State University
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
CSU San Marcos
Sonoma State University
CSU Stanislaus



UC CHECKLIST

Applying to a University Of California

Use Campuses & Location to see which school is best for you!



University of California Campuses:

- UC Berkeley
- UC Davis
- UC Irvine
- UCLA
- UC Merced
- UC Riverside
- UC San Diego
- UC San Francisco
- UC Santa Barbara
- UC Santa Cruz



Are you a first-time Freshman or a transfer student?



You are a first-time Freshman if:

- You are currently enrolled in high school and will be earning your diploma in the current academic year
- You have already graduated high school or earned an equivalent, and have not attempted college units after the diploma/ certificate date

You are a transfer student if:

You have attempted ANY college courses after earning your diploma/certificate.

- Most CSUs require you to have at least 60 units to transfer and complete all General Education courses

Use [Assist.org](https://assist.org) to ensure you are on track with transfer requirements!

The screenshot shows the ASSIST.org website. The header reads "The official course transfer and articulation system for California's public colleges and universities". The main content area is divided into three columns. The left column is titled "ASSIST is here to help" and contains a paragraph about using ASSIST with a counselor, a link to "Important Notes from ASSIST", and a section for "Now Available: 2023-2024 Transferable Course Lists". The middle column is titled "Search below for articulation agreements" and includes a dropdown for "Academic Year" (set to 2022-2023), a dropdown for "Institution" (set to "Select an Institution"), and a dropdown for "Agreements with Other Institutions" (set to "Select an Institution"). The right column is titled "Search below for transferable courses" and includes a dropdown for "Academic Year" (set to 2023-2024), a dropdown for "Community College" (set to "Select a Community College"), and three radio button options: "CSU Transferable Courses", "CSU GE-Breadth Certification Courses", and "CSU US History, Constitution, and American Ideals Courses (CSU AI)". Three pushpins are pinned to the right side of the "Search below for transferable courses" panel.



First-time, First-year Freshman



*Note, as of 2022, CSUs no longer require SAT or ACT testing for admission

Make sure you have completed or will complete these requirements by graduation:

Course Name	Number of Required Courses
History and Social Science: Including 1 year of U.S. history or 1 semester of U.S. history and 1 semester of civics or American government AND 1 year of social science	2
English: 4 years of college preparatory English composition and literature	4
Math: 4 years recommended of college preparatory math including or integrating topics covered in algebra, geometry, and intermediate algebra.	3
Laboratory Science: 2 years of college preparatory science required with laboratory (1 biological and 1 physical). Integrated science and interdisciplinary courses can meet this requirement.	2
Language Other Than English: 2 years or through the second level of high school instruction in the same language; American Sign Language and classical languages such as Latin and Greek are acceptable – See below about a possible waiver of this requirement.	2
Visual and Performing Arts: 1 year or 2 semester courses from the same discipline required including dance, music, theatre, visual arts or interdisciplinary arts.	1
College Preparatory Elective: Additional year chosen from the University of California "a-g" list.	1
Total Required Courses	15

[Click here for more information about admission requirements](#)



Starting your CSU Application!

[Click here for application deadlines!](#)

- Go to [CalState.edu/Apply](https://calstate.edu/Apply) to begin your application, apply as a first-time freshman
- Create an account and complete the extended profile
- Choose your desired area of study and program
- Complete the 4 quadrants of the application in its entirety:
 - Personal information: SSN, citizenship status, and annual income for either parent or yourself depending if you are independent or dependent
 - Academic History: High School Transcript & Coursework, a-g Course Matching, AP/CLEP/ IB Courses
 - Supporting Information: Add any supporting documents that demonstrate your achievements or EOP recommendations if you've applied to the program
 - Program Details: Any additional information needed about your program of choice



****There is an application fee of \$70 per CSU you apply for. See if you are eligible for application fee waivers (4 free applications, any after that is \$70).**

Starting your Transfer Student Application!

*Note, as of 2022, CSUs no longer require SAT or ACT testing for admission, but if you have already completed them and would like to submit the results, you can

- **Click here to apply as a transfer student**
- Create an account and complete the extended profile
- Choose your desired area of study and program
- Complete the 4 quadrants of the application in its entirety:
 - Personal information: SSN, citizenship status, and annual income for either parent or yourself depending if you are independent or dependent
 - Academic History: High School Transcript, College History and Coursework. General Education Courses needed: A1 Oral Communication, A2 Written Communication, A3 Critical Thinking, and B4 Math Concepts/ Quantitative Reasoning
 - Supporting Information: Add any supporting documents that demonstrate your achievements, Military Documents (DD214), Associate Degree for Transfer or EOP recommendations if you have applied to the program
 - Program Details: Any additional information needed about your program of choice



****There is an application fee of \$70 per CSU you apply for. See if you are eligible for application fee waivers (4 free applications, any after that is \$70).**

University of California Checklist

A How-to-Apply Overview



Students may apply to as many UC undergraduate campuses as they like with just one application. Each of their chosen campuses will receive the same application.



Application checklist for students

1. Attain minimum requirements
2. Meet key dates & deadlines
3. Review available majors
4. Prepare the personal insight questions
5. Apply online during the filing period
6. Pay the application fee(s) or apply for a fee waiver
7. Know what to do after applying



Recommendations



- **Apply to more than one UC campus**
 - This will significantly increase your chance of being admitted into the UC system. While you may not get into your first choice, all UC campuses – without exception – provide outstanding opportunities for you to learn and grow.
- **Submit only one application per term**
 - Submitting multiple applications will cause a severe processing delay.
 - Do not submit letters of recommendation (unless specifically asked by a campus). Transcripts should only be submitted to the enrolling campus after the coursework has been completed and before July 1st (unless specifically asked by a campus).
- **Spend time on the personal insight questions**
 - The personal insight questions are an important part of the application. They help us get to know students as individuals. Early in the admissions process, students should review the personal insight questions guidelines and take time to write, revise and thoroughly proofread their answers before adding them to the application. They are welcome to solicit feedback from teachers, family, and friends, but the responses must be their own work.
- **Provide accurate information**
 - Students must refer to transcripts to complete the academic history section of the application. Please tell them not to work from memory. It's very important that all the information requested be included and is accurate. The information on the self-report will be verified when we receive admitted students' official transcripts.



- **Apply on time**

- Most campuses do not accept applications after the regular filing period.

[Click here for application dates and deadlines!](#)

*UC Berkeley and UC Merced are on the semester system. All other campuses are on the quarter system. Not all campuses are open in winter and spring. Students should check available majors before applying.

- **Pay the application fee**

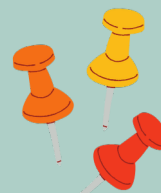
- The \$80 application fee entitles a student to apply to one UC campus. If a student applies to more than one campus, he or she must pay an additional \$80 for each campus selected. The online application automatically determines the application fees. These fees are not refundable and are subject to change.

- **Fee waivers**

- We will waive application fees for up to four campuses for students who otherwise would not be able to apply for admission. Students who qualify for fee waivers and who select more than four campuses must pay \$80 for each additional choice. To be accepted for the fee waiver program, a student's family income and size must fall within specific guidelines. The fee waiver program is for United States citizens, permanent residents, and applicants eligible for AB540 benefits. Students can apply automatically for a fee waiver within the online application.

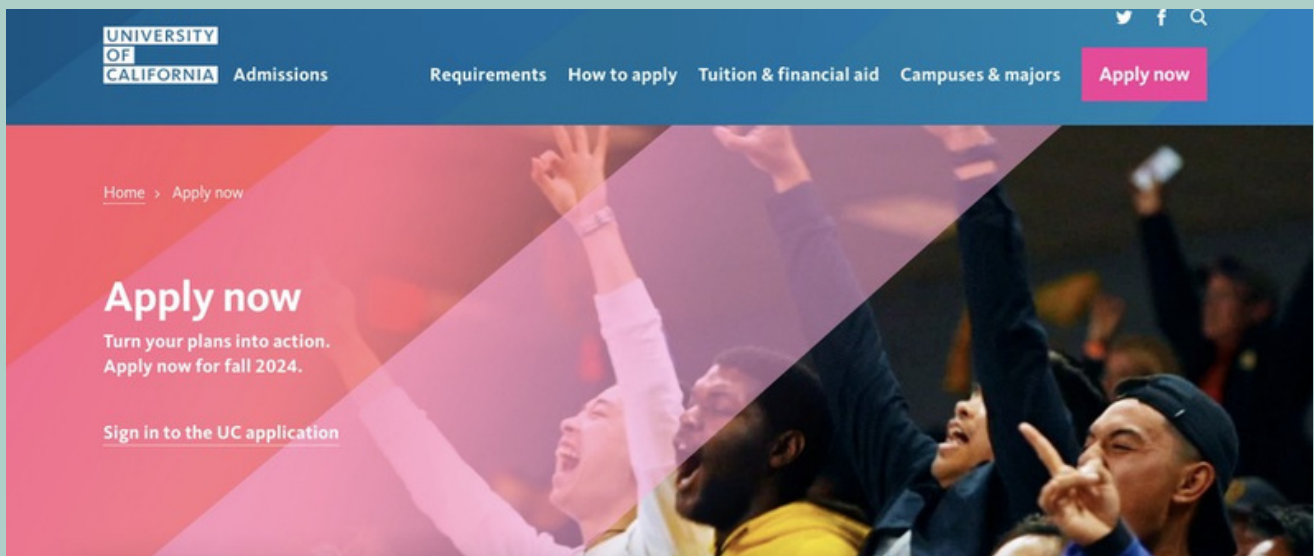
You can see if you automatically qualify for a fee waiver within the application. For more information visit [APPLY Now!](#)

- **For international and non-immigrant students:**
 - Applicants must pay a higher application fee of \$80 for each campus selected. Students who currently attend school in the U.S., however, may qualify to pay the lower application fee of \$70 per campus.
- **Submit any additional required materials**
 - Some UC majors require an audition, submission of a portfolio or supplemental application, or recommend specific prerequisite coursework, test scores or GPA.
- **Explore financial aid and scholarships**
 - We offer a comprehensive financial assistance program for qualified students and a variety of other tools that all families can use to make higher education possible.
- **Undocumented student resources**
 - UC's systemwide [undocumented student resource site](#) provides tips for applying for admission and financial aid, as well as a range of programs, resources and support services offered at UC campuses for undocumented students and their families.
- **Ask for help**
 - If students have a question about the application process, call the application center at (800) 207-1710 (within the U.S.) or (925) 298-6856 (outside the U.S.) during normal business hours



Special Requirements

- Some UC majors require an audition, submission of a portfolio or supplemental applications, or specific prerequisite coursework, test scores, GPA and/or class level.
- Please refer to the Campus Majors and Screening Procedures section of our Quick Reference Guide to UC Admissions beginning on page 56.



Scholarships

Scholarships are financial aid awards designed to help students pay for college. FREE MONEY you dont have to pay back.



Many scholarships have deadlines and different requirements. For local scholarships visit:

<https://www.cfsloco.org/available-scholarships-2/>

Apply For A Scholarship

2025-2026 Scholarship Applications

Big dreams start here! With support from generous individuals, families, and businesses, the Community Foundation offers scholarships that help San Luis Obispo County students reach new heights in their education and careers. High school seniors, undergraduates and returning students are welcome to apply!

45+ Scholarships: 1 Application

You can easily apply for all of our scholarships through our online system.

[Apply Here!](#)

2026 Schedule:

Policies and Scholarships

- SB 307 Fostering Futures: Foster youth enrolled in a community college or 4-year university in California are able to receive 100% of their unmet need covered (includes books, food, and lodging)
- Blue and Gold Opportunity Plan: Tuition and fees are covered for UC students whose total family income is less than \$80,000 a year, and who qualify after filling out both the FAFSA/CA Dream Act application and the Cal Grant GPA Verification Form
- UC Native American Opportunity Plan (UCNAOP): Tuition and fees are covered for UC students who are an enrolled member in a Native American tribe and who fill out a FAFSA or Dream Act Application
- AB19: California Promise Act: For eligible community college students, all enrollment fees are waived through the Promise Grant



Resource List

College Applications:

<https://assist.org/>

<https://www.commonapp.org/>

<https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu>

<https://www.calstate.edu/>

Financial Aid:

[FAFSA](#)

[Dream Act](#)

Personal & Scholarship Essays

<https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/applying-as-a-freshman/personal-insight-questions.html>

<https://www.commonapp.org/apply/essay-prompts>

Local College Resources: Cuesta and Allan Hancock

1. Cuesta College

The Cuesta Promise is a scholarship program covering two consecutive years of fee-free enrollment (tuition/unit fees and course materials fees) for California residents or AB540 students.

Eligibility:

- Graduate from a San Luis Obispo County high school (or earn a GED/HiSET, or be homeschooled in the county)
- Enroll at Cuesta the summer or fall term immediately following graduation
- Be a California resident or AB540-eligible (undocumented students qualify)

To maintain it for year two: complete more than 50% of attempted units each year, maintain a 2.0 GPA, and renew the FAFSA/CA Dream Act Application before August 1.

Steps: Submit the Cuesta admissions application → complete the FAFSA or CA Dream Act Application → complete Cuesta's online orientation → register for classes by the priority deadline (typically August 1).

Contact: promise@cuesta.edu / (805) 546-3153

Foster Youth & Guardian-Raised Student Support — NextUp Program

Cuesta's support office for current/former foster youth is called NextUp, part of the Affinity Programs Center.

Eligibility: Current or former California foster youth whose dependency was established/continued by a court on or after their 13th birthday, under 26 at the start of the academic year, enrolled in (or intending to enroll in) 9+ units.

Services: 1:1 support, textbook vouchers, educational grants, free parking permits, transportation assistance, housing support, food assistance, financial literacy resources, career exploration.

Contact: Lucero Rodriguez, Foster Youth Services Coordinator Email: lucero_rodriguez@cuesta.edu Phone: (805) 592-9956 Location: Affinity Programs Center, Building 3200 (SLO Campus Library)

2. Allan Hancock College (Santa Maria)

Similar to Cuesta, Hancock has an equivalent program: The Hancock Promise (HP2), which covers two years of tuition and required fees free.

Eligibility: Graduate from a high school within the Allan Hancock Joint Community College District (or homeschool/GED/HiSET within the district) and enroll immediately at Hancock the following summer or fall.

What it covers: Tuition (12+ units/semester), health fee, student body fee, course materials fees, student representation fee, saves roughly \$1,200+/year. Does not cover books, supplies, or parking permits.

Contact: promise@hancockcollege.edu / (805) 922-6966 ext. 3264

Admissions Process

Hancock follows the standard California Community College application process, no separate "admissions test" or competitive review; it's open enrollment. Students apply online, complete orientation, and meet with counseling to register.

For Promise students specifically, there's a set sequence (admissions application → FAFSA/CADAA → orientation → education plan → priority registration), with deadlines around end of May (summer start) or end of July (fall start).

Foster Youth Support — NextUp & Guardian Scholars

Hancock's foster youth support sits within **EOPS** and has two tracks:

- **NextUp:** for EOPS-eligible students who were a ward of the court at/after their 16th birthday, up to age 25.
- **Guardian Scholars:** a standalone program for former foster youth who aren't NextUp-eligible (e.g., outside the age/EOPS criteria) — same building, similar wraparound services (transportation, food/book vouchers, tutoring, study space).

Services: transportation assistance, food vouchers, book vouchers, educational grants, school supplies, tutoring, computer lab access.

Contact: EOPS/CARE/NextUp Center — Building A, Room 203

General EOPS line: (805) 922-6966 ext. 3214 (CARE/NextUp direct: ext. 3623) Foster Youth program contact: Siboney Guardado — sguardado@hancockcollege.edu / (805) 922-6966 ext. 3641

Local College Resources: Cal Poly

3. Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

Admissions Process

Cal Poly is a CSU, so the application goes through Cal State Apply during the standard CSU filing window. It's more selective/impacted than Cuesta or Hancock, admission is competitive by major, so the intended major matters a lot in the review (Cal Poly reviews by program, not just by campus). No SAT/ACT required, consistent with current CSU policy.

Worth noting: Cal Poly also has a Partner Schools program, high schools designated as partners (serving majority first-gen/economically disadvantaged populations) get a designated admissions liaison, additional admission consideration for students who meet minimum CSU requirements, and priority access to outreach events. If any of the high schools BBBS works with aren't already a Cal Poly Partner School, that's worth asking the admissions office about directly, since it could be a meaningful lever for your Littles heading toward a 4-year path.

Financial Support for At-Risk/First-Gen Youth — EOP

Cal Poly's Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) is the primary support structure for low-income, first-generation, or educationally disadvantaged students — it's the oldest EOP in the CSU system (established 1968).

Eligibility: History of low income (within EOP income guidelines), first-generation (neither parent has a 4-year degree), and demonstrated need for academic support.

Support includes: individualized counseling, tutoring, workshops, a 4-week new-student orientation, an EOP grant (up to ~\$1,050/year), a Residential Learning Community (first-year EOP students live together), and a summer bridge program (Summer Institute) before fall quarter starts.

Apply: through the same Cal State Apply application — there's an EOP-specific supplemental application with its own deadline (around January 31), including a letter of recommendation.

Contact: eop@calpoly.edu

Foster Youth Support — Guardian Scholars

The Guardian Scholars Program serves incoming first-year, transfer, and continuing undergraduate and graduate students who have experienced foster care or similar circumstances. We are committed to helping students earn a degree by providing a community of support where students can succeed and thrive. This program serves all campus locations: San Luis Obispo, Maritime Academy, as well as the Bachelor's Pathway programs at Allan Hancock College and Cuesta College.

Contact: gsp@calpoly.edu (they'll help determine eligibility even if a student isn't sure they qualify — there's an interest form to start the conversation)

Cal Poly also has a Basic Needs program and Cal Fresh assistance (up to ~\$281/month for groceries) that can layer on top of Guardian Scholars or EOP support.