

Identifying Colleges, Majors, and Career Paths

Choosing where to apply—and what to study—can feel overwhelming. But you don't have to figure it all out at once. Start by exploring schools that match your interests, goals, and needs using the tools below. These websites let you search for colleges based on things like location, size, tuition, available majors, and more.

Exploring Majors & Career Paths

Not sure what you want to study or do for a career? These websites offer free career assessment tools to help you explore your interests and discover majors or job paths that might be a good fit.

[MyNextMove](#)

- Includes the O*NET Interest Profiler, a short quiz to help you identify your interests and match them with careers
- Browse careers by industry or keyword
 - *Great starting point if you're unsure where to begin.*

[CareerOneStop](#)

- Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor
- Offers assessments, career profiles, and job outlook info
 - *Helpful for exploring careers by expected salary, demand, and required education.*

[CareerExplorer](#)

- Offers a comprehensive career assessment based on personality, interests, and goals
- Provides detailed career reports and recommendations
 - *Especially useful if you want a more personalized or in-depth breakdown.*

[What Can I Do With This Major?](#)

- Explore career options by college major

- Learn what types of employers hire for each field
 - *Great for students who have a major in mind but want to know what jobs it can lead to.*

College Search & Exploration Tools

College Scorecard – U.S. Department of Education

Provides detailed, government-verified data on colleges across the country. Includes:

- Graduation rates
- Average tuition and financial aid
- Typical student loan debt
- Post-graduation earnings
 - *Tip: Use the filters to find affordable schools with strong job outcomes.*

CollegeBoard's BigFuture

A student-friendly platform that helps you:

- Explore colleges and majors
- Estimate financial aid
- Find scholarships and career paths
 - *Bonus: You can save your college list and revisit it later.*

Princeton Review

Offers:

- School profiles and rankings
- Student reviews
- Test prep resources (like SAT/ACT help)
 - *Good for students looking for test-prep + college info in one place.*

[U.S. News & World Report College Rankings](#)

Best known for:

- National college rankings
- Guides and planning tools for students
 - *Use this for deeper dives into academics, campus life, and admissions selectivity.*

[College Confidential](#)

An online forum and community where students can:

- Ask questions
- Read about others' application experiences
- Use a search tool for colleges and scholarships
 - *This is a great peer-to-peer space but always double-check advice with official sources.*

Tip: Simplify Your College Applications

If you're applying to multiple schools, save time with these **multi-college application platforms**:

- [Common App](#) – Used by over 900 colleges and universities
- [Coalition for College](#) – Focuses on access, affordability, and success
- [Common Black College Application](#) – Apply to dozens of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) with one form

Each platform helps streamline the process so you can focus more on your goals and less on paperwork.

Want help exploring careers or filling out applications? Reach out—we'd love to support you!

Trade Schools, Apprenticeships, and Alternative Career Paths

College isn't the only path to a great career. Many high-demand, well-paying jobs don't require a traditional four-year degree. If you're more interested in hands-on work, earning

while you learn, or entering the workforce more quickly, **trades and technical careers** might be a great fit for you.

What Are Trades?

Trades are skilled jobs that often involve **hands-on work and training**. Some examples include:

- Electrician
- Plumber
- Welder
- HVAC technician
- Auto mechanic
- Construction and carpentry
- Dental assistant or medical technician
- Cosmetologist or barber
- CDL truck driver

These careers usually require **certification, a license, or an associate degree**, which you can earn through a **trade school, community college, or apprenticeship program**.

Explore Trade & Technical Programs

Explore Iowa's Registered Apprenticeship Programs

Find programs where you can earn money while receiving on-the-job training in high-demand industries.

Iowa Valley Community College District - Career and Technical Education

Example of a community college offering a wide range of trade-related programs. Check out other Iowa community colleges for similar options.

Apprenticeship.gov

A national resource for finding paid apprenticeship programs across the U.S.

Iowa Skilled Worker and Job Creation Fund

If you pursue a high-demand career path at an Iowa community college, you might be eligible for **Last Dollar Scholarships** that help cover tuition and fees.

MyNextMove

Includes a “Jobs with Registered Apprenticeships” section to explore career options that don’t require a four-year degree.

Why Consider the Trades?

- **Lower cost of training** than a traditional college
- **Hands-on, practical work** you can start quickly
- Many programs offer **job placement and paid training**
- High demand = **stable job opportunities and good pay**

College vs. Trades: Which Path Fits You Best?

Feature	College Pathway	Trade/Apprenticeship Pathway
Time to Complete	2–4+ years (Associate or Bachelor's Degree)	6 months – 2 years (or earn while you learn)
Cost	Higher (tuition, fees, books, housing)	Lower (often covered or paid during training)
Learning Style	More academic/classroom-based	Hands-on, practical, job-site learning
Types of Jobs	Professions like teacher, psychologist, nurse	Careers like electrician, mechanic, welder
Earning While Learning	Rare, mostly unpaid internships	Often paid through apprenticeships
Job Outlook	Depends on field; some require grad school	High demand in skilled trades
Financial Aid	FAFSA, scholarships, grants	Scholarships, grants, paid training
Career Growth	Opportunities to specialize or go to grad school	Opportunities for licensing & owning a business
Best For Students Who...	Enjoy academics, research, or professional fields	Prefer hands-on work, learning by doing

How to Decide?

Ask yourself:

- Do I like hands-on or classroom learning more?
- Am I more motivated by practical work or academic study?
- What kind of lifestyle do I want in the next few years?
- Do I want to start earning money quickly?

Both options can lead to **successful, fulfilling careers**. The best path is the one that fits *you*—your interests, strengths, and goals.

How to Make a Final Decision

Once you've explored your options, here are some questions to help narrow it down:

- Which schools or programs fit my goals, values, and budget?
- Where do I feel most supported or excited to grow?
- What do current students say about their experiences?
- Can I visit the campus or talk to someone who's attended?

Tip: Trust your gut—but also weigh the practical factors like cost, location, and support resources.

Transition Tips: What to Expect After High School

Whether you're heading to college, trade school, or a job, the transition can feel like a big shift. Here's how to prepare:

- **Build your support system** (mentors, friends, advisors)
- **Know your deadlines** (enrollment, housing, orientation)
- **Learn some life skills** (budgeting, laundry, time management)
- **Reach out** if you're unsure—there are people who want to help

Financial Aid & Scholarships

Paying for college can be a challenge, but there are many resources to help make it more affordable. Financial aid, including grants, scholarships, and work-study programs, can help cover your costs. This section will guide you through the steps to apply for financial aid and find scholarships to support your education. Whether you're attending a university or a technical program, there are options available to help you pay for school.

FAFSA: The First Step Toward College Funding

The **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** is the key to unlocking financial support for college—including **federal grants, work-study opportunities, and student loans**.

FAFSA usually opens each year in **October**, and it's best to submit it as early as possible to maximize the aid you're eligible for.

If this is your first time filling it out, check out [this FAFSA slideshow](#) guide. While some info is specific to California, **slides 6–94** are helpful for **students in Iowa and nationwide**.

Scholarships & Grants: Where to Begin

Finding scholarships can feel overwhelming, but you don't have to go it alone. Try these starting points:

- **Ask your high school counselor**
- **Talk with the financial aid office** at colleges where you've been accepted
- **Visit:** [Iowa College Aid - Scholarships & Grants](#)

Once you're accepted to a college, you'll likely gain access to a **scholarship portal** unique to that school. That's often the best place to find scholarships tailored to your background and goals.

Scholarships for Students with Foster Care Experience

Iowa College Aid Scholarships

[Education and Training Voucher \(ETV\)](#)

- Up to **\$5,000/year** for students who aged out of foster care or were adopted after age 16

[All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship \(AIOS\)](#)

- Prioritizes students who were in foster care or adopted after age 16
- Covers tuition for eligible Iowa students

[Future Ready Iowa Last-Dollar Scholarship \(LDS\)](#)

- Covers remaining tuition after other aid is applied for eligible students enrolling in high-demand career and technical programs at Iowa community colleges or other approved institutions
- Great option for those considering trade or vocational programs

Guardian Scholars Foundation

- For students who spent time in foster care between ages 14–18
- Must be Iowa residents attending school in Iowa

National Scholarships

Foster Care to Success Scholarship

- Supports students going to **college or vocational/trade programs**
- Opens annually in **May**

Horatio Alger Scholarship

- For current high school juniors
- Must demonstrate **financial need**, have overcome **adversity**, and show **community involvement**

Federal Financial Aid Programs: Grants, Work-Study, and Loans

- **Pell Grant**
A federal grant that helps students with financial need, typically awarded to undergraduate students. This grant does not need to be repaid.
- **Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG)**
A federal grant for students with exceptional financial need. It's awarded by the school and does not need to be repaid.
- **Federal Work Study**
A program that provides part-time jobs for students with financial need, helping them earn money to pay for education expenses. Jobs can be on or off-campus.
- **Federal Student Loans**
 - **Subsidized Loans**
Available to undergraduate students with financial need. The government

pays the interest while you're in school at least half-time, during deferment periods, and for the first six months after graduation.

- **Unsubsidized Loans**

Available to both undergraduate and graduate students. The borrower is responsible for the interest at all times, even while in school.

On-Campus Resources

These resources are designed to support your academic, personal, and physical well-being throughout your time in college. Be sure to explore them fully and take advantage of everything your campus has to offer!

*These types of resources are commonly found at most colleges and universities—not just Iowa State.

Academic Success Center

Provides services such as tutoring, academic coaching, and skill-building for written, oral, and other communication skills. At Iowa State, you can meet with an Academic Success Navigator who will help connect you to helpful resources, such as tutoring, accountability groups, and writing and communications consultations.

- **Link to Iowa State Services:** [Iowa State Academic Success Center](#)
To find these services at other universities, look under their "Student Success" pages.

Counseling and Mental Health Services

Student Counseling Services offers individual and group counseling, telecounseling, and resources on coping skills and self-guided help. Sessions are free but typically short-term, usually ranging between 4-8 sessions. If you need longer-term services, the center can help connect you with community referrals.

- **Link to Iowa State Services:** [Iowa State Student Counseling Services](#)
To locate similar services at other universities, look under their "Student Counseling" pages.

Student Accessibility Center

This center assists students with accommodations for academic and other needs such as housing, dining, and support animals. Common accommodations include extended time on exams, low-distraction environments for tests, and assignment extensions. At Iowa State, students with accommodations can access free tutoring services for one class per semester.

To get started with accommodations, you'll usually **fill out a registration form**, **schedule a meeting** with someone from the center, and then **submit documentation** of the disability. Documentation can come from a licensed-professional, such as a counsellor, psychologist, physician, etc. For more information on documentation refer to [this webpage](#), though whoever you meet in your initial meeting with the center will guide you through the documentation process and answer any questions you may have.

- **Link to Iowa State Services:** [Iowa State Student Accessibility Center](#)
At other universities, the Student Accessibility Center may be referred to as Accommodations Office, Disability and Access, or Student Disability Services.

Financial Aid/Assistance

The Office of Student Financial Aid helps guide students through applying for grants, scholarships, loans, and student employment. Iowa State offers an [Expense Estimator](#) tool to help students estimate their upcoming semester's expenses.

- **Link to Iowa State Services:** [Iowa State Financial Aid](#)

On-Campus Work/Work Study

Many students rely on on-campus employment opportunities to help fund their education. Work-study programs offer part-time jobs for students with financial need, allowing you to earn money to help pay for educational expenses. At Iowa State, you can search for available positions via the university's student employment portal, where job listings are posted regularly.

- **Link to Iowa State Services:** [Iowa State Work Study](#)

Work-study jobs are typically flexible and can offer a great way to gain work experience while managing your academic schedule.

Student Organizations

Getting involved in student organizations can provide a supportive community, opportunities to develop leadership skills, and experiences that look great on your resume. Iowa State offers a wide variety of student organizations ranging from academic clubs to hobby-based or cultural groups. Joining clubs can also be an excellent way to meet like-minded people and make new friends.

- **Link to Iowa State Services:** [Iowa State Student Organizations](#)

Explore the full list of organizations and get involved in one that aligns with your interests or career goals.

Career Services

Iowa State's Career Services office offers a range of resources for career development, including resume workshops, mock interviews, job fairs, and career counseling. They can also help connect you with internships and full-time job opportunities after graduation. Take advantage of these resources early to prepare for life after college.

- **Link to Iowa State Services:** [Iowa State Career Services](#)

At other universities, you can find similar services under their "Career Services" or "Career Development" pages.

Student Wellness Center & Gym

The Student Wellness Center at Iowa State offers fitness facilities, health services, and wellness resources, including personal training, group fitness classes, and stress-relief services. It's a great place to stay healthy both physically and mentally. Students can also take advantage of free access to [fitness classes](#) like yoga, pilates, or cycling.

- **Link to Iowa State Services:** [Iowa State Wellness Center](#)

Many universities will have a similar wellness center or gym, typically found on their student services or health services pages.

SHOP (Student Help Organizations and Programs)

SHOP is a free food pantry for Iowa State students, offering a confidential and supportive service. It's run by student volunteers, making it a great opportunity for those interested in volunteering.

- **Link to Iowa State Services:** [Iowa State SHOP](#)

Other Resources

Some other resources that may be beneficial for navigating college and university are:

[FOSTER CARE TRANSITION TOOLKIT](#)

A toolkit from the U.S. Department of Education that provides detailed guidance for foster youth in navigating the transition to adulthood and pursuing academic and career opportunities.

[Transitioning Into Adulthood](#)

Resources from the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services explaining how to plan for the transition to adulthood, and programs, grants, and scholarships available to foster youth.