A Message from the Editors

Dear Students,

On behalf of Center for Student Opportunity, thank you for picking up this copy of the I'm First Guide to College.

There’s something special about being first. The first in flight, first man on the moon, and the first African-American president. First kisses, first impressions, first place. Being among the first in your family to attend and graduate from college is special too.

We developed this Guide to help students like you get to college and succeed. If you feel overwhelmed by the college process, don’t worry! There are specific steps you need to take during the college search and application process. This Guide is designed to turn your college dreams into action-oriented goals and simplify the steps to college so you know what to do next.

It’s your responsibility to find out which school is right for you. Asking the right questions and knowing what information to seek out is important. To help you get started, the Guide profiles 171 colleges and universities that are committed to helping students like you thrive in college.

Remember too that you are not alone on path to the college. In the Guide, you will read inspiring stories of students who overcame many obstacles to become first-generation college students. They, along with others, share great advice on how you too can make it to and through college.

We wish you the best of luck on this journey to college and hope you find the I'm First Guide to College to be valuable along the way.

Did you know that you can continue your research and college prep on the I’m First web site?

Sign up at www.imfirst.org

For counselors, teachers and mentors

The I’m First Guide to College, now with an interactive curriculum and built-in workbook activities and quizzes, is a great resource to use in the classroom or to give to students to call their own.

To purchase additional copies, visit http://store.imfirst.org.

Contact help@imfirst.org to request bulk order discounts.
“The road to reaching your goals begins now. If you wait until tomorrow to begin reaching for them, you might just find it’s too late.”

Objectives

By the end of this unit, I will...

• understand the benefits of obtaining a college degree.
• identify the characteristics that competitive colleges are looking for in students, both inside and outside of the classroom.
• develop long- and short-term goals which will build toward college success and identify supports that can be used to achieve these goals.
With everything you need to do to get ready for college, you may wonder if it’s all worth it. Here are four quick (but very important) reasons why:

**REASON 1**  
Every bit of education you get after high school increases the chances you’ll earn good pay. Most college graduates earn a lot more money during their working years than people who stop their education at high school.

**REASON 2**  
The more education you get, the more likely it is you will always have a job. According to one estimate, by the year 2028 there will be 19 million more jobs for educated workers than there are qualified people to fill them.

**REASON 3**  
Continuing education after high school is much more important for your generation than it was for your parents’ generation. Today most good jobs require more than a high school diploma. Businesses want to hire people who know how to think and solve problems.

**REASON 4**  
Education beyond high school gives you a lot of other benefits, including meeting new people, taking part in new opportunities to explore your interests, and experiencing success.

Young people in all socio-economic groups have college aspirations. In fact, eight out of 10 expect to attain a bachelor’s degree or higher, according to the U.S. Department of Education. But despite their aspirations, low-income students and those who are the first in their families to pursue higher education are severely underrepresented on college campuses. Studies show these students often lack the guidance they need to prepare for postsecondary education.

In order to turn these students’ college dreams into action-oriented goals, the American Council on Education, Lumina Foundation for Education and the Ad Council launched the KnowHow2GO campaign in 2007. This multi-year, multimedia effort includes television, radio, outdoor public service advertisements (PSAs), an interactive website KnowHow2GO.org to encourage students to prepare for college using four simple steps.

Throughout the I’m First Guide to College, you’ll find pages with content and graphics printed with permission from KnowHow2GO. Learn more at KnowHow2GO.org.
First things first.  
Everyone loves the first.  
The first man on the moon, 
the first African-American 
president, and the first in flight.  
First kisses, first impressions, 
first place.  
What is it about the first?

In many ways, it is easier for students who have siblings or parents who took on the big firsts. When it comes to college, students with parents who attended college have a better chance of attending college themselves.

So what does that mean for students who don’t have a family history of higher education? These students who enroll in colleges and universities are called first-generation college students.

Yes, being the first can be lonely. Everything feels strange and different the first time. You might worry how your friends and family will see you, the first: “He thinks he is so special because he is first.”

But don’t hold back on being first. The great thing about being the first one is that it doesn’t mean that you will be the last one. By being the first in your family to graduate from college, you open the door for younger siblings, for your children, and their children. College will not be an intimidating unknown because you went first.

OK, maybe the betterment of your imaginary grandchildren isn’t the most convincing reason to take on being the first in college. So, think of yourself. College is four years that are all about you. Your discoveries, your achievements, and your firsts. People who attend college live longer, make more money, and vote more often. You will have more opportunities in your lifetime if you go to college.

Although it can be daunting, being the first is an accomplishment. It will make you a stronger and happier person. And that is what really matters.
There's an old Chinese saying that goes, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” But no matter how unsure you feel taking that first step, every single one after that will be a little easier. Here's some helpful tips to get you started.

**Plan out a challenging program of classes.**
- Colleges care about which courses you’re taking in high school. Remember, you will have more options if you start planning now for college and do your best to earn good grades.
- The courses you take in high school show colleges what kind of goals you set for yourself. Are you signing up for advanced classes, honors sections, or accelerated sequences? Are you choosing electives that really stretch your mind and help you develop new abilities? Or are you doing just enough to get by?
- Colleges will be more impressed by respectable grades in challenging courses than by outstanding grades in easy ones.
- Do your high school course selections match what most colleges expect you to know? For example, many colleges require two to four years of foreign language study.
- Your schedule should consist of at least 4 college preparatory classes per year.

**Create a file of important documents and notes.**
- Copies of report cards.
- Lists of awards and honors.
- Lists of school and community activities in which you are involved, including both paid and volunteer work, and descriptions of what you do.

**Start thinking about the colleges you want to attend.**
- Create list of colleges and universities in which you are interested.
- Discuss the list with your school counselor and narrow it down to your top few.
- Start visiting the campuses.

**Find out about honors-level courses at your school.**
- Ask if AP or other honors courses are available.
- See if you are eligible for the honors classes you want to take.
- Stay active in clubs, activities, and sports that you enjoy.
- Study, study, study. Colleges look at your permanent academic record for admissions beginning with freshman-year grades.
- Think about an after school or summer job to start saving for college.

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KnowHow2GO  Printed with permission from KnowHow2GO. Learn more at KnowHow2GO.org.
Going Above and Beyond: Taking Rigorous High School Courses

Course Rigor
The college application process is more competitive now than ever before. So when college admissions officers look at your transcript, they want to see more than just good grades. They are looking for evidence that you are an ambitious student with the skills needed to persevere in a rigorous academic setting. In other words, they want to see that you’ve taken advanced classes. Students are often surprised to learn that many colleges would rather accept a student with okay grades in advanced classes than A’s in basic classes.

It’s no wonder that course rigor is important to colleges. Many first-year college students find that the transition from high school academics to college is challenging because college-level work is more difficult and time-consuming than high school work. However, students who have been exposed to college-level classes before arriving on campus are usually better prepared to handle their first-year work load.

AP Courses
Most high schools offer Advanced Placement (AP) courses for their students. AP courses are generally year-long classes offered in a specific content area, from Chinese to Studio Art (a full list of courses available can be found at www.apstudent.collegeboard.org/apcourse). AP courses are designed to offer college-level rigor, and students who take them can sometimes receive credit towards their college degree before they even graduate high school! Sometimes these courses are only available to juniors and seniors. Check with your guidance counselor to see what courses are offered at your school and what eligibility requirements you need to meet to enroll.

In May of each year, most AP students take the national AP exam in their specific subject. The exam is scored on a scale from 1-5. There is a fee to take the exam, but schools are often provided with fee waivers for low-income students. Students earning a score of 3, 4, or 5 on their exams may be eligible to credit towards their college degree, depending on the college they attend. For example, a student who gets a score of 4 on the AP European History Exam might be excused from taking a history course at his/her college. Not all schools will accept AP credit, and some will only accept credit from certain courses, so make sure you check on the school website to see what their policies regarding APs are.

If your school doesn’t offer APs, you may be able to find a class online offered through your state’s Department of Education or through a local college or university. Ask your guidance counselor for more information!

International Baccalaureate Program
Select schools around the country (and the world) offer the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IB). This program is offered for students ages 16 to 19 and offers rigorous instruction which is well recognized among selective colleges and universities.

Most schools are not able to offer IB for their students, and you must be enrolled in an IB school to participate in the program. To find out if your school, or any schools in your area, offer IB, check out www.ibo.org/schools.
The chart below gives you a good overview on what courses you need to take in high school to meet standard college entrance requirements. Of course, every college has its own requirements—check with the ones you're interested in to see what they recommend.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF YEARS</th>
<th>COURSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>four or more</td>
<td>grammar, composition, literature, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>three or more</td>
<td>algebra I and higher—does not include general math, business math, or consumer math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Sciences</td>
<td>three or more</td>
<td>earth science, biology, chemistry, physics, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>three or more</td>
<td>history, economics, geography, civics, psychology, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Courses</td>
<td>two or more years</td>
<td>foreign language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>one or more year</td>
<td>visual arts, music, theater, drama, dance, computer science, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FACT**

Studies show that the more math courses students take in high school, the more likely they are to graduate from college.4


**Try it**

Now it's your turn to use what you've learned.

**Turn to page 21**
GETTING INVOLVED

When it comes time to apply for college, you should be able to show that you’ve been involved with activities outside of your regular school day. This way, a college can see what you can add to their campus outside of the classroom. Don’t wait until senior year to get started—colleges will become suspicious that you simply got involved to make your applications stronger.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>How to Get Involved</th>
<th>What It Shows About You</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY SERVICE</td>
<td>• Join your school’s community service club</td>
<td>Service work shows colleges that you feel a duty to give back to your community. It shows that you care about leaving your world a better place than you found it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Get involved with service work at your place of worship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Find a cause you’re committed to (like ending animal cruelty) and Google ways to get involved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERNSHIPS/Jobs</td>
<td>• Ask your guidance counselor (or career counselor) for information on internships or jobs that suit your interests</td>
<td>Holding down a job shows colleges that you are consistent, mature, and responsible, particularly if the money from your job goes to help support your family. Securing an internship in an area of interest to you will show colleges you are dedicated to reaching your career goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Draft a résumé and take it to local businesses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Search the web and ask friends and family for recommendations of businesses who hire teens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BECOME A LEADER OF A CLUB/TEAM</td>
<td>• Pay attention to your school building. Lots of times, clubs and teams post flyers about try-outs and meetings, but if you don’t keep your eyes peeled, you’ll miss them.</td>
<td>Joining clubs and teams early in high school gives you time to make your mark and work your way up to leadership/captaincy positions by junior or senior year. Holding a leadership position shows that you are responsible, you get along well with your peers, and you are committed. Founding and growing a club shows initiative, dedication, and perseverance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ask your teachers, coaches, and counselors about available clubs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If you don’t see a club you want to join, ask a teacher to sponsor you in founding a new club.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEVELOP A TALENT YOU’RE GOOD AT</td>
<td>• Ask your guidance counselor for summer enrichment opportunities in a certain skill area.</td>
<td>If you are a budding author or a first-rate flute player, don’t keep these skills to yourself. Finding groups in your community to join and participating in a summer enrichment program will show schools you are serious and passionate about developing your talents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• See if there are groups at your school devoted to developing your specific skill.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Every summer, seniors meet with their mentor and me, as their college advisor, to reflect on their two and a half years participating in Summer Search, a leadership development program providing students with year-round mentoring, life-changing summer experiences, college advising, and a lasting support network. Ninety-one percent of these low-income students head to college each fall, and much of their courage and willingness to take this step is emboldened by the experiences of their summer trips.

During a recent meeting, one senior told me that he never thought he would go to college. He assumed he would work to provide for his siblings; a responsibility that he shouldered from a very young age. His proudest reflection, aside from his college destination, was his recent choice to initiate a family meeting to talk with his siblings about their family’s dynamics and history. He was, in effect, passing on responsibility in a thoughtfully mature way, which freed him to find comfort in leaving home for college soon.

We spoke about his first summer wilderness trip and the culminating hike when each student in the group was offered a choice, poetically the “hard road” or the “easy road.” He took the “hard road.” His second summer trip was an academic program. He fell in love with architecture and was able to experience living with a variety of peers on a college campus. Both experiences, holistically combined with Summer Search mentoring, transformed the trajectory of his life.

Summer experiential programs contribute to student success by providing an opportunity to take healthy risks and experience unfamiliar settings. Students learn to navigate social challenges as these summer experiences often consist of more wealthy, less diverse students, an experience that can be both alienating and intimidating. The courage it takes to be vulnerable in these situations is what defines their immense personal growth. Students return home with new confidence and broader options. They and their families begin to bridge the dramatic distances between college and home life.

Combined with thoughtful mentoring and best possible preparation to ensure success, summer experiences offer students practice for challenges similar to those they will face on campus. In doing so, students develop skills to be resilient leaders and voices in college, their communities and beyond.

TIPS for Finding a Summer Experience

Summer Search runs offices in Boston, New York City, North San Francisco Bay, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle, and Silicon Valley. If you’re a student in one these cities, visit www.summersearch.org for more information.

If not, here are a few tips for researching and finding the best summer program for you:

1. **Start early.** Many programs require an application and have a limited number of spaces available, so the earlier you start the more options you’ll have.

2. **Check local colleges and universities.** Many schools offer pre-college initiatives over the summer that give you a chance to preview the school while exploring your academic interests.

3. **Ask your counselor or mentor.** Counselors, community leaders, or mentors may be able to point you to local programs tailored specifically to high school students.

4. **Search online.** Tailor your search to the type of program you are interested in, and the geographic location where you are looking to spend your summer.

5. **Ask for financial aid.** Summer experiential programs cost money, but many will offer financial assistance and scholarships to those who need it. Just ask!
You’ve just made it through a year of high school. So, what are your plans for this summer? What about going to college? Every summer there are programs held at college campuses across the country. They range by various interests, activities, and academic areas. Some are science programs, while others enhance artistic ability or musicality, but all of them are right at your fingertips.

So, now you might be thinking, how can I afford to go to a summer program if I don’t have the money? Many summer programs such as MITES (Minority Introduction to Engineering and Science) and QuestBridge affiliated summer programs offer full scholarships for all students accepted into their programs. You could attend a program the summer following your junior or even sophomore year of high school for free!

While these programs may not sound like the most exciting thing to do over your summer, let me share my experience with you.

As a high school junior, I applied to the MITES program on the campus of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). It is a seven week program in Science and Engineering that is aimed towards helping disadvantaged minorities and/or students from low-income backgrounds excel in the field of science. While at MIT, I was given the chance to complete research in genomics at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard. My research team dealt with Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms in genetic disorders such as Cystic Fibrosis and early onset Breast Cancer. Prior to the summer, I had no idea what that even meant!

Besides doing work and taking courses, I also explored the city of Boston on weekends, went to theme parks, dances, and dinners. I spent that summer at MIT living on my own and learned how to balance my time. I got a chance to experience what college might be like before actually getting into college.

My point is not that all of you should apply to the MITES program, but rather that you should consider finding out more information about summer programs like MITES. Summer programs provide you with opportunities to discover what it’s like to be in a college setting prior to actually applying to or attending college. Summer programs also offer high school students an edge in the college admissions process. They are looked highly upon, because many of them are a lot of work, and prove your dedication and skill. Completing a program successfully makes you stand out from amongst thousands of high school college applicants who didn’t take the opportunity to explore, learn, or take their summer seriously. Most are only a few weeks long, so you will still have time to be home and relax with friends before school starts!

So before you turn away an application to spend your summer away studying, consider how it might change your life, the new adventures you might be able to take, and the people you may meet. Never turn down an opportunity, because they are just that, something that you either take or leave, but ultimately can never be replaced!
1.2 SETTING STRONG GOALS

HAVE A GOAL-ORIENTED MINDSET

Alessis Montes
College: University of Rochester
Hometown: National City, CA

Three years ago, I struggled to decide which colleges I wanted to apply to. There was no doubt in my mind that I would make my goal of attending college a reality. The question was: where would I apply? As I cracked down on my search and shared my tentative choices with others, a pattern revealed itself. After reading my list of potential schools, one of my teachers declared, “You’re undervaluing yourself.”

I heard similar statements from everyone who saw my list. I didn’t understand what they meant. “I don’t think you realize what you have to offer to these schools,” my teacher explained. “They want kids like you. You need to sell yourself efficiently. You have bargaining power through your diversity, so don’t be afraid to reach for the stars.”

What my teacher meant was that often times, diverse students don’t realize how much colleges value their unique backgrounds and how committed they are to helping first generation and low-income students succeed on their campuses. But what he didn’t understand at the time was that this “bargaining power” he spoke of (my low-income status, race, and sexual orientation) was something that I truly saw as a pure disadvantage to my life. The fact that I was poor wasn’t a “bargaining power” to me, it was a circumstance that had brought me to feel sorry for myself because of how society perceived people like me. How was I supposed to understand that colleges viewed these same traits as positive aspects that would help bring diversity to their campuses?

Through some soul-searching and meditation, I learned that we create our own realities. If we set goals for ourselves and see ourselves achieving them, then we will. If we undervalue ourselves and set the bar low, we will never reach higher. As diverse students, we are vulnerable to underestimating our capabilities when we are constantly told, for example, that “Latinos, African-American, and other minority groups are less likely to graduate high school.” We must be able to create and honor our own realities and acknowledge that existing perceptions created by others may not be correct. This is not to say that systems of inequality do not exist, simply that we as diverse students all have the choice to counter these systems with goal-oriented thinking and view ourselves not as inferior, but as limitless beings.

Fortunately, there are people and organizations (like Center for Student Opportunity and I’m First!) whose sole mission is to challenge and alter our cultural realities to make them fair and equal for those who are systematically disadvantaged because of race, income status, sex, etc. When I realized my potential was quite literally limitless if I refused to accept to the cultural stigmas that were placed upon me for being poor or gay, I was able to allow myself to dream bigger. I was able to accept that I was worthy of attending a prestigious Ivy League school if I chose to do so. In essence, I was able to have a goal-oriented mindset in which I no longer undervalued myself and my merits, but instead set realistic and ambitious goals.

Set goals for you and you only. Don’t underestimate yourself by believing in someone else’s perception of who you are and who you will be. Instead, set goals tailored around you and your very own reality.

“I had goals set for first semester and accomplished them. However, just because I’ve done this well doesn’t mean I can take a break or not try as hard. I will remember everything I’ve done in the past, set goals like I did last semester to achieve a greater future. This is just the beginning.”

– Reminiscing for a Better Future

ON THE SPOT: Have you ever felt as though your potential was being undervalued? What did you do in that situation?

ALEXIS MONTES is an I’m First scholarship winner. Alexis shares his college experiences and offers advice on the I’m First student blog. Visit www.imfirst.org to follow the student blog, research and connect with colleges, ask questions and get answers, and have the chance to be a future scholarship winner and student blogger yourself.
Learning to Walk: Effective Goal Setting

Ever heard the expression “you can’t learn to walk until you learn how to crawl”? This idiom stresses the necessity of setting short-term goals to help you achieve your long-term goals. We all have big dreams. Maybe yours is to become a doctor, or an engineer, or a politician. No one becomes these things overnight. Ask any lawyer or scientist how they got to where they are today and they’ll tell you it took a lot of hard work and discipline.

Short-term goals are tasks we set ourselves to accomplish in a small amount of time, such as one week or one month. Long-term goals are the ambitions that drive and shape our lives—the colleges we want to graduate from, the careers we want to have. But having a long-term goal without having short-term goals to support it is like trying to build a bridge in midair: our goals can’t stand without positive foundational habits to support them.

Margarita is a high school senior who is aspiring to become a newspaper journalist. In order to achieve this long-term goal, she set short-term goals for herself:

- **Daily**
  - Finish all assigned homework
  - Read three newspaper articles
  - Spend one hour in Spanish tutoring after school

- **Weekly**
  - Research two colleges
  - Write one article for the student paper
  - Spend five hours per week studying for the SAT

- **1 year**
  - Maintain honor roll grades
  - Get accepted to a school with a well-known journalism program
  - Obtain an internship at a local newspaper

- **5 year**
  - Graduate from college with a Bachelor’s degree in Journalism
  - Become editor for my college newspaper
  - Study abroad to become bilingual in English and Spanish

- **10 year**
  - Become a journalist at a leading global newspaper

Without finishing her homework, Margarita could not become an honor roll student. Without being an honor roll student, she might be able to get into a competitive school to study journalism. And without studying journalism in college, she might not be able to get a job as a reporter once she graduates.

The road to reaching your goals, like Margarita’s, begins now. If you wait until tomorrow to begin reaching for them, you might just find it’s too late.

Now it’s your turn to use what you’ve learned. **Turn to page 22**
L.O.V.E. YOUR PARENTS

As I look back on my first year in college, I realize I’m at the halfway point. I’m grateful for the opportunity, but more importantly, I’m grateful for L.O.V.E. The month of February gives me a chance to express my love for those who have been in my corner. February is also a chance to thank those who have my back through whatever and whenever. That would be my parents.

We often take our parents for granted. I realize some may have grandparents or other family members who substitute as their parents. I just want to show some love to my parents because I realize how critical their assistance has been in my life up to this point.

I am pursuing higher learning because I want to achieve a level of success in life which will allow me to have my best life. The main reason I’m here today is because of the values instilled in me by my parents. My parents ensured I was in the right programs and schools in order to position myself for college. I could not have done this alone.

So, it is with love that I write this for them. L is for the love my parents have consistently given me through the years. O is for my continuous effort to obey their rules, advice, and guidance as they share their personal experiences with me. V is for the value of all that love and support – it’s priceless and I value them to the highest. And finally, E is because I encourage them to continue to be a part of my life even though I’m away from home. I call my mom all the time to ask her for advice and direction. I realize that I still need them in my life – now, more than ever.

As you’re preparing for college, please never forget what matters most: the L. O. V. E. you share with your parents – it’s invaluable and the best thing in life!

When I was younger, I had aspirations to attend the University of Virginia. Despite not having a strong college-going culture in my hometown, opportunities existed for me to accomplish my goals.

Every semester during high school, I signed up for classes that challenged me. I did not always get straight A’s, but I did gain skills that prepared me for college. I was not the valedictorian of my high school class, but I was a risk taker.

My parents and I did not understand all of the specifics about applying to college since I was first in our family to do so. I took a personal risk and asked people for advice about the college application process. Asking for help wasn’t a sign of weakness, but rather the most important step in following my dream of being accepted at the University of Virginia.

Jeremy Harris
College: University of Missouri
Hometown: Chicago, IL

Jeremy Harris is an I’m First scholarship winner. Jeremy shares his college experiences and offers advice on the I’m First student blog.

Visit www.imfirst.org to follow the student blog, research and connect with colleges, ask questions and get answers, and have the chance to be a future scholarship winner and student blogger yourself!
Here are a few people who helped me throughout my college journey.

- **My English teacher** was the best writer I knew, and she helped me to organize my thoughts. I felt very confident in the essays I submitted with my college applications.

- **An older cousin** helped me craft a résumé, and it paid off big time! High school activities demonstrated my capacity for leadership and interests beyond academics.

- **My parents** didn’t understand how to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) but with the help of my guidance counselor, we completed it well before the deadline.

As a high school student, you are surrounded by teachers, college counselors, family members and friends who want you to become successful. They will do everything they can to help you reach your goals.

It is hard to admit when you need help, but you have to be brave and take the first step to find people who have the answers you need. Without asking for help, I never would have accomplished my goal of graduating from the University of Virginia.

**BIO** Tomika Ferguson is a doctoral candidate and 21st Century Scholarship Covenant Program Coordinator at Indiana University-Bloomington. Previously, she was an adviser with the National College Advising Corp and an intern with Center for Student Opportunity.
I’m First Scholarship winners are first-generation college students who blog about their college experiences and offer advice on www.imfirst.org

**SOS: SEEK OUT SUPPORT**

“Being a first-generation college student, it is imperative that I seek guidance, branch out to grasp what I need to succeed in my environment. I’ve realized that it is true that everyone needs someone in their corner.”

— Second Semester Freshman: Through the Storm

“ASK, ASK, ASK! Don’t be afraid to ask questions! You may think that you’ll look dumb because your classmates seem to know what they’re doing or where they’re headed. But, you’ll only hurt yourself by not getting the information you need.”

— Dumb Questions?

“There are many students out there who think they can’t come to college because of their financial situations, because of their problems; I used to be one of those students. I read [I’m First student blogger] Jesse Sanchez’s success story. It made me strive to go to college, to be successful in life, and to set an example for my community and my family.”

— On the 12th Day of Christmas, CSO Gave to Me...Involvement in My University

“I expressed my need for financial aid to my school’s guidance counselors and school faculty. Many of them gave me advice to find scholarships and some even knew of some scholarships I could apply for.”

— Scholarships Are Key

“Not having a mentor can leave you without a sense of direction—you need someone there to go to for advice, to keep you motivated, and to help you out in times of need. It is very important to find this person in your life early on so they can help you make the right decisions from the beginning.”

— Got Mentors?
Community and Virtual Supports

Feeling overwhelmed by the prospect of going to college? You’re not alone. Fortunately, there are resources in your community and online to help you in your pursuit of college.

I’m First www.imfirst.org

Along with this Guide, I’m First is building an online community offering support, advice, and information to aspiring first-generation college students and their supporters.

At I’m First, you can find stories from first-generation college students and graduates, follow a first-generation college student blog, research and connect with colleges that care about recruiting and helping first-generation college students to succeed on their campuses, and find answers to your questions about college.

I’m First is also home to a national directory of community-based organizations, college access programs, and charter schools that support first-generation college students that is accessible to college and supporter users.

If you feel like you need more help in your pursuit of college, seek out a support program in your community. Many communities have programs and organizations that assist students and families in planning for college. While these programs come in all different shapes and sizes, most good ones offer one-on-one college counseling, assistance filling out the necessary financial aid forms, mentorship, academic tutoring, college visits, scholarships, parental support groups and internship opportunities.

Here are some online resources to help you find support in your community:

KnowHow2GO www.knowhow2go.org

The “Find Help” page offers a searchable map to help you connect with local resources.

The National College Access Program Directory
www.collegeaccess.org/accessprogramdirectory

A searchable online set of profiles of college access programs across the United States that help underserved students prepare, plan and pay for college developed by the National College Access Network (NCAN) and the Pathways to College Network (PCN)

National Partnership for Educational Access (NPEA)
www.educational-access.org

There are over 260 organizations across 34 states that comprise NPEA’s membership. These organizations all serve underrepresented students with academic preparation, placement services and counseling, and ongoing support to ensure enrollment at and graduation from four-year colleges.

Directory of TRIO and GEAR UP Programs
www.coenet.us

Check out the directory of TRIO and GEAR UP programs hosted by the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE). COE works in conjunction with colleges, universities, and agencies that host TRIO Programs to help low-income students enter college and graduate.
HOW TO Use Your High School Counselor  

By Mary Lee Hoganson

School counselors are one of the best sources of support for college-bound students. Whatever grade you are in, now is the time to start helping your counselor get to know you and your college dreams.

Introduce yourself and state clearly that it is your definite goal to attend college. Let your counselor know that, regardless of your test scores or grades to date, you are highly motivated.

Also, make sure to tell your counselor about yourself: your interests, activities, college and career goals and family background — including what your parents do and whether or not anyone in your family has attended college. With this initial meeting as a good starting point, your counselor can help you plot a successful course for college.

Top 10 items to cover with your counselor:

1) Plan classes that will prepare you for college.
2) Review your academic record and suggest areas that need improvement.
3) Identify the questions you should be asking, like: Do I want to stay near home? Does the college have my major? How important is size?
4) Get information about specific colleges and universities.
5) Identify opportunities like college fairs, weekend or summer programs on college campuses (often free for first-generation or low-income students), internships, or community college classes open to high school students.
6) Register for college admission tests and get fee waivers if your family can’t afford to pay for tests.
7) Write a letter of recommendation to colleges or universities.
8) Complete and submit college applications carefully and on time and ask colleges to waive application fees.
9) Figure out how to pay for college.
10) Compare offers of admission and financial aid from all of your colleges.

There are a few other very important things to remember about working with your school counselor:

- Most school counselors have many, many students who they want to help. So make appointments early, show up on time and submit forms that require counselor completion well in advance of due dates.
- Make backup copies of everything you mail or give to your counselor.
- Make sure that you keep your counselor “in the loop” in terms of what you are hearing from colleges. If there are any problems which arise, your counselor can act as your direct advocate with colleges.
- If you think it would be helpful, try to schedule a meeting with your counselor AND your parent(s). There are parts of the college process for which you will need a lot of help from them, such as completing the financial aid applications.
- Be sure to thank your counselor for assistance given. When you have made it successfully through the college selection and admission process, thank your counselor with a handwritten note (as well as any teachers who helped).

BIO Mary Lee Hoganson has over 35 years experience as a high school counselor, 25 of those years focused on college counseling. She served as President of the National Association for College Admission Counseling in 2007.
Get the Conversation Started!

Planning for college isn’t something you do by yourself—it’s really a team effort. But it’s up to you to put together your team. And that means talking to the adults in your life who can help—from your parents, guardian, or other family members to your teachers, coaches, guidance counselor, or religious leader.

YOUR PARENTS

The best way to communicate with parents, or any adult, is to keep talking to them, no matter what. Strong relationships really depend on keeping the lines of communication open. Here are some ways to approach your parents (or any adult) with a specific topic:

- **Plan what to say.** Think over what you want to say in advance, and write down the two or three most important points you want to make.

- **Be direct.** Let them know directly that there’s something you’d like to discuss. Be sure you have their full attention and be direct in your language. Say, “There’s something important I want to talk to you about” instead of “Hey, when you have a moment I’d like to talk.”
Pick a good time to talk.

Try to approach them at a time when you know they’ll be less busy and more able to focus on you. You may even want to ask if they could talk at a particular time so that you know you have their attention.

Write it down first.

Some people find it easier to put their ideas into a letter. Let the other person read it and then have your discussion.

Disagree without disrespect.

Parents are only human, and they can feel offended when their views are challenged. Using respectful language and behavior is important. Resist the temptation to use sarcasm, yell, or put down your parents and you’ll have a much better chance of getting what you want.

OTHER ADULTS

No matter how good your relationship is with your parents or guardian, there will be times when you’ll feel more comfortable confiding in other adults. Even if you’d rather talk to friends about certain things, an adult may have more experience, be able to contact the right person, or find the best resources to get help.

Ask for their word.

Most adults will keep your conversations confidential if you ask them to, unless they fear that your health or well-being may be in danger.

Other adults.

Other adults who may be able to help include teachers, your school guidance counselor, or other family members such as an aunt, uncle, or older sibling. Parents of a close friend may also be able to help.

Spiritual leaders.

If you’re involved in a church group or belong to a synagogue or mosque, your spiritual or youth group leader may also be a good source of advice.

Extracurricular leaders.

If you’re involved in an extracurricular activity, such as sports or drama, you may feel close enough to your coach or advisor to ask him or her about more personal stuff.

Quiz

Parents are always the best people to talk about preparing for college.

FALSE

If your parents didn’t go to college, chances are there’s an adult in your life who would be happy to help you prepare for college.
YOUR TEACHERS

OK, so it may be hard to think of your teachers as real people. But they eat pizza, watch movies, and enjoy sports on the weekends just like you. And they know about more than just their subject matter. Given the chance they can offer you the kind of advice and support that might change your life forever. Here’s how to build a connection:

**Show some interest.**
Obviously, your teachers are really interested in their subjects. Showing the teacher that you care—even if you’re not a math whiz or fluent in French—sends the message that you are a dedicated student.

**Schedule a conference.**
Schedule a private conference during a teacher’s free period to get extra help, ask questions, inquire about a career in the subject, or talk about your progress in class. You may be surprised to learn that your teacher is a bit more relaxed one-on-one than when lecturing in front of the whole class.

**Be yourself.**
Teachers can sense when your only motivation for trying to be a “favorite student” is to get special treatment or a good grade. Just be yourself and forget about trying to show off.

**Deal with study problems.**
If you find a subject hard, talk to your teacher right away about extra tutoring. If you find it boring, talk to your teacher about ways to see the subject in a different light. For example, you may hate math, but learning how to calculate averages and percentages can help you in everything from sports to leaving a tip.

**Show some respect.**
Just as teachers need to be fair and treat everyone equally, students have responsibilities too. You don’t have to like your teacher or agree with what he or she says, but it is necessary to be polite.
Free Write: Why Is College for Me?

You just read some of the reasons that college is an important step for all students. Take a minute to think about what priorities and goals are important to you personally. Why is college important for you in particular? As you write, you may want to think about:

• How will going to college affect your future career path?
• How will going to college impact your family?
• What might you be exposed to in college (academically and socially) that will help you grow as a person?
In the following pages, you’ll find comprehensive profiles of colleges and universities committed to serving and supporting first-generation college students on their campus and in their community.

The section is organized by state, with schools presented alphabetically within each state. You are encouraged to continue your research and to connect with the colleges and universities profiled here at www.imfirst.org—Center for Student Opportunity’s online community offering support, advice, and encouragement to the students who will be among the first in their families to attend and complete college.

How Can I Use the College Profile?

Think of the college profile as a snapshot. It will provide you with data which can help you get a feel for who attends the school, what academics are like there, how much it costs, and what types of students get accepted. It will also give you an overview of the school’s mission and history and the types of supports you can expect to receive on campus. What it can’t tell you is how it actually feels to be on the college campus and how well you’ll fit in. To find out those things, you’ll need to dive deeper into the college search.

Criteria for Inclusion

The colleges and universities profiled here do not reflect each and every—or the only—schools that serve first-generation college students. Still, the colleges and universities that are featured exemplify many of the four-year colleges and universities committed to serving and supporting these students and are profiled in light of the unique programs and opportunities they offer.

Profiled colleges and universities partner with Center for Student Opportunity to build awareness of and improve their institution’s efforts on behalf of first-generation college students.

Compiling the College Profiles

The information and data found in the college profiles is developed by Center for Student Opportunity staff in collaboration with and approved by the schools themselves. Because of this close editorial process, we believe the information presented to be accurate and up-to-date. If a college did not supply a certain piece of data requested, the information either does not appear or is marked as “n/a” for “not available.” We still encourage you to check directly with schools to verify important information on programs, deadlines, tuition and fees, and other data.

What’s Included in Each Profile?

Page 35 gives a detailed explanation of the college profile, including a breakdown of the data provided and the types of support programs outlined. In general, each profile has four parts:

1) an introduction to the school to give you a general overview;
2) descriptions of campus programs which serve first-generation college students;
3) a student quote which explains how the school benefits and supports its students;
4) fast facts which give you data on the student body, academics, affordability, and admissions.

Additionally, each school supplies its contact information in the upper right-hand corner.

For more detailed information ‘Explaining the College Profile’ see page 35

Note that the profiles use many college access terms which can be confusing to students just starting their search. If you are not yet familiar with what a term means, look it up in the glossary starting on page 335!
Northern Arizona University

With nationally-ranked undergraduate and graduate programs, Northern Arizona University (NAU) delivers a rigorous, learner-centered education in multiple places, including Flagstaff, online, and at more than 30 statewide locations. Founded in 1899, the university promotes a learning community where students are prepared to contribute to the social, economic, and environmental needs of a changing world. From its inception, NAU has implemented innovative and accountable teaching practices, including the effective use of technology. With nearly 22,500 undergraduate and graduate students from 50 states and 70 countries, students become active citizens, leaders, and problem solvers with an understanding of global issues.

Pre-College Prep & Outreach Educational Talent Search (ETS)
Talent Search is a year round pre-college program that provides services to low income and potential first generation middle and high school students in Northern Arizona. Talent Search’s goals are to increase educational and career awareness among its participants, increase the number of students who complete high school and encourage our participants to continue and enroll in post-secondary education.

Nizhoni Academy
Nizhoni Academy is a pre-college program designed to encourage Native American students to seriously prepare for scholastic achievement in secondary and post-secondary education. The Academy emphasizes a rigorous academic discipline to provide students a clear understanding of the demands of college studies and the requirements of academic study skills necessary to be successful in college.

Upward Bound
Upward Bound is a year-round program providing educational services and college preparatory assistance to Northern Arizona high school students who attend either Williams, Coconino, Hopi or Winslow high schools. There is also a 5-week summer academy held every year.

First-Year Experience & Transition Successful Transition and Academic Readiness (STAR)
The STAR program offers selected new freshmen an innovative and exciting way to begin their higher education at the university. STAR assists students with making the important transition from high school to college. STAR students will earn six university credit hours, live in the STAR residence hall, develop leadership skills through Club STAR, experience campus life and connect with other new students.

Academic Advising & Support Student Support Services
The Student Support Services (SSS) program assists eligible students in adjusting to campus life and the rigors of academic study. Throughout participation in the SSS program, students will receive free individual mentoring from our staff members, who can guide them in their transition to the university and Flagstaff community. Students also attend educational workshops, cultural activities, community service projects, and retreats. Freshmen and sophomores can earn grant money (up to $500 per semester) after a full semester of participation in our program.

“The STAR program was very beneficial because it not only helped me adjust to the college lifestyle, but it also taught me how to become more of an independent person and experience life on my own. During STAR, I met such a diverse group of people; many of which became some of my closest friends. I’m so happy that I was a part of the program!”

~ Kristina R. ’12
Gilbert, AZ

Northern Arizona University Undergraduate Admissions
P.O. Box 4084
Flagstaff, AZ 86011
Ph: (888) 628-2968
admissions@nau.edu
www.nau.edu

Fast Facts

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<th>STUDENT DIVERSITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% male/female</td>
<td>42/58</td>
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<tr>
<td>% first-generation college</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>% American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
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<th>STUDENT SUCCESS</th>
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<tr>
<td>% first-to-second year retention</td>
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<td>% six-year graduation</td>
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<tr>
<td>% six-year graduation for underrepresented minority groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>% freshmen who live on campus</td>
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<tr>
<td>% undergraduates who live on campus</td>
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<tr>
<td>full-time faculty</td>
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<td>student-faculty ratio</td>
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<th>Popular majors</th>
<th>Elementary Education, Hotel and Restaurant Management, Biology, Nursing, Management</th>
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<td>Multicultural student clubs and organizations</td>
<td>Black Student Union, Hispanic Honor Society, MECHA-Native Americans United, National Society of Minorities in Hospitality, Native American Business Association, American Indian Science and Engineering Society, Club STAR</td>
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AFFORDABILITY

Cost of Attendance

| tuition | $20,364 or in-state: $8,008 |
| room and board | $8,474 |

Financial Aid

| total institutional scholarships/grants | $90,180,087 |
| % of students with financial need | 62 |
| % of students with need awarded any financial aid | 97 |
| % of students with need awarded any need-based scholarship or grant aid | 70 |
| % of students with need whose need was fully met | 9 |
| % Pell Grant recipients among freshmen | 31 |
| average aid package | $10,057 |
| average student loan debt upon graduation | $20,602 |

ADMISSIONS

| # of applicants | 31,995 |
| % admitted | 65 |
| SAT Critical Reading | 470-590 |
| SAT Math | 480-590 |
| SAT Writing | 460-570 |
| ACT Composite | 23 |
| SAT/ACT optional | n/a |
| average HS GPA | 3.40 |

DEADLINES

| regular application closing date | 3/1 |
| early decision plan | n/a |
| application closing date | n/a |
| early action plan | n/a |
| application closing date | n/a |
| application fee | $25 |
| application fee online | $25 |
| fee waiver for applicants with financial need | yes |
Founded in 1891, California Institute of Technology has a long history of tackling the most challenging, fundamental problems in science and technology. With world-class scholars as their faculty mentors and access to incredible research facilities, students can prepare to become leaders in the scientific community. As part of a deliberately small undergraduate population of just under 1,000 students are surrounded by unusually talented classmates with whom they collaborate regularly. Caltech has a unique culture that combines a passion for innovation and intense intellectual curiosity with a tradition of practical jokes and pranks for which the school is widely renowned. At Caltech, it's relatively easy for one to find their niche and develop strong working relationships with both their professors and their fellow students.

**Pre-College Summer Experience**  **Leadership Education and Development (LEAD)**

Leadership Education and Development is an intense summer program for high school students of color with outstanding academic performance and demonstrated leadership skills. The mission of LEAD is to provide an intense curriculum to lay the foundation for an increase in the number and quality of minority students interested in careers in engineering and computer science.

**Scholarship & Financial Aid**  **QuestBridge Partner**

QuestBridge is a non-profit program that links bright and motivated low-income students with educational and scholarship opportunities at some of the nation’s most selective colleges and universities. QuestBridge is the provider of the National College Match Program and the College Prep Scholarship. Caltech partnered with QuestBridge to connect and provide access to high-achieving low-income students who are looking for exceptional science, math and engineering undergraduate experiences.

**Summer Bridge & Orientation**  **Freshman Summer Research Institute (FSRI)**

Incoming freshmen may participate in the FSRI program, designed to enhance the transition from high school to a research-based education and to assist students in developing learning behaviors that will help them excel at Caltech. Participants conduct research with mentors, write research papers and give professional research talks.

**Student Life & Support**  **Caltech Center for Diversity (CCD)**

The mission of the Caltech Center for Diversity is to provide programming and support for campus activities that promote the acceptance and inclusion of underserved minority groups on campus. The CCD offers proactive academic monitoring with appropriate follow-up, advising, referrals, graduate school guidance, and activities to foster a sense of community among underrepresented groups on campus. The CCD also holds social events for students such as lunches, Midnight Study Breaks, Welcome Back BBQ and Spring Banquet.

"You have to show that you are passionate about math and science, that you want to get out there and try new things and collaborate and push the envelope."

– Teri J., ’12
El Paso, TX

**Fast Facts**

**STUDENT DIVERSITY**

- # undergraduates: 978
- % male/female: 61/39
- % first-generation college: n/a
- % American Indian or Alaskan Native: <1
- % Asian: 30
- % Black or African American: 1
- % Hispanic/Latino: 8
- % Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: <1
- % White: 35
- % two or more races: 3
- % race and/or ethnicity unknown: <1
- % International/nonresident: 12

**STUDENT SUCCESS**

- % first-year to second-year retention: 96
- % six-year graduation: 92
- % six-year graduation for underrepresented minority groups: n/a
- % freshmen who live on campus: 24
- % undergraduates who live on campus: 44
- full-time faculty: 322
- full-time minority faculty: 57
- student-faculty ratio: 3:1

**Popular majors**

Engineering, Physical Sciences, Computer and Information Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics, Biological/Life Sciences

**Multicultural student clubs and organizations**

Caltech Center for Diversity, Black Students at Caltech, Caltech Latino Association of Students in Engineering and Sciences, The Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, The National Society of Black Engineers, The American Indian Science and Engineering Society, Melton Mays Undergraduate Fellowship

**AFFORDABILITY**

Cost of Attendance

- tuition: $39,990
- required fees: $1,548
- room and board: $7,035

Financial Aid

- total institutional scholarships/grants: $16,071,323
- % of students with financial need: 52
- % of students with need awarded any financial aid: 100
- % of students with need awarded any need-based scholarship or grant aid: 52
- % of students with need whose need was fully met: n/a
- Pell Grant recipients among freshmen: n/a
- average aid package: $38,756
- average student loan debt upon graduation: $18,090

**ADMISSIONS**

- # of applicants: 5,537
- % admitted: 10
- SAT Critical Reading: 720-780
- SAT Math: 770-800
- SAT Writing: 730-800
- ACT Composite: 34
- SAT/ACT optional: n/a
- average HS GPA: n/a

**DEADLINES**

- regular application closing date: 1/3
- early decision plan: n/a
- application closing date: n/a
- early action plan: yes
- application fee: $75
- application fee online: $75
- fee waiver for applicants with financial need: yes