

College Admissions 101

Frequently Asked Questions



Covenant Christian Academy
Cumming, Georgia

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College Admissions
Frequently Asked Questions

DEAR COVENANT STUDENT:

There are many great questions in life, questions that everyone must face and ultimately answer. In our culture, one of these questions is this: "What should I do after graduating from high school?" While there are certainly other questions which outrank this one, this question is very important, for it will impact the first several years of your adult life. It is our hope that this document will help you as you work through this decision.

On the pages which follow, we will seek to provide very practical, personal answers to the questions we are most frequently asked by students and parents. You will likely have additional questions. If so, please ask, for we are here to help you. As you begin this process, please consider some wise council from the Apostle Paul:

"Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification."

– 1 Thessalonians 4:1-3a

In the passage above, the Apostle Paul teaches us a very important truth – the will of God for each of us is not hidden. Christians today often attach some degree of mysticism to the will of God, as if it is something that only a few can find, and only then through great trials and effort. Yet, the Bible actually makes it quite plain. God's will for every Christian is actually quite simple, He wants us to grow as Christians and learn to act more like Jesus. Day-after-day, week-after-week, year-after-year, God's basic will for us stays the same: He wants us to be conformed more completely into the image of His Son. Practically speaking then, this means that your college choice does not define the remainder of your life, for you can become more Christ-like regardless of what college you attend. So, as you embark upon this awesome journey, and yes, it is an awesome journey, we plead with you to keep Christ at the forefront of your plans and dreams, for life – your life – truly is about your Creator, not you.

As you ponder your future, ask yourself a few questions:

- (1) What does God want me to do with my life?
- (2) Why do I want to go to XYZ University?
- (3) If I'm accepted to XYZ University, in what ways will I be able to glorify and serve God there?

We pray that the truths you have learned while at Covenant will remain with you throughout your days. Moreover, we pray specifically that they will prove real to you in the years ahead, for our world needs a generation like yours to go out and be the hands and feet of Jesus.

May God bless you abundantly and use you mightily.

– Your Covenant Faculty

Part 1: Preparing for College

- **Does graduating from a small Christian school hurt my chances of being accepted to a large university?**

No, graduating from a small Christian school should not limit you when it comes to your post-secondary choices. In fact, we have heard from major universities that the size of a student's high school does not negatively or positively impact admission decisions. Rather, the university wants to know to what extent a student took advantage of what was offered to them.

- **I have no idea what I want to major in at college, what should I do?**

Prayerfully consider what God is calling you to do with your life. Not feeling positive about a particular major is very common among high school graduates. Do not be anxious. Rather, rest in the promise that God has purpose in your life and that the truth of 1 Thessalonians 4:1-3a applies regardless of your college major. If you know college is where you need to be directly after high school, then find a local college that meets your immediate needs and enroll. Spend a year or so studying, working, and serving. You might be surprised at the path God reveals to you during this time.

- **How many Advanced Placement classes should I take?**

There is no magic number as it pertains to the number of AP courses a student should take. While many people believe that students need five or more AP courses on their college transcript, our experience says otherwise. The general question, according to college admissions counselors that we have spoken to, is this: Did a student take advantage of what was offered to them? For example, if a school offers two AP courses and a student took both of them, then they took full advantage of what was offered to them. However, if a school offers five AP courses and a student only took one of those courses, then that student did not take advantage of what was offered to them and that decision could negatively impact their application to any number of universities.

- **Will taking AP exams help me earn credit towards college?**

Yes, it is possible to earn college credit if you score high enough on any AP exam. Generally speaking, the minimum score required for college credit is a three (3); however, keep in mind

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that colleges are NOT required to give you credit and the ultimate decision lies with the individual university. Regardless of whether you receive college credit or not, taking the exam is a helpful preparation for college-level academics.

- **I don't think I'm ready for college, are there other options?**

Yes, there are options. While many high school graduates matriculate at a college or university directly after high school, it does not mean that it is the only acceptable plan for life after high school. Many students find the military as the best option for them, while others invest in what some call a “gap year”, which implies a gap between high school and college. This “gap” can be spent in a multitude of productive ways, such as mission work or employment; regardless, the idea is that you’re actively serving God and working towards His calling upon your life.

- **My high school grades have not all been great; how will this impact my ability to go to college?**

The good news is that you are not alone. Every year students across the world realize that mistakes made early in the high school career can directly impact their future plans. Further good news: Based upon our experience, colleges often understand this when making admission decisions. This is not meant to imply that your freshman year does not matter from an academic perspective, for that is not true. Rather, we are saying that it might not necessarily cost you admission to your dream school. If you find yourself in this predicament, the only course you have is to start from this moment and do your very best. Work hard and opt for the difficult courses – do not coast through your senior year! In short, strive to show your dream school that you have learned from your mistakes and are ready to do college-level work.

Part 2: College Readiness Exams

- **What study helps are available to help me prepare for the ACT[©] or SAT[©]?**

All juniors are encouraged to take our annual ACT Test Prep course. This course is taught during the fall semester and includes eight, two-hour group sessions, the official ACT Prep Guide, and a lot of practice! The course is also helpful for SAT prep. The course reviews key concepts and addresses various strategies for taking both tests.

The following resources are helpful:

The Official ACT Prep Guide, 2016-2017. ISBN: 978-1-119-22541-6

The Official SAT Study Guide, 2016 Edition. ISBN: 978-1-457-30430-9

- **When should I first take the ACT[©] or SAT[©]?**

For most students, it is helpful to have your desired ACT / SAT score(s) by the end of the first quarter during your senior year of high school. While some students achieve this score quickly, most students find that taking either or both tests 2-3 times is necessary. That being the case, taking the test for the first time during your junior year of high school is a great idea. A great plan is to take our ACT Test Prep course in the fall of your junior year and sign up for the December administration of the ACT.

- **How do I register for the ACT[©] and SAT[©]?**

To register for the ACT, go to www.act.org and follow the registration instructions.

To register for the SAT, go to <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/> and follow the registration instructions.

- **How many times should I take the ACT[©] or SAT[©]?**

Technically speaking, you are permitted to take the ACT up to twelve (12) times and there is no limit on the number of attempts for the SAT; however, for the majority of students, taking the test more than four (4) times is not beneficial.

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- **Does it matter whether I take the ACT[®] or SAT[®]?**

In most cases it does not matter, as the majority of colleges accept scores from either test. However, it is always a good idea to check with the college(s) you are applying to so as to verify if they prefer one test over another. With the recent revision to the SAT, the two tests are more similar than ever, but some students still prefer one test over the other. If you have any doubts as to which test is best for you, it would be wise to take both and then pick the one you want to focus upon.

- **How do I know if my ACT[®]/SAT[®] score is high enough?**

The strength of your score depends heavily upon which school(s) you are applying for admission. Some colleges publish their minimal admission expectations; yet, many schools do not. Your best course is to speak with a Covenant administrator and/or guidance counselor so that we can address your situation individually. Generally speaking, a competitive ACT composite score will range from 24-27, while a score of 28-36 is exceptional and will place you in the top 10 percent of test-takers. A composite ACT score of 20-24 places you in the average range where you should be able to gain admission to many schools, but scholarship dollars may be limited.

For the SAT, an exceptional score in reading and writing is 660-800 and for math it is 680-800. A competitive score range in reading and writing is 590-650 and for math it is 610-670. An average score for reading and writing is 500-580 and for math it is 510-600.

Part 3: Dual Enrollment

- **What is the Dual Enrollment program (formerly the *Move On When Ready* program)?**

The Dual Enrollment (DE) program allows for eligible high school students to enroll in participating post-secondary institutions and earn both high school and college credits.

- **If I take college courses through the DE program, who pays for the course and textbooks?**

For students who meet the state criteria and are accepted into a participating technical college or university, the state of Georgia funds the program. Post-secondary institutions must accept the amount received from Georgia Student Finance Authority (GSFA) as full payment of tuition, mandatory or non-course related fees and books. Post-secondary institutions must provide required course books. However, textbooks remain the property of the post-secondary institution. Students are responsible for course required fees or supplies and non-course related fees.

- **Who is allowed to participate in the DE program?**

All students attending a public or private high school in the state of Georgia, or a home study program operated in accordance with OCGA 20-2-690(c). You must be approved by Covenant administration to participate and meet the admissions requirements at the post-secondary institution where you desire to take DE courses. There are no residency or citizenship requirements.

- **If I take courses through the DE program, will those courses count against my HOPE scholarship cap?**

No, courses taken within the DE program do not count against your HOPE Scholarship cap.

- **If I take courses through the DE program, will those classes impact my GPA?**

Yes, all DE courses are calculated into your high school GPA.

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- **If I take courses through the DE program, will those classes appear on my transcript?**

Yes, ALL courses taken within the DE program will appear on your high school transcript regardless of the grade you earn.

- **The DE program sounds good; but are there any aspects of the program which could be detrimental to my future?**

Yes, all students should give serious consideration to the previous two questions. While college-level courses can benefit you as a student, if you earn low grades then those grades will not only impact your high school GPA, but also your overall high school transcript, which is very important to college admissions counselors. Also, consider where you will learn the most and be best prepared for college studies in the future. Careful consideration of the potential impact should be given.

- **Where can I learn more about the DE program?**

The following website is very helpful:

<https://www.gafutures.org/hope-state-aid-programs/scholarships-grants/dual-enrollment/>

Also, if you are considering the DE program, you must meet with a Covenant administrator or guidance counselor, as registration for the program begins at the high school level.

- **I'm interested in Dual Enrollment, but I would like to take DE classes online as opposed to a college campus, is this possible?**

Yes, it is possible. For several years now, CCA has partnered with Sevenstar Academy, a leading online provider of College Preparatory and AP level courses. We have had multiple students take online AP courses such as AP Microeconomics, AP Macroeconomics, AP Art History, AP Computer Science and AP World History. Several of these students have opted for DE credit through Colorado Christian University (see below). All online courses through Sevenstar Academy must be approved by school administration.

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- I've heard that I can earn college credit through Colorado Christian University, how does that work?

Through our partnership with Sevenstar Academy, our online provider of college preparatory and AP level courses, we have an extended partnership with Colorado Christian University (CCU). For students who successfully complete an AP level course through Sevenstar Academy, the option to opt out of the AP exam and receive college credit instead exists. There is a fee involved (currently the program costs \$200, this is in addition to the cost of the course itself). For more details, please see an administrator.

- I'm not interested in Dual Enrollment - is there another way to earn credit for college courses based upon what I already know? In other words, can I test out of some college courses?

Yes, you can test out of some college classes. The College Board has a series of tests known as CLEP, or, College Level Examination Program. You can learn more here: <https://clep.collegeboard.org/register>. As of this printing, there are 33 exams spread across the areas of business, composition and literature, foreign languages, history and social sciences, science, and mathematics.

It is important to keep in mind that a student cannot register for any of these tests until they have been accepted to a post-secondary institution and have received a student number (you will need the student number during the registration process). There is a fee for each exam and the results are school-specific, meaning individual schools determine the minimum score required to earn college credit. If you receive credit for a course at one college, but later transfer to another, the second school has the right to deny the score and subsequently, the college credit.

- Which do colleges prefer, Dual Enrollment courses, such as through DE or online AP courses, a three or higher on an AP exam, or a minimum score on a CLEP test?

The DE program is relatively new, so we do not have enough data or experience to adequately answer this question. Each opportunity available has pros and cons. Students and families should carefully consider what is best for each student after receiving feedback from others.

Part 4: Applying for Admission

- **When should I start applying to colleges?**

It is a good idea to differentiate between searching for college and applying to college. Your junior year of high school is a great time to give careful consideration to schools you would be interested in attending. This is a great time to consider your calling and career path, and how those two issues coincide with various colleges. However, the best time to actually apply for admission to college(s) is during your senior year. It is imperative that you check early in your senior year with each college where you plan to apply for admission, as each school establishes their own application procedures and deadlines.

- **How many colleges should I apply to?**

Generally speaking, only apply to schools that you would actually consider attending. Each school will require an application fee, so if you know that you would never want to attend a particular school, it might be a waste your time and money to apply. That being said, the average student will likely apply to no more than five (5) colleges.

- **I'm ready to apply, where do I begin?**

There are several methods of applying to colleges.

- 1) *The most direct way to apply is to simply navigate to the school's website and follow the listed procedure for applying to their undergraduate school.*
- 2) *If you are applying to any college in the state of Georgia, public or private, you can create an account with the state through their website, www.gafutures.org and apply through the state. This is a convenient means of completing and tracking your Georgia college applications.*
- 3) *Another option which is gaining popularity is the Common Application, known simply as the "Common App". There are now nearly 700 colleges nationwide which participate in this program. More information can be found here:*

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

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- **What is the Common Application?**

See the previous question.

- **How do I send my high school transcript to the colleges I am applying to?**

There are two ways of completing this task.

- 1) *You can request CCA to prepare a certified copy of your high school transcript and forward it to the college(s) of your choice. You simply need to complete a transcript request form and turn it into the front office at CCA or your CCA guidance counselor. The form can be obtained in the front office.*
- 2) *If you are applying to a school in the state of Georgia, public or private, you can transfer the transcript through the Georgia Student Finance Commission's (GSFC) website. To do this, you must first create an account with the GSFC through their website, www.gafutures.org.*

- **I hear that many colleges are looking for more than just good grades and good test scores. What non-academic factors contribute to the college admissions process?**

This will vary from college-to-college, but there are some fundamental guidelines. We have heard from top-tier schools that admission decisions are not based solely upon grades. Rather, colleges are looking for well-rounded students who participate in extracurricular activities, community service, and demonstrate the ability to maintain a part-time job. Moreover, schools are looking for longevity, not your ability to participate in one hundred different activities. The perseverance needed to maintain participation in a singular activity speaks volumes to college admission counselors because it provides evidence to your ability to stay committed to a task even if it is difficult.

- **How important is the student essay to college admissions counselors?**

The impact of the admission essay will not only vary from school-to-school, it will vary from student-to-student. Internet research on this topic will yield a variety of answers, but the essay is important for at least two reasons. First, it is your first significant opportunity to share something about your personality and skills that isn't reflected through grades. With the essay, you get to share with colleges more about yourself and why they should accept you

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into their university. Second, it also provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate your writing skills. The essay allows you space to demonstrate logic and reasoning along with your ability to communicate your thoughts, all of which are important skills universities are seeking in new students.

The 2017-2018 Common Application Essay Prompts can be found here:

<https://www.commonapp.org/whats-appening/application-updates/common-application-announces-2017-2018-essay-prompts>

- **Is it true that some universities calculate applicant GPA's based upon different standards?**

Universities know that schools, both public and private, calculate GPA's differently. Yes, the basic calculation is the same, but schools weigh things differently. Therefore, it is common for universities to take a student's grades and filter them through their own GPA rubric. While your actual grades do not change, this process does place all applicants on a more level playing field.

- **Is there a difference between my GPA at Covenant and my HOPE Scholarship GPA?**

Yes, there is a difference between the two GPA's. Covenant operates on a 4.5 GPA scale, while public schools operate on a 4.0 scale. For HOPE Scholarship purposes, all students in Georgia, regardless of how their high school calculates their GPA, must have their GPA calculated on a 4.0 scale. The key difference is that the HOPE Scholarship GPA includes only grades earned in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science, social studies and foreign language. More information can be found here:

<https://www.gafutures.org/hope-state-aid-programs/hope-zell-miller-scholarships/hope-scholarship/eligibility/hope-gpa-calculation/>.

Part 5: Planning for College

- I often hear about students starting at a small college and then transferring to a larger school such as the University of Georgia. How feasible is this process and are there any pitfalls to avoid?

Yes, this is very common and has several positives. For example, this approach allows you to start college with a lower student-teacher ratio, which can often be very helpful. Of course, the smaller school will also likely cost less, although this is not always the case. Yet, you must be careful and make a plan. You always run the risk of some courses not transferring, so it is best to communicate with your destination school very early in the process.

- I am interested in attending a Christian university; what should I look for in a Christian university?

First, learn as much as you can about the school's beliefs. While Christians do not have to agree on every point of doctrine, if key points of disagreement exist between you and a school, it might be a good idea to look elsewhere. Second, learn as much as you can about the school culture. Is the school Christian in name and in practice? Finally, does the university offer the degree track you feel called to pursue? Christian universities can be excellent places to be challenged intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually during a vital part of your life.

- I'm thinking about attending a two-year college or a local technical university; however, I feel like this is second-best: is that the case?

Simply stated, no, it isn't second best. The key factor for every believer is to determine how you can glorify God and grow in the likeness of Christ, regardless of where you are or what you are doing. Two-year colleges and technical schools offer excellent programs which are certainly meet the needs of some students.

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- I want to go to Georgia Tech, but I want to start somewhere smaller or closer. How do I know if my first two years of college will transfer to Georgia Tech?

A great way to build a path towards Georgia Tech, or one of Georgia's other engineering programs, is to utilize the Regents' Engineering Pathways Program (REPP). You can find more information about this program [here](#):

<https://coe.gatech.edu/regents-engineering-pathways-program-repp>.

For students who qualify for the program, they are allowed to complete the first two years of their degree at a participating university in the state of Georgia ([click here for a list of participating schools](#)). Upon successfully completing the REPP requirements, the students can apply to one of five state of Georgia engineering programs (Georgia Tech, Georgia Southern University, University of Georgia, Kennesaw State University, or Mercer University) to complete their bachelors of science in engineering degree.

This is a great way to ease your way into college life and the elevated academic demands of an engineering program. It can also allow you to save money and attend a college with smaller classes.

Part 6: Scholarship Information

- **What is FAFSA?**

FAFSA stands for “Free Application for Federal Student Aid” and is the first step in search for information about Federal grants, loans, and work-study programs. To begin the process, you will need to create a user profile (see links below). Rules about how early you can submit a FAFSA have recently changed. Students planning to attend college during the 2017-18 academic year were able to submit a FAFSA as early as October 1, 2016, which will rely upon financial information from the 2015 tax year. For now, the October 1st date is the new opening date. Thus, students planning to attend college during the 2018-19 academic year will be able to submit a FAFSA as early as October 1, 2017, which will rely on financial information from the 2016 tax year. A new FAFSA must be submitted each year of college in order to be considered for financial aid.

General information about FAFSA can be found here:

<https://fafsa.gov/>

More information about creating your FSA ID can be found here:

<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa/filling-out/fsaid>

The US Department of Education has put together an informative video. You can find it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUis5lityCQ>

The online FAFSA application can be found here:

<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa>

- **What is the difference between a scholarship, grant, and a loan?**

Scholarship: A monetary gift awarded to a student based upon factors ranging from grades to athletics. It does not have to be repaid.

Grant: A monetary gift awarded to a student based upon financial considerations (i.e., level of income). It does not have to be repaid.

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Loan: Money provided to a college or university on behalf of a student. The most common example is the Federal Student Loan. There are also private student loans available from banks and other lenders. This money DOES have to be repaid.

General information about Federal Student Aid can be found here:

<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/resources/loan-grant-fact-sheets>

- **What is the difference between the HOPE Scholarship and the Zell Miller HOPE Scholarship?**

The key differences between the two scholarships are defined below, but broadly speaking, the Zell Miller HOPE Scholarship pays out more money, but has stricter academic standards.

- **What are the requirements for the HOPE Scholarship?**

To qualify for the HOPE Scholarship a student must graduate with a 3.0 HOPE GPA on a 4.0 scale. It is also important to understand that not all high school courses are factored into the HOPE equation. In other words, do not assume your CCA GPA is your HOPE GPA, for the two numbers are different. For HOPE consideration, the state only factors in courses from the following areas: English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Foreign Language. Courses taken for high school credit during middle school (this often applies to students transferring into CCA) are not used for calculating the HOPE Scholarship. Students must also meet state rigor course requirements (more information below). Finally, all grade weights are uniform with regards to the HOPE Scholarship. For example, the GSFC adds a weight of 0.5 quality points to the student's grade (up to a maximum of 4.0 quality points) for AP courses and for dual enrollment courses taken at an eligible post-secondary institution.

- **What are the requirements for the Zell Miller HOPE Scholarship?**

To qualify for the Zell Miller HOPE Scholarship a student must graduate with a 3.7 HOPE GPA and either a combined score of 1200 on the math and reading portions of the SAT or a minimum composite score of 26 on the ACT. These scores must be achieved on a single, national administration of the either test. The remaining requirements are the same as for the HOPE Scholarship (see above).

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- **What are “rigor courses”?**

Rigor courses are characterized by more difficult subject matter and in many cases contain a lab component. For example, at CCA, the following courses in our curricular program are considered rigor courses: All AP courses, Advanced Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Spanish II, and Spanish III. Beginning with the class of 2017, all graduates, in order to qualify for the HOPE Scholarship, must have passed four courses designated as “rigor courses” by the state of Georgia.

More information about rigor course requirements can be found here:

<https://www.gafutures.org/hope-state-aid-programs/hope-zell-miller-scholarships/hope-scholarship/eligibility/academic-rigor-requirements/>

- **I want to attend an out-of-state university. I've heard that some states offer reciprocal agreements where an out-of-state student can pay in-state tuition rates. Is that true?**

Yes, it is known as the Academic Common Market and it is designed to be a tuition-savings program for college students who want to pursue degrees that are not offered by their in-state institutions. Currently there are fifteen states participating in this program and Georgia is one of these states.

Additional information about the program can be found here:

<http://www.sreb.org/academic-common-market>

<http://home.sreb.org/acm/StateInfo.aspx?state=GA>

http://www.nasfaa.org/State_Regional_Tuition_Exchanges

- **I'm a student-athlete who is considering participation at the collegiate level. How do I initiate the process of securing an athletic scholarship?**

The first step is to speak with your athletic coach(es) or athletic director. Your coach(es) should be able to direct you to potential schools for your sport and help you connect with recruiters. This process will certainly vary from school-to-school.

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- **I've earned the HOPE Scholarship! How do I make certain that I maintain the HOPE Scholarship while attending college?**

It is reported that of the 19,877 freshmen who enrolled in Georgia colleges and universities on the HOPE Scholarship from 2008 to 2014, 33 percent of those students lost the HOPE Scholarship after taking only 30 credit hours (end of freshman year). Out of the original 19,877 students who began with HOPE funds, a full 60 percent had lost the scholarship by the 90 credit hour mark (end of junior year). The point is simple, keeping the HOPE Scholarship is not automatic nor easy. Generally speaking, there are some basic steps every student can take to make it more likely that they will be in the roughly 40 percent of students who keep the HOPE Scholarship throughout college.

First, go to class. Yes, this sounds simple, but attending class will most assuredly have a positive impact on your grades.

Second, study. Again, sounds simple, but it actually works!

Third, every college, regardless of whether it is Christian or secular, public or private, has all sorts of activities happening at all hours of the day. Choose how you spend your time wisely. The freedom of college can be overwhelming. Eventually you will find yourself in a situation where you have not allowed yourself adequate time to study and prep for your coursework. When that happens, regroup and work out a plan to keep yourself on track.

Finally, don't be afraid to get help! Every college offers some level of academic support – don't be embarrassed to ask for help. It is safe to say that most college freshmen are surprised by the academic expectation. So again, seek out support before it is too late, meaning that the night before an exam is too late.

You can find out more about actual requirements for maintaining eligibility for the HOPE Scholarship here:

<https://www.gafutures.org/hope-state-aid-programs/hope-zell-miller-scholarships/hope-scholarship/maintaining-eligibility-for-the-hope-scholarship/>

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- **How do I find more information about scholarships?**

The best place to begin your search is directly with the school you plan to attend. Colleges and universities often offer various scholarships that students can apply for. There are academic merit scholarships, need-based scholarships, and at some schools, departmental scholarships. The internet can also be a great resource. However, as always, you cannot trust everything you read, so be mindful of where you get your information. The following site appears to have very helpful information: <http://www.collegescholarships.org/grants/>.

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