EXPLORING COLLEGE
FOR FRESHMEN & SOPHOMORES
GETTING STARTED

Now that you’re in high school, you’re probably starting to think about the future...what you want to be, where you’ll go to college, the kind of lifestyle you would enjoy. But how will you get there?

Pursuing education after high school is your key to future success. For example, if you achieve a bachelor’s degree from a 4-year college, you’ll earn nearly $25,000 more per year than someone with a high school diploma. With a college education, you’re more likely to have:

- Greater wealth
- Job security
- Better health
- A closer family
- A stronger community

There are steps you can take now to build the future you want. We’ll help you get started.

1. ASK FOR HELP.
   Ask an adult you know to help you stay on track to college. This might be your parent, school counselor, mentor, coach, youth group leader, or someone else who knows you well. This person can make sure you’re completing tasks such as:
   - Exploring careers and colleges that fit your interests
   - Getting involved in activities that could lead to scholarship opportunities
   - Going on campus visits
   - Finding ways to save and pay for college
   - Applying for college and financial aid when you’re a senior

   It’s especially important that you get to know your school counselor! Nobody knows better what you need to do to make college a reality.

2. CREATE A 4-YEAR COURSEWORK PLAN.
   Work with your school counselor to map out classes you should take during high school to ensure admission to college. Ask about the availability of Dual-Credit and Advanced Placement courses through which you can earn college credit.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY COLLEGE?

College can include:
- Career School
- Community College
- College/University
STAY ON COURSE FOR COLLEGE
By taking these courses, you’ll be better prepared for admission to any college in Nebraska.

4 YEARS OF ENGLISH with focus on intensive reading and writing.

4 YEARS OF MATH including algebra I, algebra II, geometry, and an additional algebra-related course.

3 YEARS OF SOCIAL SCIENCES including American and/or world history; one additional course in history, American government and/or geography; and a third course from any social science discipline.

3 YEARS OF NATURAL SCIENCES including biology, chemistry, physics, or earth sciences. One course must include a lab.

2-4 YEARS OF WORLD LANGUAGE - must be the same language.

Interested in playing college sports? Learn National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) course requirements at ncaaclearinghouse.net.

GETTING STARTED

3) IMPROVE YOUR STUDY SKILLS.
The grades you get in 9th and 10th grade will count toward your high school GPA (grade point average). Colleges will review your GPA when you apply for admission as a senior, which is why it’s important to get the best grades possible starting now! Here’s how:

- Use a planner or homework app to record assignments.
- Take notes and review them often.
- Ask questions if you don’t understand the subject.
- Find a place to study where there are no distractions.
- Ask your teacher how you can improve your grades.

4) CREATE AN ACTIVITIES RESUME.
By joining clubs and activities - and doing volunteer work - you can explore career interests and increase your chances for scholarships and college admission.

To track your involvement, create an Activities Resume at EducationQuest.org and update it throughout high school. Then the information is available when it’s time to apply for scholarships, college admission, and jobs.

5) LEARN HOW TO BUDGET.
You might have a part-time job to help cover expenses like your phone, eating out, movies, video games, and car expenses. By setting up a budget, you’ll learn how to manage your money to cover expenses with some left over for savings (especially for college). Use a budgeting tool such as TheMint.org/teens.

EducationQuest.org
FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

Before you choose a college, explore your career interests. Once you discover career options you may want to pursue, research colleges that offer programs in those areas.

FOLLOW THESE STEPS TO FIND THE RIGHT FIT.

1) THINK ABOUT YOUR INTERESTS AND SKILLS.

LIST THINGS YOU LIKE TO DO. (Examples: writing, building things, helping people, being outdoors)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

LIST CLASSES YOU’RE GOOD AT.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2) FIND CAREERS THAT MATCH YOUR INTERESTS AND SKILLS.

To get started, visit https://eqf.org/explore_careers to find links to career-exploration sites including:

- **Nebraska Career Connections** – Find videos and details about career options, and take career interest assessments. Ask your counselor for the code to access this site.

- **My Next Move** – Take the O*NET Interest Profiler to be matched with career options, or search a variety of careers, and learn about annual wages for each job.

- **H3.ne.gov** – Find labor market information for high-skill, high-wage, high-demand jobs in Nebraska.

- **“Now, Next, Later” Career Ladders** – Learn about career paths in specific career clusters in Nebraska.

Your research should lead you to career fields that may be a good fit for you.
FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

Occupation
- Purchasing Agent for farm products
- Art Director at an ad agency
- Welder
- Physician Assistant
- Firefighter
- Public Relations Manager

Required Education
- 2-year associate’s degree
- 4-year bachelor’s degree
- 2-year certificate
- 4-year bachelor’s degree + 2-year master’s degree
- 2-year associate’s degree
- 4-year bachelor’s degree

Average Pay
- $19/hour or $40,470/year
- $21/hour or $43,920/year
- $18/hour or $37,440/year
- $44/hour or $91,520/year
- $20/hour or $40,710/year
- $26/hour or $53,620/year

Sample careers with required education and average pay.

See below for an example of one career from each field with the required education and average pay.

EducationQuest.org
3) **CREATE A CAREER PLAN.**
Review the sample career plan below and then fill in the blanks below to make your own plan.

**SAMPLE CAREER PLAN**

Job Title:

**Physician Assistant**

Skills you’ll need:

*Organization, problem-solving, and communication*

Courses you should take in high school:

*Biology, chemistry, anatomy, physiology, and health and wellness*

Activities you should pursue in high school:

*Science Club,*  
*HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America),*  
*FCCLA (Family, Career and Community Leaders of America)*

Education required after high school:

*4-Year bachelor’s degree plus a 2-year master’s degree*

**YOUR CAREER PLAN**

Job Title:

Skills you’ll need:

Courses you should take in high school:

Activities you should pursue in high school:

Education required after high school:

To find career descriptions, visit [www.bls.gov/k12/](http://www.bls.gov/k12/) or [MyNextMove.org](http://MyNextMove.org).
**4) GET A REALITY CHECK.**

Reality Check at EducationQuest.org is a fun way to find out how much it will cost to support yourself after college – and if the career you want will pay enough to cover your expenses.

**5) RESEARCH COLLEGES THAT MATCH YOUR CAREER INTERESTS.**

Did you know there are over 45 colleges in Nebraska? These include public and private colleges and universities, community colleges, and career schools. The types of colleges you research depends on careers that interest you.

Here’s how to get started:

- Go to College Profiles at EducationQuest.org to find details about colleges in Nebraska and across the country. Another good resource is bigfuture.collegeboard.org.
- Attend a College Fair in the spring of your sophomore year – if there’s one in your area. Find dates and locations in the “Events Calendar” at EducationQuest.org.
- Explore college campuses.
  - Attend events or camps at area colleges.
  - Stop at colleges when traveling with your family.
  - Participate in group campus visits organized by your school.
  - Take a virtual campus tour via a college website.

**TYPES OF COLLEGE DEGREES**

**DIPLOMA/CERTIFICATE**
Specialized training that typically takes a year or less to complete.

**ASSOCIATE**
A two-year degree offered by community colleges and career schools.

**BACHELOR’S**
A four-year degree offered by colleges and universities.

**MASTER’S**
Typically takes 1-2 years to complete after earning a bachelor’s degree.

**DOCTORATE**
The most advanced degree available, this is earned after completing a bachelor’s or master’s degree.
PAYING FOR COLLEGE

After determining what careers and colleges might be the right fit for you, it’s time to learn about ways to pay for college. Follow these steps:

1. LEARN HOW MUCH IT COSTS TO ATTEND COLLEGE.

Colleges break down their costs into these categories:

- **Tuition & Fees** – the amount of money a college charges for the courses you take and for services like computer labs, fitness centers, and career services.
- **Books & Supplies** – you’ll be required to purchase or rent textbooks and/or supplies for most classes.
- **Room & Board** – if you live on campus, the college will charge you to live in a residence hall and for the meals you eat in the cafeteria.

### AVERAGE COSTS TO ATTEND COLLEGE IN NEBRASKA FOR ONE YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Two-year community college</th>
<th>Four-year public college</th>
<th>Four-year private college*</th>
<th>Career school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuition &amp; Fees</td>
<td>$3,150 - $3,600</td>
<td>$7,500 - $9,200</td>
<td>$21,000 - $39,500</td>
<td>$17,000 - $18,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books &amp; Supplies</td>
<td>$1,500 - $2,200</td>
<td>$1,000 - $1,400</td>
<td>$1,000 - $1,400</td>
<td>$2,000 - $2,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room &amp; Board</td>
<td>$6,500 - $8,300</td>
<td>$7,400 - $11,800</td>
<td>$7,800 - $10,900</td>
<td>No campus housing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Don’t rule out a private college because of cost – financial aid may offset much of the cost.*
LEARN ABOUT FINANCIAL AID.
Federal financial aid is money awarded by colleges to help students pay college expenses. You'll apply for financial aid when you’re a senior by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The results of your FAFSA will determine how much financial aid you’re eligible to receive based on your family’s income and assets.

Some students will show “financial need” which qualifies them for need-based aid. However, students of any income level may qualify for some type of aid, which is why you should complete the FAFSA your senior year – and every year you’re in college.

LEARN THE TYPES OF FINANCIAL AID.
Following are the types of financial aid you might receive depending on the results of your FAFSA:

- **Scholarships** – Money awarded by private donors or your college that you don’t repay. Some are based on financial need, while others are based on criteria such as academics, leadership, athletics, or talents.

- **Grants** – Money awarded to students who show financial need. Grants are not repaid.

- **Work-Study** – Also based on financial need, this is money you earn from a college-based job to help pay expenses.

- **Student Loans** – Money you borrow and must repay after you’re done with college. Loans are also available for parents.

*These types of financial aid are based on FAFSA results.*
4) **POSITION YOURSELF TO EARN SCHOLARSHIPS.**

While there aren’t many scholarships you can apply for now, there are things you can do to earn scholarships later:

- **Do well in school** – academic scholarships are based on criteria such as your high school GPA, ACT score, and class rank.

- **Get involved in extracurricular activities** – many scholarships are based on involvement in school clubs and community service. Some are based on talents such as music, drama, art, or sports.

If you qualify for free or reduced price lunch, you will probably qualify for scholarships (and grants) that are based on financial need.

5) **SAVE!**

You can stash away a lot of money over the next 3-4 years to help pay for college. Here’s how:

- **Save a portion of money** you receive for birthdays and holidays.

- **Get a part-time job** and save half of your earnings.

- **Ask your parents about setting up a college savings plan.**
  - A good option is the Nebraska Educational Savings Trust. This 529 Plan will provide tax benefits for your parents and others who invest in your education. Find details at NEST529.com.

- **Create a budget.** This will help you limit the amount of money you spend on snacks and other unnecessary items.

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**IT ALL ADDS UP!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frappuccino</td>
<td>$4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheeseburger, Fries &amp; Soda:</td>
<td>$7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chips and Soda from Vending Machine:</td>
<td>$3.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL:** $15.00

$15 x 260 days (5 days a week) = $3,900

Pay attention to how you spend money. For example, if you spend $15 for food and drinks five times a week, you’ll go through nearly $4,000 in one year!

This could pay for one year of tuition at a community college!
Now that you understand what you can do during your freshman and sophomore years to prepare for college, here's a preview of what to expect your junior and senior years.

JUNIOR YEAR COLLEGE-PREP TASKS:

• **Take the ACT test.** You can take the SAT as well. Many colleges base admission decisions on the scores you receive on these college entrance exams.

• **Continue to research colleges.** Meet with college representatives who visit your school, and talk to graduates of your high school about the colleges they’re attending.

• **Attend a College Fair or Educational Planning Program** (smaller college fair). For dates and locations, see “Upcoming Events” at EducationQuest.org.

• **Go on campus visits.** This will help you narrow your college choices before you start your senior year.

SENIOR YEAR COLLEGE-PREP TASKS:

• **Apply to your top college choices.** Colleges will consider your ACT/SAT scores, GPA, class rank, and extracurricular activities.

• **Complete the FAFSA.** Colleges will use your FAFSA results to determine how much they will award you in financial aid.

• **Apply for scholarships.** ScholarshipQuest at EducationQuest.org has over 2,000 Nebraska-based scholarships.
EDUCATIONQUEST CAN HELP YOU START YOUR JOURNEY TO COLLEGE.

We’re a nonprofit organization that provides FREE services and programs for Nebraska students and families including:

- College-prep information and tools at EducationQuest.org
- One-on-one help at college planning offices in Omaha, Lincoln, Kearney, and Scottsbluff
- Outreach services for community agency clients
- Statewide efforts such as college fairs, financial aid programs, and Apply2College campaign
- Look2College and KnowHow2GO programs for younger students

We also provide need-based scholarships for students referred by colleges or community agencies, and award College Access Grants to Nebraska high schools.

FOR FREE HELP WITH COLLEGE PLANNING, CONTACT THE LOCATION NEAREST YOU.

OMAHA
Rockbrook Village
11031 Elm St.
402.391.4033
888.357.6300

LINCOLN
1300 O St.
402.475.5222
800.303.3745

KEARNEY
2706 Second Ave.
308.234.6310
800.666.3721

SCOTTSBLUFF
1601 E 27th St.
800.303.3745,
ext. 6654

Materials and resources are available in Spanish. Materiales y recursos disponibles en español.