

Understanding the application process



1. Common App vs. COA app

There are two ways that you can apply to COA: either through the [Common App](#) or the [COA application](#). We have no preference and review both applications equally, so it is completely up to you. If you are planning on applying to several schools, you may want to use the Common App as it can streamline the application process. We do not have an application fee, so both options are free to submit.

2. Early decision, early action, and regular decision

You can apply to COA Early Decision (ED), Early Action (EA), or Regular Decision (RD) and we have [four rounds of application deadlines](#). If you apply Early Decision I or II (there are two rounds—one in November and one in January) or Early Action, you will have an earlier application deadline and receive an earlier decision notification. The application round you choose will not affect your financial aid package.

Early Decision (ED) is binding and you will sign an agreement with your application committing to attend COA if accepted. Therefore it only makes sense to apply Early Decision if COA is your top choice. The primary benefit of applying ED is that you will receive notification of our admission decision much earlier than if you apply Regular Decision, and if admitted, you get to be done with college applications!

Early Action (EA) is a nonbinding application round that allows you to get a jump on the college admissions process—you apply to college early and receive an early response. EA functions like Regular Decision in that you have until May 1st, the national decision deadline, to choose which college you will attend, but EA can allow you to hear from your top schools first and then decide whether you want to submit any Regular Decision applications later.

Regular Decision (RD) applications are reviewed and decisions are made after both rounds of Early Decision and Early Action applications have been completed. If you apply Regular Decision (RD), you will hear from all of the schools you are applying to around the same time in the spring and will need to commit to one by May 1st.

3. Recommendation letters

As part of your application, we ask for two teacher recommendations and a counselor recommendation. For teacher recommendations, we love to hear from teachers who know you well and can really speak to you as a student. The counselor recommendation should be a letter from your school's college counselor. Some counselors will submit a school report and short student evaluation rather than a full letter. If you are a homeschooled student or have a unique educational circumstance, check out our [alternative recommendation options](#).

4. FERPA

When you submit your request to your recommenders, you will be asked if you are willing to waive your right to read your recommendation letters (it may be referred to as “FERPA” which stands for the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#)). It can sound intimidating, but this is generally expected as it tells colleges that you did not influence or edit your recommendations. If you do not waive FERPA, your recommendation letters may be interpreted by admission readers as less honest and genuine.

5. Essays

A personal essay is a standard part of a college application and is a way for colleges to get to know you. There are several prompts that you can choose to work from, but your essay should say something about you, rather than being an unrelated story or piece of fiction. COA also asks for [two supplemental essays](#) with prompts that help us understand why you would like to attend COA and what about your academic experience might not be evident from your transcript (whether it is an inspirational experience or a challenge you've faced). We really value the supplemental essays as a way to get to know you better and learn why COA may be a good fit for you. Feel free to have friends, family, and teachers review your essays before submission for feedback, but remember that we want to hear your voice!

6. Activities

The activities section of your application tells us what you do outside of class. This can include clubs, sports, hobbies, volunteer work, jobs, or family responsibilities you have at home. We want to hear about anything that you spend time doing that adds value to your life!

7. Interview

We offer informal one-on-one [interviews](#) for applicants. These interviews are a chance for us to get to know you better and an opportunity for you to ask us questions about the college. Interviews are not required for admission and are low-pressure, but we really value the opportunity to get to know you beyond your application. Please bring any questions you have about COA, we'll be sure to leave time for them!

8. Optional portfolio

Applicants can submit a portfolio of their writing, art, music, and/or another form of expression that tells a part of their story that is not easily conveyed through a standard application. This can be compiled in a variety of formats including a PDF, website link, Dropbox, and Google Drive, and can either be submitted through the Common App or emailed to inquiry@coa.edu.

9. Financial aid

- a. For U.S. citizens: The [FAFSA \(Free Application for Federal Student Aid\)](#) is a form you will submit to all the colleges you apply to (if you want to apply for financial aid). This is one piece of your financial aid application.
 - i. To start you will need to create a Federal Student Aid ID (FSA ID), an account username and password combination for students and parents to access the FAFSA and sign the application electronically. Once you create an account, be sure to write down your FSA ID as you will need it again. To complete the FAFSA, you typically need your social security number, family tax returns (there is an IRS data retrieval option in the FAFSA to make this easier), and bank account

information. There is detailed information about how to fill out the FAFSA on the [Federal Student Aid website](#).

- ii. The FAFSA calculates your student aid index (SAI) which is how much your family is able to contribute to your tuition and fees. That amount is subtracted from a school's cost of attendance to determine your financial need. Make sure COA receives your information by entering our school code when prompted: 011385.
 - iii. You and your parent(s) or guardian(s) will need to update this application prior to each year you are enrolled in college (completed in the winter for fall enrollment).
 - iv. COA also has a [New Student Financial Aid Verification and Application](#) that you need to submit in addition to the FAFSA.
- b. Your financial aid application has the same deadline as your admission application.
 - c. We read all U.S. student applications need-blind, so financial need will not be considered as part of an admission decision.
 - d. You can find more information about the financial aid application process, including information for independent students (27 and older) and international students, on our [Apply for Aid](#) page. Please note: if you are an international student, you need to complete the Certification of Finances form, regardless of whether you are applying for financial aid (your admission application will not be reviewed until this is received).
 - e. All applicants are considered for merit scholarships based on their admission application (considering both academic strength and personal qualities). If you are awarded one of these scholarships, you will be notified with your admission decision.
 - f. Check out our page on [understanding your financial aid offer](#) to learn more about the breakdown of costs, billing, and financial aid.
 - g. Our financial aid staff knows this process can be confusing and overwhelming and they are here to help! [Feel free to reach out with any questions](#).