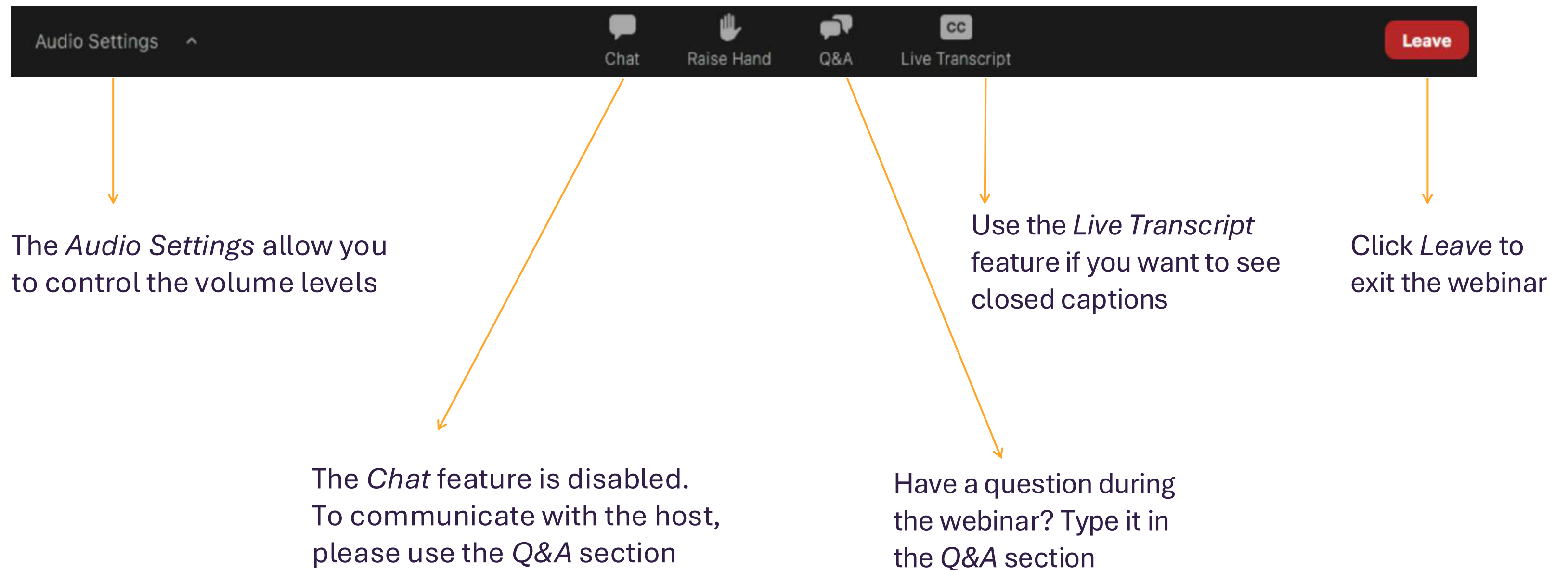


# College Admissions



# How to Participate



# About MEFA

State authority created by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1982, helping families plan, save, and pay for college.





# Webinar Topics

- Current Trends
- Your College List
- Campus Visits
- The Application Process
- Financial Aid
- Free Resources



# Trends in College Admissions

- Students applying to a greater number of schools
- Demonstrated interest a factor
- Social media
  - *A 2023 Kaplan study\* found that 67% of admissions officers “believe that checking out applicants’ social media posts to learn more about them is “fair game” to help them make decisions about who gets in.”*
- Cost a bigger factor
- More ways to interact with colleges virtually
- More test-optional schools & more applicants at those schools
- Longer waitlists
- Direct admissions

\*<https://kaplan.com/about/press-media/kaplan-survey-college-admissions-officers-applicant-social-media>

# Stay Organized!

Use a system to keep track of applications and deadlines, such as MEFA’s College Application Manager:

[mefa.org/college-application-manager](https://mefa.org/college-application-manager)

MEFA

Massachusetts  
Educational  
Financing  
Authority

College Application Manager

As you explore schools and build your college list, keep track of your details here. Remember that deadlines are critical when applying to college and requesting financial aid, so set yourself reminders to ensure you submit all applications on time. If you're applying to more than ten schools, make a copy of this chart.

School Name	Admissions Deadline*	Send SAT, ACT, or Neither	Required Financial Aid Apps	Financial Aid Deadline*	Notes
1. Example University	November 1st	SAT	FAFSA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CSS Profile <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>	February 1st	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High school visit: Oct 1st</li><li>• Strong nursing program</li><li>• 4-hour drive away</li></ul>
2.			FAFSA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CSS Profile <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>		
3.			FAFSA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CSS Profile <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>		
4.			FAFSA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CSS Profile <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>		

# Researching Colleges

## Research Thoroughly

College Navigator: [CollegeNavigator.gov](https://collegenavigator.gov)

College search with admissions, academic, & cost info

College Scorecard: [CollegeScorecard.ed.gov](https://collegescorecard.ed.gov) →

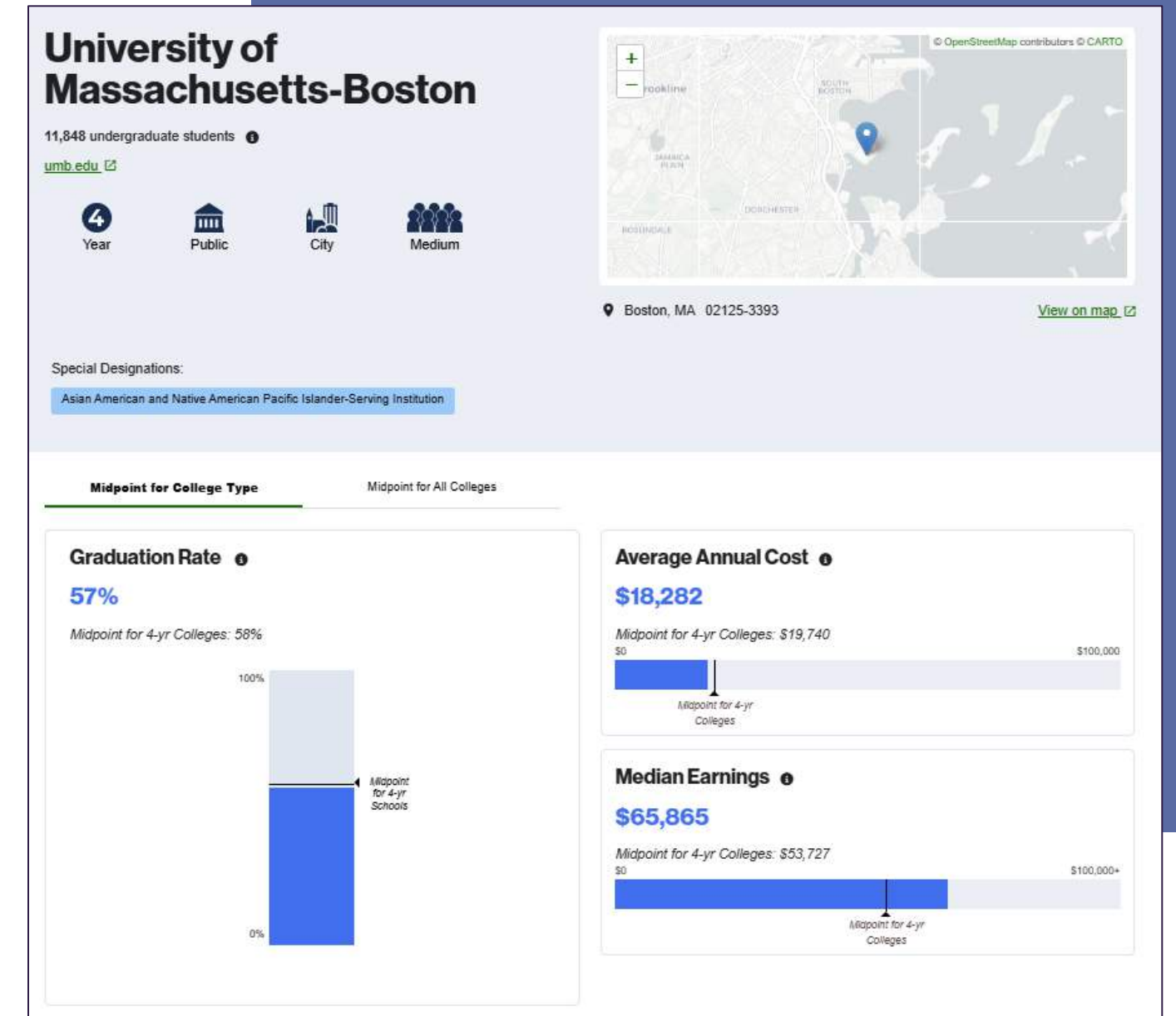
College info including average net price, student debt, grad rate, & alumni salary

Big Future: [bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search](https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search)

College search with info on academics, applying, & paying

MEFA Pathway: [mefapathway.org](https://mefapathway.org)

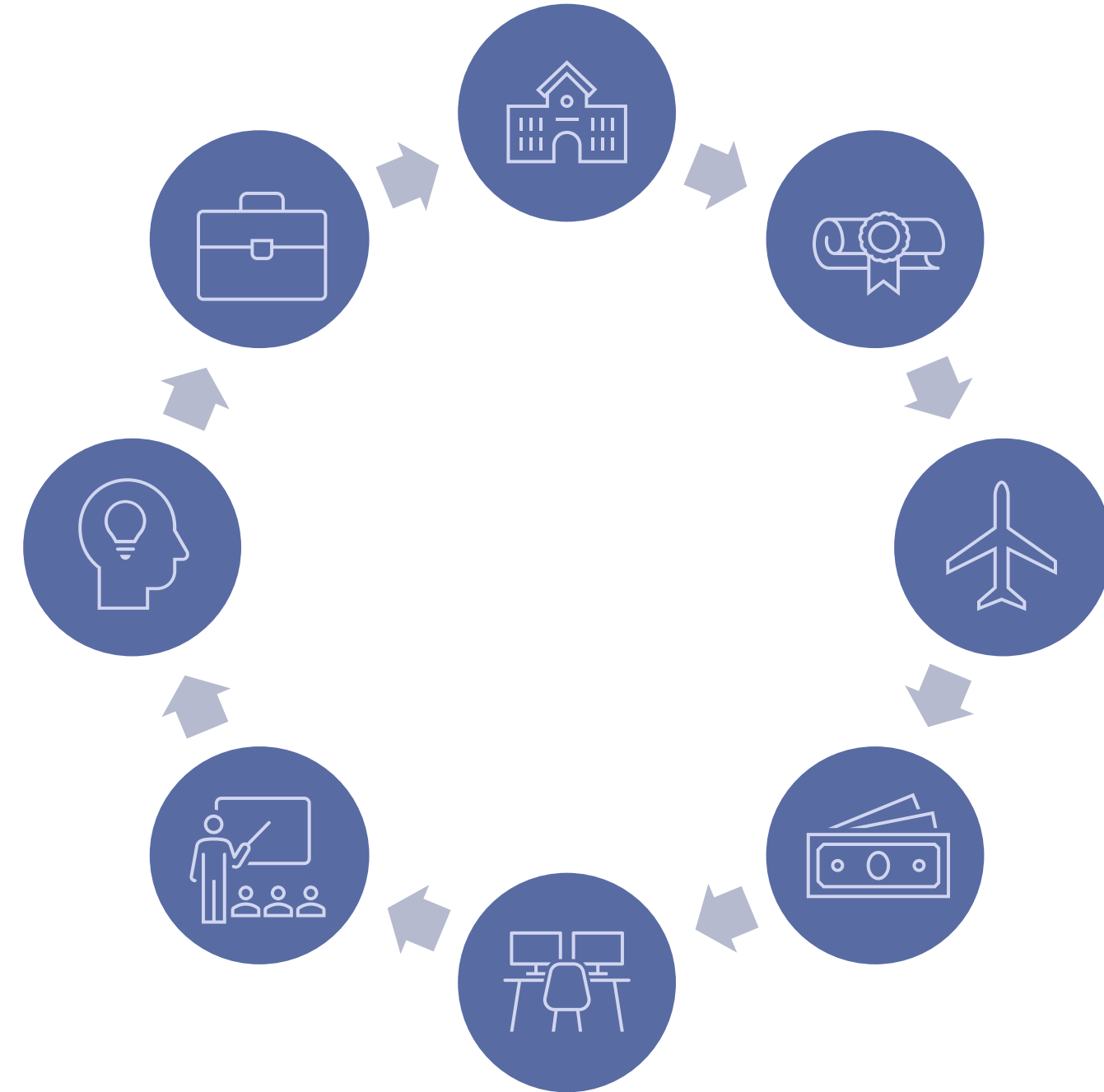
College search and matching tool based on preferences





# College Factors to Consider

- Institution size & location
- Academic fit
- Intended major
- Learning style
- Campus culture
- Activities
- Study abroad programs
- Career & internship services
- Affordability



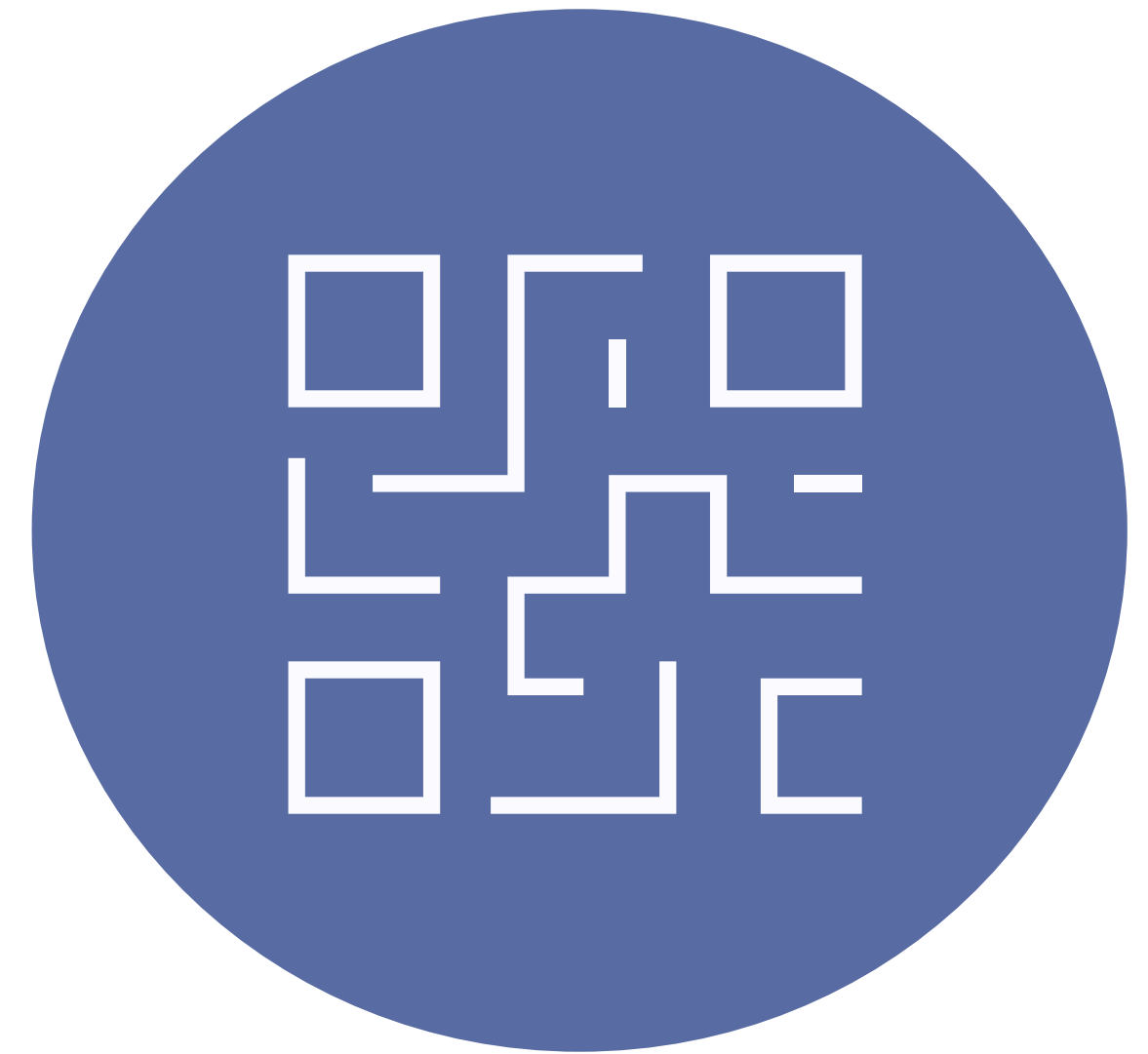


# Informal & Formal Campus Visits

Informal Visits	Formal Visits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Size</li><li>• Setting</li><li>• Culture</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Academics</li><li>• Activities</li><li>• Housing</li><li>• Food</li><li>• Q&amp;A</li></ul>

# College Fair Tips

- Sign up
- Check out the college list beforehand
- Have a plan of attack before you start
- Take advantage of information sessions
- Schedule 1-on-1 meetings with colleges if available
- Check [nacacfairs.org](https://nacacfairs.org) & [neacac.org](https://neacac.org) for upcoming events



# Assess Prospects for Admission

Develop a final list with colleges of each type:

- Likely
- Possible
- Reach



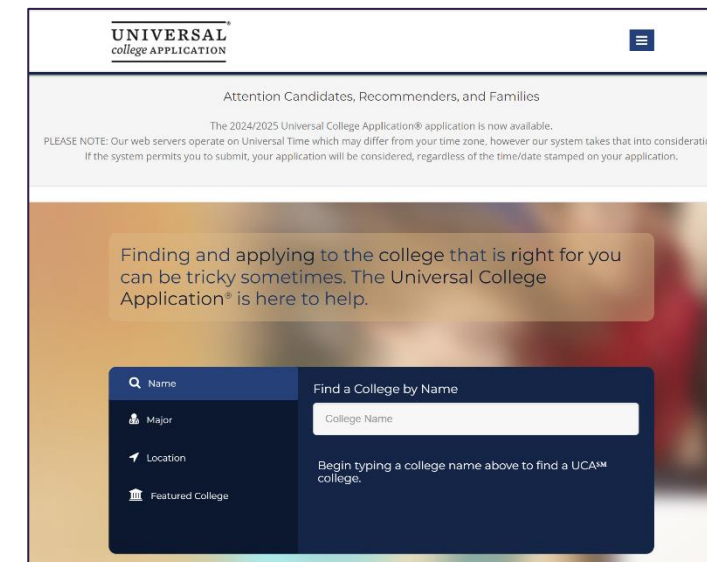
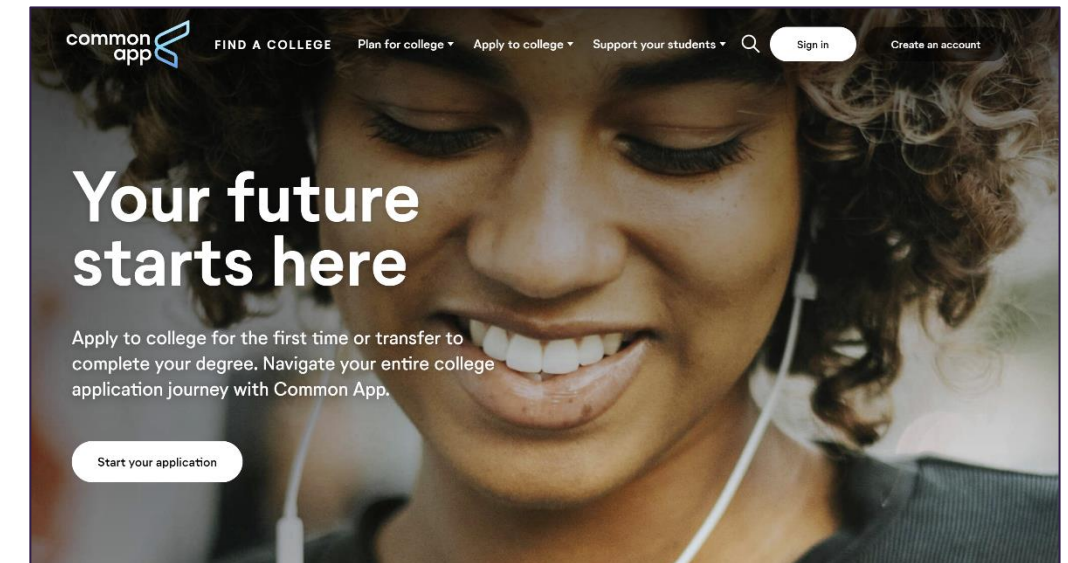
# College Application Types

- Regular Decision: Usually an early Jan deadline
- Early Action: Deadlines in Nov & Dec, non-binding agreement
- Early Decision: Deadlines in Nov & Dec, binding agreement
- Rolling Admission: Decisions on a rolling basis, Nov-May
- Open Admission: Admits most students for most programs anytime



# College Application Forms

- Common App: CommonApp.org
- Universal College App: UniversalCollegeApp.com
- Coalition App: CoalitionForCollegeAccess.org
- College website application
- Paper application



# College Application Components

- Application requirements may vary at each college.
- Your application may include:
  - Application form
  - High school transcript
  - Standardized test scores
  - Letters of recommendation
  - Activity list or resume
  - Personal essay
  - Interview
  - Audition
  - Portfolio





# Academic Readiness

- Rigor
- Good grades vs. challenging classes
- Improvement over time
- Exceeding minimum requirements
- Relevance to college plans
- Sliding scale for MA public colleges & universities



# Standardized Tests

## PSAT

- Offers practice and assessment
- Register at [collegereadiness.collegeboard.org](https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org)

## SAT

- Measures college readiness
- Offers free test prep online
- Register at [collegereadiness.collegeboard.org](https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org)

## ACT

- Measures college readiness
- Offers free test prep online
- Register at [act.org](https://act.org)

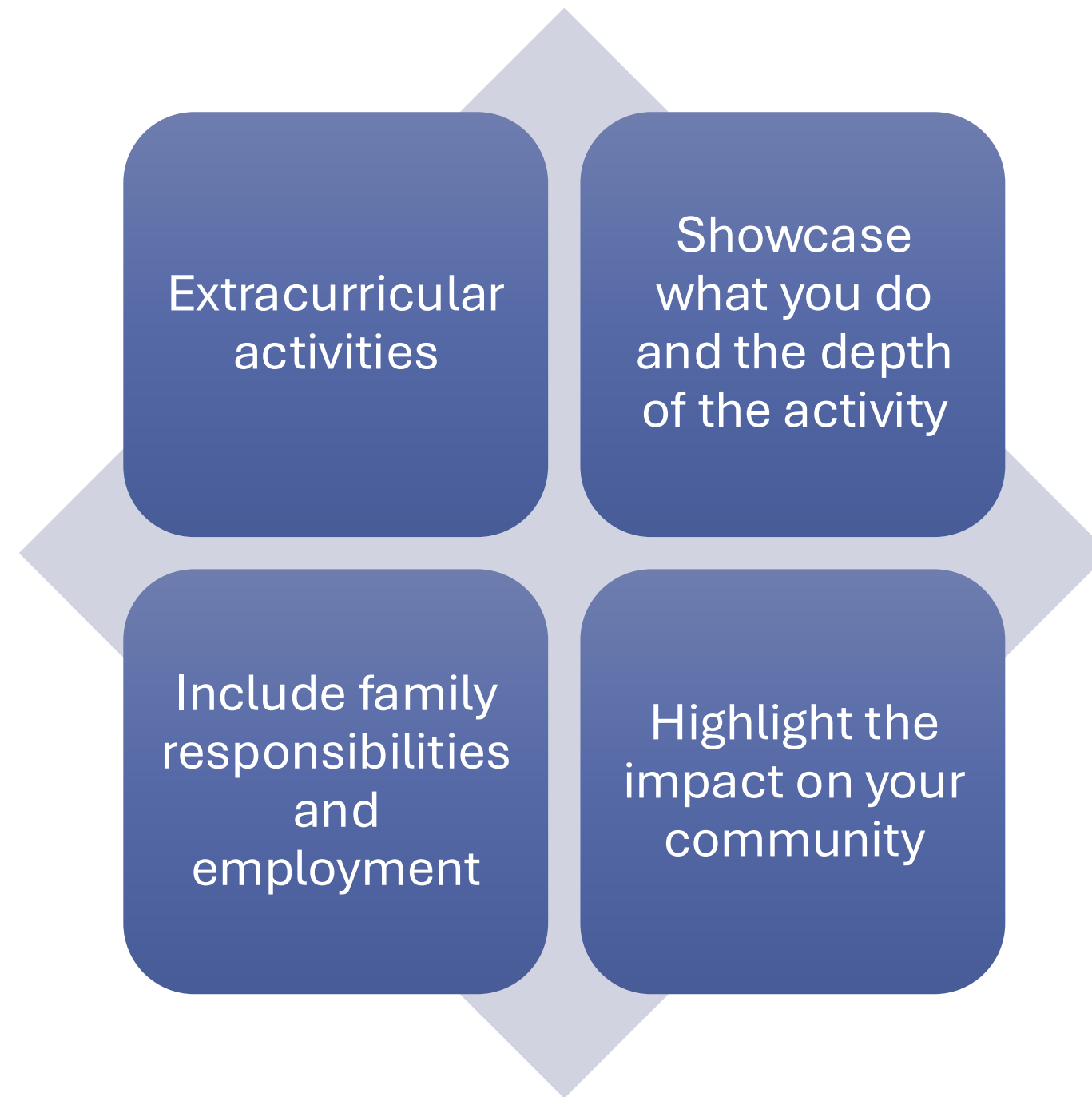
## AP Exam

- Shows subject knowledge
- Register at [apstudents.collegeboard.org](https://apstudents.collegeboard.org)

[Fairtest.org](https://fairtest.org) provides a list of over 2,100 test-optional schools



# Activity List & Resume



# Essays

- Your application essay says a lot about you
- Share something meaningful and personal
- Start writing early
- Try different topics and approaches
- Plagiarism is taken very seriously
- Leave time for careful proof-reading



# Common App Essay Prompts for Fall 2026 Admission

- Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
- Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
- Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
- Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
- Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
- Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.



# Letters of Recommendation

- Adults who know you well can offer a helpful perspective on your strengths
  - What are your high school guidelines?
  - Whom to ask?
  - When to ask?
  - Say thank you!





# Interviews

- A face-to-face conversation lets colleges see the person behind the numbers
- Only offered at a small number of schools
- Two types: Informational and Evaluative
- Be prepared to answer open-ended questions
- Know your reasons for applying to the college
- Ask thoughtful questions
- Cover the basics
- Relax and be yourself



# The Admissions Decision

Most colleges send decisions over email or post to their online portal

Deposit by deadline (usually May 1st) to secure your spot at a school

Admitted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student is accepted</li><li>• Student may also be accepted to begin at a later semester</li></ul>
Deferred	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student is not accepted Early Action/Decision but will be considered in the regular applicant pool</li></ul>
Denied	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student is not accepted</li></ul>
Waitlisted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student is not yet accepted and may not get accepted off the waitlist</li></ul>

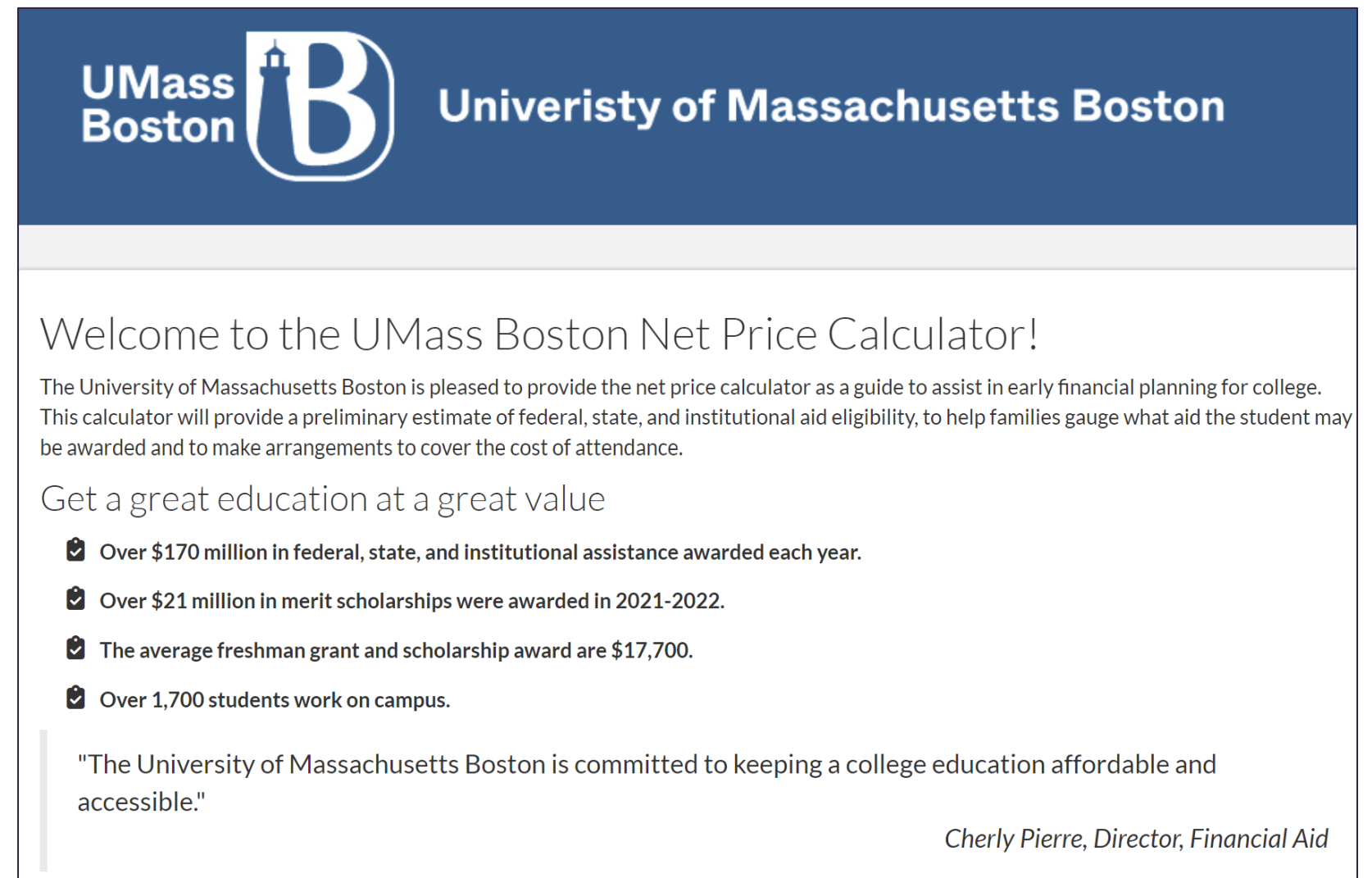
# Understanding College Affordability

- What is the Cost of Attendance?
- What financial aid applications are required and when?
- Need-based aid vs. merit-based aid: potentially different deadlines
- Start looking for private scholarships now



# Net Price Calculators

- Online tool found on each college's website
- Asks questions about family finances & student academics
- Provides personal, estimated net college price
- Displays federal & institutional financial aid
- Merit-based aid may also be calculated



The screenshot shows the UMass Boston Net Price Calculator landing page. At the top is a dark blue header with the UMass Boston logo and the text "Univeristy of Massachusetts Boston". Below the header is a light gray bar. The main content area has a white background. It starts with the heading "Welcome to the UMass Boston Net Price Calculator!". This is followed by a paragraph explaining that the calculator provides a preliminary estimate of federal, state, and institutional aid eligibility. Below this is a section titled "Get a great education at a great value" which contains four bullet points, each with a checkmark icon: "Over \$170 million in federal, state, and institutional assistance awarded each year.", "Over \$21 million in merit scholarships were awarded in 2021-2022.", "The average freshman grant and scholarship award are \$17,700.", and "Over 1,700 students work on campus." At the bottom of the page is a quote: "The University of Massachusetts Boston is committed to keeping a college education affordable and accessible." attributed to "Cherly Pierre, Director, Financial Aid".

UMass Boston Univeristy of Massachusetts Boston

Welcome to the UMass Boston Net Price Calculator!

The University of Massachusetts Boston is pleased to provide the net price calculator as a guide to assist in early financial planning for college. This calculator will provide a preliminary estimate of federal, state, and institutional aid eligibility, to help families gauge what aid the student may be awarded and to make arrangements to cover the cost of attendance.

Get a great education at a great value

- ✓ Over \$170 million in federal, state, and institutional assistance awarded each year.
- ✓ Over \$21 million in merit scholarships were awarded in 2021-2022.
- ✓ The average freshman grant and scholarship award are \$17,700.
- ✓ Over 1,700 students work on campus.

"The University of Massachusetts Boston is committed to keeping a college education affordable and accessible."

*Cherly Pierre, Director, Financial Aid*



# Applying for Financial Aid

## Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®):

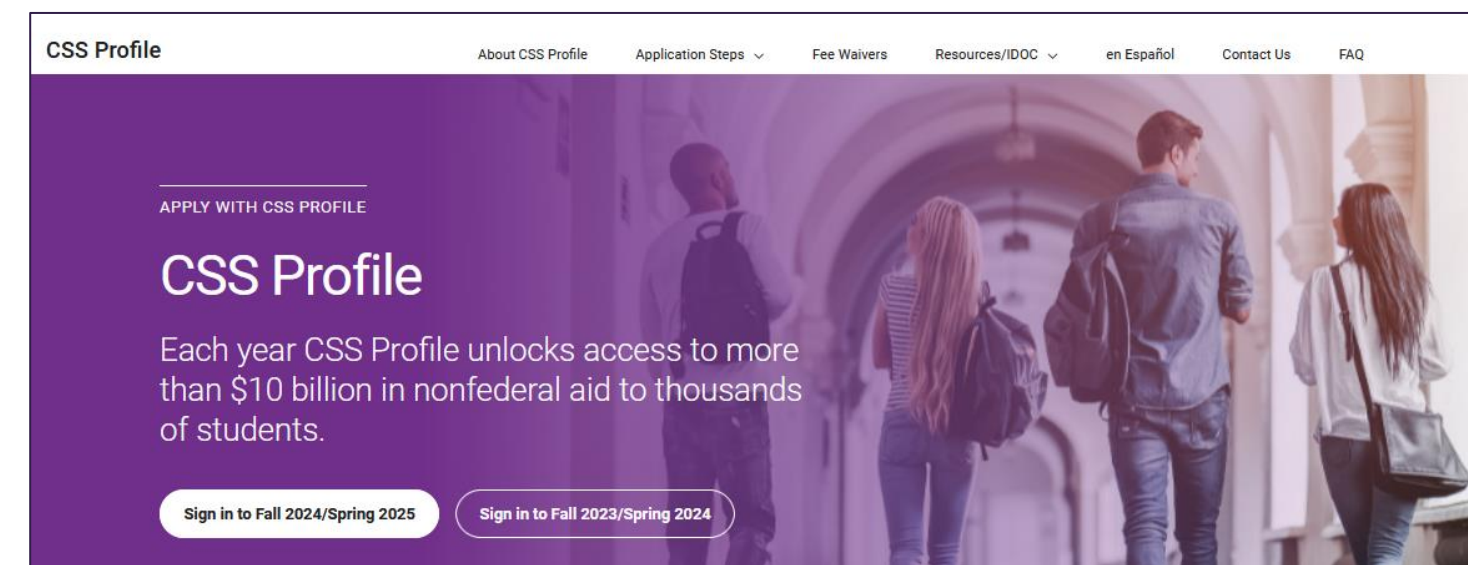
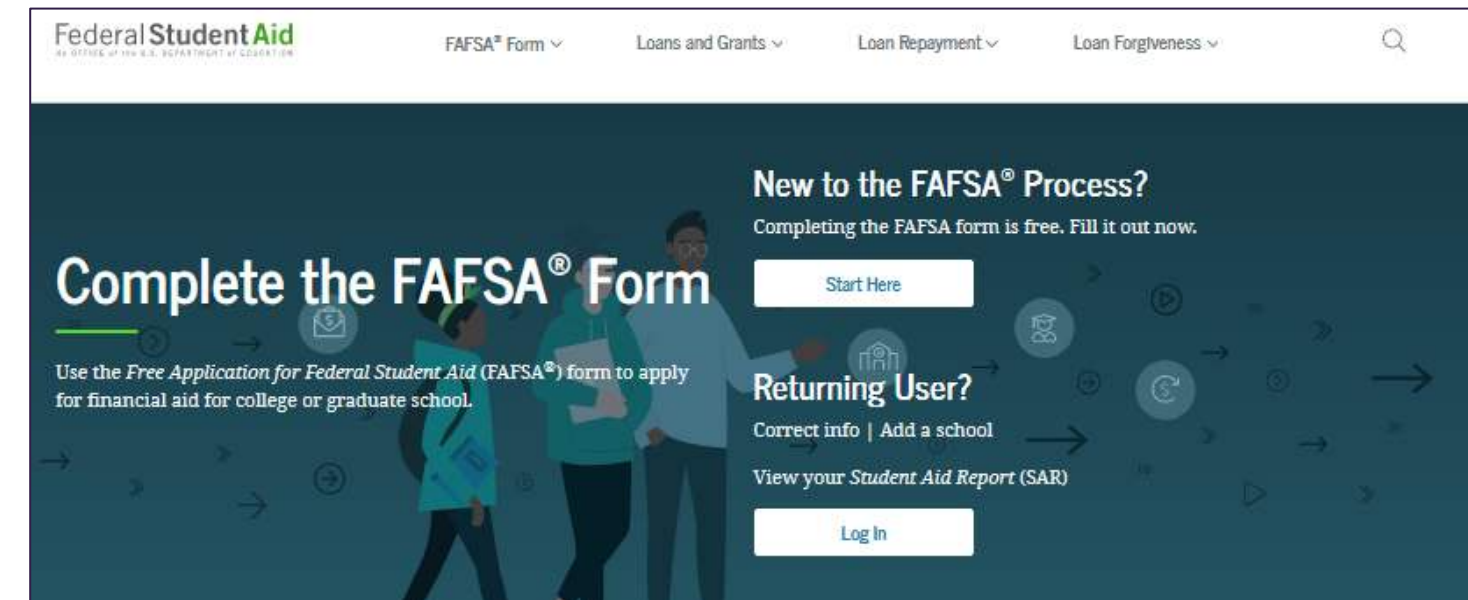
- Required by every college and university
- 2026-27 FAFSA will be available on Oct 1, 2025
- Will ask about 2024 income

## CSS Profile™:

- Required by ~200 colleges and scholarship agencies
- 2026-27 Profile will be available Oct 1, 2025
- Will ask about 2024 income

## College-specific financial aid applications

- Posted on each college's financial aid website



# Paying for College in MA



## Free and Affordable College

Free and affordable college tuition and fees are here across public Massachusetts community colleges and four-year universities!

To apply for MA state financial aid, complete the FAFSA by May 1<sup>st</sup>

<https://www.mass.gov/free-and-affordable-college>

- **MassEducate:** Free community college (tuition & fees and potential book allowance) for all students
- **Mass Reconnect:** Free community college for adults over 25 years of age
- **MASSGrant Plus Expansion:** Free or reduced tuition & fees for low & middle-income students and potential book allowance
- **Tuition Equity Law:** Some undocumented students can receive MA state aid and in-state tuition rates (<https://www.mass.edu/tuitionequity/home.asp>)
- **MassTransfer:** Makes transferring from a MA community college to a 4-year MA public college more affordable
- **Tuition Break:** Reduction on out-of-state tuition costs at New England colleges for certain programs (<https://nebhe.org/>)

[mefa.org/paying-college-massachusetts](https://mefa.org/paying-college-massachusetts)

# Staying on Track Through Senior Year

## Spring/Summer Junior Year

- Research Colleges
- Visit campuses and college fairs
- Ask teachers for letters of recommendation
- Take the SAT/ACT
- Start writing the college essay

## Fall Senior Year

- Retake the SAT/ACT
- Secure letters of recommendation
- Finalize the college essay(s)
- Attend MEFA's *Financial Aid 101* webinar
- Complete all admissions applications
- Submit the FAFSA
- Submit the CSS Profile if required

## Winter Senior Year

- Submit admissions applications
- Apply for private scholarships
- Send in mid-year grade reports

## Spring Senior Year

- Receive admissions and financial aid offers
- Attend MEFA's *Financial Aid Offers & the College Bill* webinar
- Attend college open house programs
- Choose your college by May 1<sup>st</sup>

**View an extended timeline at: [mefa.org/college-admissions-and-financial-aid-timeline](https://mefa.org/college-admissions-and-financial-aid-timeline)**



# MEFA Pathway

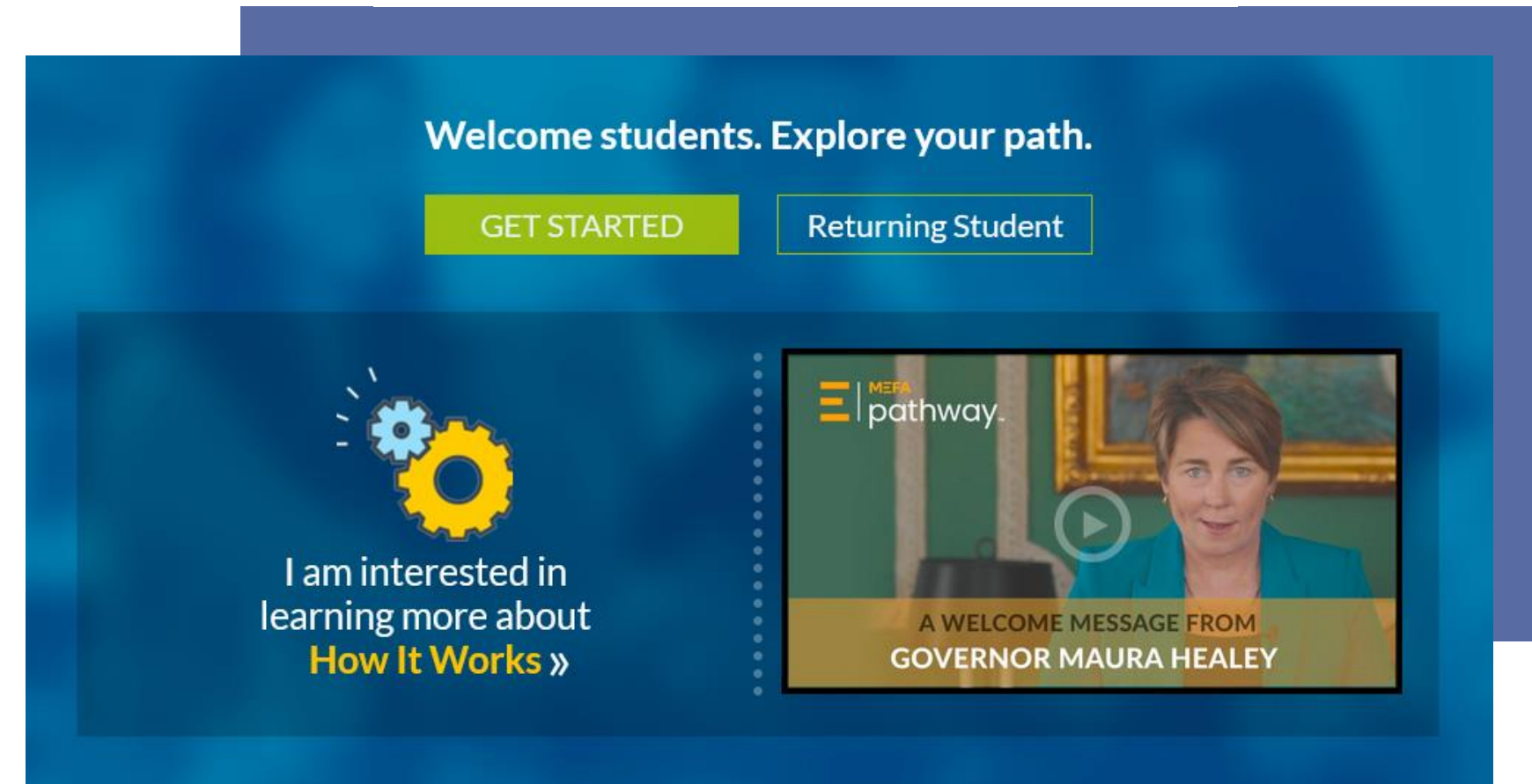
FREE college and career planning tool open to all

Resources include:

- Skills and interests assessments
- Career exploration
- College search
- Financial aid and scholarship information
- Personalized digital portfolio

Visit [mefapathway.org](https://mefapathway.org) to get started

**MEFA** | pathway™



# What You Can Do Now

- Sign up for upcoming MEFA webinars: [mefa.org/webinars](https://mefa.org/webinars)
- Research colleges
- Start creating your college list

# Connect with MEFA on Social Media





# Thank You!

## Questions?



**(800) 449-MEFA (6332)**



**[collegeplanning@mefa.org](mailto:collegeplanning@mefa.org)**