

# College 101

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for individuals from Hasidic & ultra-Orthodox communities

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

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If you're reading this, chances are you're thinking about college and don't know where to start. This guidebook provides a concise overview of things you will need to know if you were raised in an insular community with a limited secular educational background – such as the Chasidic or otherwise ultra-Orthodox community.

The information provided in this guidebook focuses on the pursuit of an undergraduate degree, which is the first, most basic form of higher education most students pursue after high-school. Our assumed audience is New York/tri-state area readers seeking to attend college in the United States.

## Chapter 2: Things You Need to Know Before Applying

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### I. Types of Colleges

- Community College
  - Community colleges are two-year schools that are easy to enroll in. They are nonresidential - meaning, students do not usually live on campus. Most often, students live at home or in an apartment of their own and come to community college for classes. They are very affordable, with the average yearly cost being around \$3,000 - and this cost can even be covered by financial aid.
  - Usually all you need to enroll in a community college is a high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate (TASC/GED).
    - You might not even need this for certain community colleges. For example, Rockland Community College (RCC) has a program where you can earn your New York State High School Equivalency with 24 college credits. It definitely pays to do research on community colleges in your area, and to ask if they have these programs.
  - Going to a community college is a great option in and of itself. After two years, you will have your associate's degree, and will be able to continue on a good path to getting a bachelor's degree at a four-year institution. It will also open new career opportunities for you.
  - Community college can also be a great stepping stone if your goal is to transfer to a more selective university. If this is the case, try choosing courses that will show you are challenging yourself academically. Enroll in the honors program, if possible. This will help massively with transferring later on.
  - Pros: it is cheap, FAFSA (see page 8 if you're unfamiliar with FAFSA) will most likely cover full tuition if you are eligible, you can live at home while commuting to school, after two years you can transfer to another university.
  - Cons: it doesn't have a campus community that is as strong as a school where students reside on campus. Most community colleges do not have large endowments with which to fund scholarships.

- Four-Year University
  - If it's not a community college, each school usually has a four-year undergraduate program. (The following types of colleges to follow in this section are all four-year universities.)
  - To attend a four-year university directly from high school, you need at the very least high school transcripts/equivalency diploma and letters of recommendation.
  - Some four-year universities have looser requirements. For example, CUNY asks for SAT/ACT scores and 2 letters of recommendation from anyone.
  - Pros: A bustling campus with extracurricular activities
  - Cons: Might require that you take out student loans
  
- Liberal Arts vs Regular vs Specialty Schools
  - Colleges differ in their curriculum offerings by drastic measures:
    1. Liberal Arts School: these schools place an emphasis on theoretical, not practical, learning. This usually means that there are very few courses (or none at all) on business or accounting or technical skills. Economics, for example, is a social science in liberal arts schools, and is very different from business.
      - a. The purpose of this is to get a chance to explore new intellectual horizons and to come up with an idea for how you'd best like to live your life.
      - b. If you research a school, and you see that there are no options for majoring in things such as finance, business, accounting, communications, marketing etc. it is most likely a liberal arts school with limited offerings in those areas.
      - c. Some schools that operate on this model are: Haverford, Amherst, Williams, Swarthmore, Harvard, Yale, Vassar, Barnard, Dickinson College, Franklin & Marshall College, Bates College, Colby College.
    2. Regular: these schools have a mix of "liberal arts" and more practical courses. I.e. you'd be able to find an accounting course.
      - a. Most state schools operate on this model, along with other mainstream universities.
    3. Specialty: there are some schools that offer very specialized curriculums.
      - a. For example, the Fashion Institute of Technology & Parsons School of Design both offer very specific degrees in fashion and art. Undergraduate business schools, such as the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, focus on developing skills for business. The University of Southern California's film school focuses on developing skills for movie editing and design.
      - b. Other schools are known for having general specialties. For example, there are certain schools that have excellent STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) programs. Examples include the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Caltech.
      - c. It is tricky to choose a specialized school at a young age, because there is not that much room to change your mind - you might have to transfer if you want to explore other options.
  
- State Colleges

- There are certain schools that cater primarily to residents of their state.
    - You can still attend a state school that's not in your state of residence, but tuition might be more expensive.
  - In New York, these are schools in the City University of New York (CUNY) system and the State University of New York (SUNY) system.
    - CUNY schools: Brooklyn College, Baruch College, Hunter College, City College, Queens College and many community colleges.
    - SUNY schools: Stony Brook, Binghamton, University at Albany, University at Buffalo and many more.
  - CUNY & SUNY schools are located all over New York, and because they're so close to ultra-Orthodox communities, many choose to attend these schools. It is pretty common to start out at a community college like Kingsborough and transfer to a college like Brooklyn College after 2 years.
  - CUNY has programs like [CUNY ASAP](#) which provides financial, community and academic support to help you complete your associate's degree.
  - SUNY also has support programs such as the [Educational Opportunity Program](#).
  - Pros: cheaper for in-state residents, high-quality academics, well-regarded degree.
  - Cons: some of them are commuter schools and some lack adequate financial resources.
- Non-Traditional Schools
    - There are some schools which are presented as undergraduate institutions serving “non-traditional” students - meaning, students who have usually taken some time off after high school, or students who never got the chance to attend high school at all.
    - Examples include: Columbia University's School of General Studies, University of Pennsylvania's College of Liberal and Professional Studies, Yale University's Eli Whitney Students Program, Harvard University's Extension School, Trinity College's Individualized Degree Program, Smith College's Ada Comstock Scholars Program.
    - Pros: It is easier to get into them with lower SAT scores or missing application materials, and you get to be at a prestigious school.
    - Cons: These schools are sometimes considered “cash cows” for universities, because they don't offer much financial aid and students typically end up paying large amounts of money (which might require enormous loans). You also don't get the complete college experience (living in the dorms, attending events with other undergrads, having access to dining halls and other resources that traditional undergrads do and so on).
  - Ivy League Universities
    - The “Ivy League” refers to eight private schools which are known for their academic excellence and selective admissions. The following are all 8 Ivy Leagues: [Harvard](#), [Yale](#), [Princeton](#), [Columbia](#), [University of Pennsylvania](#), [Dartmouth](#), [Brown](#), [Cornell](#).
    - You need – at the very least – SAT/ACT scores, high school transcripts/equivalency diploma, and letters of recommendation from two teachers.
    - Pros: Extremely generous scholarships available (the first five meet full-need, which means you can even get paid to come there with all expenses covered including food and housing), a vibrant campus with many extracurriculars, a wide support system, and name recognition when you graduate.
    - Cons: These schools have very low acceptance rates, competitive environments and rigorous academic standards which can be very stressful.

- Little “Ivies”
  - These are prestigious liberal arts colleges that offer very generous scholarships and are sometimes easier to get into than Ivy League schools.
  - Some examples include: [Amherst](#), [Williams](#), [Swarthmore](#), [Colgate](#), [Bates](#), [Bowdoin](#), [Haverford](#), [Tufts](#), [Wesleyan](#), [Lafayette](#), [Colby](#), [Smith](#), [Mount Holyoke](#).
  - Pros: the size of the student body of these schools are usually small (ranging from around 1000 to <10,000. This is small, particularly when you consider schools like Arizona State University that have 70,000 students). Therefore, you can get to know a lot of people and get to shine in extracurriculars since there aren’t that many students vying for the same roles on campus.
  - Pros: Generous financial aid, name recognition, vibrant campus community.
  - Cons: Some might prefer a larger school with more students.
- Test-Optional Schools
  - There are some schools that have made a standardized test score optional, so you don’t absolutely have to submit an SAT/ACT score with your application.
  - These include: Bates College, Bowdoin College, Bryn Mawr College, George Washington University, Hofstra University, Sarah Lawrence College, Smith College, University of Chicago, Wake Forest University, Wesleyan University, American University, Bard College, Brandeis University, Drexel University, Minerva Schools at KGI, NYU, Pace University.

## II. Testing

### A. High School Equivalency Exam (TASC)

*A high school equivalency is a recognized alternative to a high school diploma. It tests you on the topics you are supposed to study in high school and those that signify college preparedness.*

- TASC (formerly known as the GED)
  - This is New York State’s high school equivalency exam.
  - Typically, the subjects tested include science, math, social studies, reading and writing.
  - You should try to study for a couple of months, depending on your level of prior education.
  - Utilize YouTube/Google to see other people work through problems.
  - Take the TASC before any standardized test, because it’s easier.
  - The Brooklyn Public Library offers [free TASC prep classes](#).
  - See the [External Resources](#) section for many more options on preparation help.
  - It costs around \$50 to register for the TASC.
  - Steps:
    - Get the NYS TASC book (available at Barnes & Noble, Amazon or for free from public library.)
    - Study material thoroughly until you understand the topics.
    - When you are ready to schedule the exam, follow [this link](#) to set up an account and register.



- For additional help & guidance regarding the NYS TASC, visit [this link](#).

## **B. Standardized Testing**

*A standardized test is an examination that is supposed to predict how well students will perform in an upcoming academic setting. Most four-year colleges require the submission of a standardized test score - usually the SAT or ACT - because they are comparing applicants from vastly different schools with a varied level of college prep. These tests are administered by private companies, such as the College Board, and different schools tend to accept different scores. Some schools have dropped the standardized test requirement, but if you went to a high school without adequate college prep, you are strongly encouraged to take one.*

- [ACT](#)
  - Pronounced A-C-T.
  - The ACT is one option of a standardized test you have to take if you want to go to a four-year university.
  - It is divided into four sections: English, math, reading and science – along with an optional writing section (it is best to do the writing section).
  - It is graded on a scale of 1-36.
  - It includes more science-based questions than the SAT, although the main goal is to test your critical thinking skills.
    - Note: you do not need any science background whatsoever to do well on the science section because it's essentially about critical thinking. However, some people have an easier time digesting passages about cultural topics, history and philosophy, and the SAT's reading section has more of those and less science-based reading.
  - You can take this test more than once.
  - It typically costs around \$50 to register for the ACT
    - With the writing section, it's around \$67
- [SAT](#)
  - Pronounced S-A-T.
  - The SAT is an option of a standardized test you have to take if you want to attend a four-year university.
  - It is divided into three sections: Reading, Math & Writing. The writing portion is optional but some schools do ask for those scores, so it's best to do all three if you can.
  - It is scored on a 1600 scale. The higher the score, the better. If you Google average SAT scores for top-tier schools, you will see that they usually have average scores of above 1460/1600. However, this is just an *average*. Getting a score that's lower than that should not stop you from applying to top-tier schools.
  - Some schools have dropped the standardized test requirement. However, if you went to a high school without adequate college prep, you are strongly encouraged to take it.
  - It typically costs around \$50 to register for the SAT
    - With the essay, it's around \$65
  - Testing dates are typically on Saturdays. In order to be able to take it on a Sunday, you must register by mail and include a letter from an official religious leader confirming your religious exemption.

- See more [here](#).
  - Note: the SAT was completely changed in 2016, so make sure you're studying for the new version.
- How to Choose:
  - You must only take the SAT or ACT - no need to take both.
  - Schools do not care which one you take.
  - Take official practice tests for both to get a sense of what to expect for each test, and take the one you think you'll do better on.
    - When taking the practice tests, make sure to take the time limits for each section into account.
  - Some students register for both and only send in the scores for the test they performed better on.
    - This is a great option if you have the available financial resources or fee waivers to register for both.
- General Tips for taking the SAT/ACT:
  - Prep schools (private schools that prepare students for college) encourage students who have difficulty with the SAT to try the ACT, so it pays to take a practice test of both and see which one seems better for you.
  - Typically you should start studying for this at least a year in advance of when you plan to take the test.
  - You can (and should, if possible) take the test more than once. This is how most people get good scores.
    - It doesn't look great to have taken it more than three times, so try to cap it at that number.
    - However, some schools have "score choice," which means they don't care how many times you took it, they just want to see your highest score.
    - In short: don't be afraid to take it as many times as you want, but think of three as your ideal ceiling.
  - See "Chapter 4: [External Resources](#)" for free standardized prep help.
- Non-Saturday Testing:
  - The SAT and the ACT are usually administered on Saturdays. However, they know that not everyone may be able to take it on that day for religious reasons.
  - The ACT is offered at a limited number of testing locations on Sundays.
  - The SAT allows you to request Sunday testing, but requires a letter from an official religious leader.
    - The letter must explain the religious reason for the request; it must be printed on stationery from the house of worship; it must be signed by an official religious leader.
    - You can register for Sunday testing online [at this link](#).
    - If you need a letter from an official religious leader who can attest to your circumstances, please email [hasidiccollegeaccess@gmail.com](mailto:hasidiccollegeaccess@gmail.com).
- [SAT Subject Tests](#):



- Once you've gotten the score you want on your SAT/ACT (which is most important), if you're really good at a certain subject, say U.S. history or modern Hebrew, you might consider taking the subject test because it can boost your application, especially if you get a score between 700-800.
- These are not required for the majority of schools you might apply to, and most schools will understand if you didn't take them.
- Some schools do require subject tests. Examples include: California Institute of Technology, MIT.
- [Here](#)'s a list of colleges that require it, and others that recommend it, or consider it.
- Note: requirements are often different for transfer students, and even schools that require or strongly recommend it from regular admissions will usually not require these for transfer admission.
- Example of when to take a subject test: If you are taking a U.S. History regent in high school, consider studying for the U.S. History subject test throughout that year. This way, you don't have to learn a ton of new information.

### C. Practice Resources

*When it comes to standardized testing, many people invest a lot of effort into studying - be it with specialized tutors, books and practice tests. The following are some resources that are available online and are affordable or free. The best way to study is to practice - so learn the materials and practice a LOT before registering!*

- Official Sample Practice Tests
  - Official practice tests will give you the most accurate information for what to expect on the actual exam on your test day. You should take at least two official practice tests before registering for the exam. Try taking as many official practice tests before your exam, and if possible, take all of them.
  - [SAT 10 official practice tests](#)
  - [ACT practice tests](#)
- Guidebooks
  - Companies like Princeton Review and Kaplan have guidebooks for standardized testing that many students use to study and practice.
  - These books are not from the companies which administer the tests, so it's best not to rely only on a single guidebook.
- [Khan Academy](#)
  - Offers amazing, free test prep (among a variety of other courses!).
  - They are partnered with the College Board, the organization that creates and administers the SAT.
  - A great way to increase your math SAT score is by going through every single math skill listed in their SAT prep and making sure you build the foundational skills through their practice.
- Public Libraries

- Most public libraries in NYC have the latest study guide books and you can borrow them for free.
- See “Chapter 4: [External Resources](#)” for info on how to get a public library card in order to take out these books.

### III. Financial Aid

*Financial Aid refers to funding available for students attending college to help them cover tuition and/or other college expenses. Financial aid is available to students in need primarily through these sources: government programs (FAFSA, TAP, etc.), school grants or loans, and college scholarships through various organizations. Every school is different, and some have more generous financial aid than others.*

#### A. Application Materials Needed to Apply for Financial Aid

- [FAFSA](#)
  - The FAFSA stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid. This is how you apply for financial aid from the government, which provides grants up to around \$6000 if your family is below a certain income threshold.
  - You typically need your own and your parents’ IRS tax forms to fill this out. (i.e. 1040, W-2)
  - Other information you need: Social Security #, W-2s.
  - If you cannot use your parents’ tax forms, see “dependency override” in section C below.
- [CSS Profile](#)
  - If you’re applying to private schools, they usually require submission of the CSS profile as a part of applying for financial aid.
  - It is similar to the FAFSA, but asks questions about your family’s assets, such as real estate, and about expenses you have.
  - Depending on how many assets you/your family have, it can be a very simple process or it can take a longer amount of time.
  - Your parents/guardians may be required to sign/fill out the CSS Profile. There’s a waiver if you have special circumstances, which may require a letter from a therapist or someone familiar with your situation explaining it all to the financial aid office.
  - If your parents are separated or divorced, you may need to fill out two separate CSS Profiles by having two separate College Board accounts. See [here](#) for more information.
- [TAP](#)
  - TAP stands for Tuition Assistance Program. It is particular to New York State residents who are going to school in New York State. You can apply to this for extra funding.
  - After you finish the FAFSA, they give you the option of applying for TAP. It is an easy click following completion of the FAFSA.

## *B. Types of Financial Aid*

- Need-Based vs Merit-Based
  - Some schools provide need-based aid, which means they meet the amount that you need to be able to come to their school. This means that if your family is below a certain income threshold, you will get more aid, no matter what.
    - Examples: Amherst, Bowdoin, Columbia, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton, Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Swarthmore, MIT, Caltech, Vassar College, Colgate University, Middlebury College, Wake Forest University, Skidmore College, Wesleyan University, Carleton College, Reed College, Davidson College.
  - You prove financial need by the information on your tax forms and by submitting the FAFSA + CSS Profile.
  - Others provide merit-based aid, which is given for a specific reason. Sometimes this is for playing sports well (an athletic scholarship), or it is for performing well in school (an academic scholarship).
- Grants vs Loans
  - Some schools give financial aid in grant forms, which you don't have to pay back, and some give aid in loan forms, which you do have to pay back.
  - You should be careful about taking on too many loans, as they can be a massive headache after graduating. Do not take out student loans without a plan for repayment.
  - Some schools have financial aid packages that are a combination of the two.
- National Scholarships
  - There are many organizations that provide scholarships.
  - Some examples include: Coca-Cola Scholars, New York Times Scholarship, Jack Kent Cooke Scholars.
  - If you seek out external help, you should ask about relevant scholarships depending on your situation.

## *C. Other Helpful Information*

- Fee Waivers
  - You can request fee waivers at many points in the application/college process. For example, you might not have to pay to register for the SAT or to submit an application if you can prove financial need - look out for a button that says "request fee waiver."
  - You can try Googling or calling the company directly to find out about their fee waiver policy.
- Dependency Override
  - If you do not have your family's tax information, there are options for you. First of all, you can complete the FAFSA and override financial dependency.
  - Do not let financial aid concerns stop you from applying or starting the college process. At the very least, your college's financial aid office will help you complete the overriding process.
  - See "[External Resources](#)" for organizations that can assist you with this process.

## IV. Parts of the College Application

- Counselor's Letter
  - Most high schools have a college counselor, which submits a separate report to the colleges.
  - If you went to a school without a college counselor, you can contact the admissions office of the schools you applied to and ask them to waive this requirement.
  - An alternative to the counselor's letter is a letter from an official at a community-based organization who can attest to your character, ambition and family background. This holds the same weight as a counselor's letter.
    - See "[External Resources](#)" for CBOs that can help you with this letter, such as the Goddard Riverside Options Center.
    - Note that the counselor needs to actually know you and have advised you for a couple of meetings in order to write a good letter on your behalf.
- Letters of Recommendation
  - Admissions committees want to know how you will do in their school. This is why it is important for them to hear from your teachers what kind of student you are.
  - Most schools want to hear from at least 2 teachers.
  - Some schools will allow you to send letters from employers or advisers instead, or in addition to your teachers.
- Intended Major
  - Colleges may ask what you are applying to major in.
  - Definitely choose something you're interested in pursuing - or you can write a general field of interest.
  - Colleges who place a lot of weight on your intended major will look for proof that you have taken the required pre-requisites in order to major in your intended area of focus. This applies especially to transfers.
  - The following is a tip to be taken lightly: there seems to be a better chance of getting accepted into highly-selective liberal arts schools (Ivy Leagues & Little Ivies) if you choose something that's less typical.
    - For example, tons of students apply to study things like economics and computer science in every application cycle. Therefore, if you apply to study something unique, such as religion, philosophy, anthropology, history, English, astrophysics, neuroscience, or women & gender studies - and can actually back up your interest in it - then it makes you stand out more as an applicant.
    - Obviously, do not apply for something you are not interested in. However, if you're unsure, and have a variety of interests, consider putting down something more niche. It is also not set in stone - in most schools you will have the option of switching your major later.
    - This is no official admissions rule at all, there are schools that take your "intended major" with a grain of salt and are mainly concerned with how well you'd fit into the school.
- Personal Essay

- Be authentic and don't be afraid to be vulnerable/personal. This can be a real advantage for admissions purposes.
- Write with immediacy and make it focused. It may be tempting to wax on about your personal history, but try to keep it about a single point in the present. What is your life like right now? Let that be the focus of your essay to keep it hard-hitting.
- If you Google college admissions essays, you will find a wide range of topics. Do not try to make yours sound like someone who grew up with completely different circumstances and advantages than you. For example, you might read about someone who volunteered in the summer for a former U.S. president, or someone who learned so much from being on a sports team. Since these experiences are not typically available for ultra-Orthodox students, you should realize that your essay will sound different - and it'll make you stand out.
- Reach out to any college students/grads that you know; they'd be happy to proofread your essays.
- See "Chapter 4: [External Resources](#)" for more assistance.
- Supplemental Essays
  - In addition to a personal statement essay, many schools require additional essays.
  - Depending on the school, the prompts for these essays vary.
  - A common prompt is "Why This School?", where you're expected to discuss why you decided to apply to the given school or to a specific program/major within the school. Do some research about the school before beginning to write and try to be as specific as possible.
- Interview Process
  - Selective schools often require that you have an interview. Sometimes these are with alumnae of the school.
  - Typical questions include: Why do you want to go to X school? What do you want to major in? Which extracurricular activities do you want to get involved in on campus and why? What's your favorite book? Why should school X accept you? What are your future plans?
  - Research the school and whatever programs/majors you're considering at that school.
  - Prepare some questions you have about the school to ask the interviewer.
  - Wear something that makes you look put-together (but nothing too fancy), and be authentic.
  - Make sure to send a thank you email to the interviewer following your interview.
  - Google college interview tips
    - [Here's](#) one guide on acing college interviews.
- Portfolios
  - A portfolio is an optional addition to your application to showcase your skills.
  - Most often, these are artistic portfolios which students submit to show their artwork or filmwork.
  - Unless they're applying to art-related programs, many students do not send in portfolios.
  - Colleges will understand that not everyone has the access to resources which enables them to hone artistic skills.

- AP Classes
  - Advanced Placement (AP) classes are what many high schools across America offer in order to give their students advanced-level courses.
  - They are typically not offered in ultra-Orthodox schools.
  - Colleges understand that not every high school provides the same resources, and so they just want to see that you did the best with what you had. If you had no AP offerings, they will take other factors into account.

## V. How to Assemble a List of Colleges

### A. Factors to Consider

*Do as much research as you can about a school. Check out the kinds of majors they offer, if their location is good, and see student testimonials, if possible. You can also schedule a visit to a school and join a tour through their admissions office!*

- Safety Schools vs Reach Schools
  - Based on your application and schools' acceptance rates, there are certain colleges which you can safely assume that you will gain admission to (safety schools) and others which are more selective and typically accept higher scores (reach schools).
  - You can google every school's acceptance rates and average SAT scores. If you have a score that's above their 75th percentile, and they have a solid acceptance rate (meaning, greater than 40%) then you will most likely get in.
  - Statistics don't say everything about whether you will get accepted/rejected. There are schools which reject students who are highly qualified to attend, then there are schools with extremely low acceptance rates that will accept students that are well below their typical SAT scores.
  - Here's a list of schools that range from very safe to highly selective. Consider picking some from each section:
    - Very Safe: community colleges in your area.
      - Examples: Kingsborough Community College, Rockland Community College.
    - Safe: state colleges and universities, like CUNY/SUNY, and some private colleges.
      - Examples: Brooklyn College, Hunter College, Baruch College, Pace University
    - Selective: some state colleges and private colleges
      - Examples: Dickinson College, University of Rochester, Franklin & Marshall College, Bates College, Colby College
    - Highly Selective: Schools that receive tons of applicants and accept very few of them.
      - Examples: Stanford, MIT, Caltech, Ivy Leagues, "mini Ivies"
- Commuter vs Residential Colleges
  - Some schools have a campus that does not have housing close by, and most students travel to school just for classes. These are commuter schools.



- Examples: Baruch College (CUNY), UC Berkeley, most community colleges.
- Some schools have residential housing, which means students live on-campus, and conduct their daily lives within the college's space.
  - Examples: Cornell University, Syracuse University, University of Rochester, Pace University.
- Some schools even have a "house system," which ensures a close-knit residential college.
  - A "house system" is a residential college system where students are sorted into different "houses" which operate as dorms, but are so much more. Essentially, it means students have one place to eat, sleep and hang out with friends. Ultimately, it's a place to come "home" to, since it cultivates a smaller close-knit community within a school's larger student body. (If you're familiar with *Harry Potter*, it's something like the Hogwarts houses.) If finding a community is important to you, consider applying to schools that offer this.
  - Examples of schools that have this: Rice University, Caltech, Yale College, Harvard College, University of Chicago.
- Financial Aid
  - Google schools to see if they are need-blind (meaning, they don't consider your ability to pay tuition when considering your application), if they meet full-need and what their financial aid is like.
- Grade Deflation
  - When schools grade more harshly so it's harder to get good grades.
    - Some schools that have grade deflation: Princeton, Rice, Tufts, Wellesley, Boston University, Reed, UC Berkeley, Swarthmore, University of Chicago
    - This is something to consider when you're picking a college, because grade deflation usually comes along with a more stressful culture at school.
    - This usually only applies when choosing between highly selective schools.
- Other
  - There are many factors which could personally be important to you, like a school's location or type.

## **B. Resources Available**

*There are many ways to learn more about colleges. Of course, there's no way to know everything about a school and what kind of match it would be before going - but the following research is a good start.*

- College Tours
  - Google a school's admissions office to sign up for a tour of the school and to learn more about it from a current student.
- Rankings
  - This is one way to see the best schools in any given area.
  - [U.S. News & World Report](#) releases a list of the best colleges every year.
  - [Colleges That Change Lives](#) has a list of lesser-known niche schools.

- There are also books like the *Fiske Guide to Colleges* which allow you to read more about schools.
- Talk to Current/Former Students
  - Ask them to edit your essays and for general application advice.
  - If you don't know anyone, email [hasidiccollegeaccess@gmail.com](mailto:hasidiccollegeaccess@gmail.com) to ask us!
- College Finders
  - [CollegeBoard Big Future Tool](#)
    - Allows you to filter for schools by test scores, majors, learning environments, diversity and more.
    - Take their suggestions with a grain of salt. Just because they say you might not get into a school does not mean you shouldn't give it a shot.
  - [Kiplinger College Finder](#)
    - Allows you to filter schools by type, cost, size, admission rate, region and more.

### C. Application Tools

*The college application process is almost entirely online now. You can use the following technical tools to submit the necessary materials.*

- [Common App](#)
  - The Common App is the website through which you can submit your college applications for most schools.
  - You can find most schools on the Common App. Some, however, might require a separate application portal, and it's up to you to decide if it's worth using it. These schools include: schools in the University of California system (such as UC Berkeley), Georgetown University, and University of Maryland.
  - Each application costs \$50-\$125 to submit, but you can request fee waivers.
  - At the end, the Common App will allow you to add additional information. USE this for any info about you that might not be reflected in other parts of your application.
    - For example: the Common App only has room to add up to 5 siblings in the personal information section. If you have more than 5 siblings, add them to this "additional info" section and write their level of education.
- CUNY Portal
  - If you apply to schools in the City University of New York system, you will use their website portal to submit your application.
  - Simply follow all the steps on the "How to Apply" page
  - While the Common App specifically writes that you need to add letters of recommendations from teachers, the CUNY Portal will let you submit recommendations from people who you worked for or advisors that know you.
- Other

- In 2015, the Coalition App was created to filter for colleges that meet certain requirements such as sufficient financial aid. Many schools accept either the Common App or the Coalition App, but the Common App is most widely used.
- A school might also have their own application portal through which they want you to submit the application.

## Chapter 3: The Application Process

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### I. The Overall Process

#### A. If you don't have a high school diploma:

Requirements: TASC, personal essay

Optional: Standardized test scores

- Take the TASC exam (formerly known as the GED)
  - If you don't want to take a standardized test such as the SAT or ACT:
    - Research community colleges and colleges that do not require standardized test scores.
    - Apply to these colleges
    - Apply for FAFSA
    - To enroll, you usually have to provide documentation such as tax returns, social security #, medical records.
    - After two years, the college will help you transfer to a four-year university
  - If you want to go to a four-year university:
    - Take the SAT or ACT
    - Make a list of colleges
      - Some examples of four-year universities that do not require teachers to write recommendations are the following CUNYs: Baruch, Hunter, Brooklyn, Queens, City College & Stern College/Yeshiva University
    - Apply
      - You need to apply at least a year before you intend to start. For example, the typical application to enroll in 2020 opens in August of 2019, with a regular application deadline of January 1st.
    - Complete financial aid forms (See "Financial Aid")
    - Enroll!

#### B. If you do have a high school diploma:

Requirements: SAT/ACT, two letters of recommendation, personal essay

Optional: school counselor, SAT subject tests, AP scores

- Take the SAT or ACT

- Assemble list of schools
  - Based on your SAT/ACT scores, apply to at least 2 safety schools and as many reach schools as you'd like.
  - The more schools you apply to, the better your chances are of getting into a good one.
  - To be safe, assemble a list of 8 reach schools, 4 schools that are solid and you'd be happy with, and 3 safety schools.
  - There are application fees, but the Common App offers to waive them if you can prove financial need.
- Assemble letters of recommendation
  - Ideally, these come from teachers/professors who taught you in a classroom.
  - Could be employers or anyone who knows you in an academic sense.
  - If you cannot get letters from your high school teachers, you can ask advisors or mentors.
- Write personal essay
  - Ask for help editing the essay
- Ask your high school to send transcripts to your list of colleges
  - Note: every school that offers State-accredited diplomas (such as a Regents diploma) is legally required to release your transcripts.
    - Many Chasidic schools, especially the ones that don't offer Regents, are usually not fully accredited by the State (even if they have "transcripts"). This means they may not be legally required to send your transcripts to colleges.
    - If your school is not legally required to release your transcripts, you might have to take the TASC test and go to community college for 2 years OR take the TASC test + SAT/ACT and apply to four-year universities. (Regardless, you can still try to explain the situation to colleges and they might overlook this requirement - this has worked before.)

## II. Regular Admissions vs. Transfer Admissions

*For regular admissions, you apply almost a year in advance. The deadline is usually around January 1 in order to enroll in the fall. There are also other admissions cycles, and the one most relevant to people from ultra-Orthodox communities is transferring.*

- Transferring
  - Transferring is a good way for non-traditional students to enter university.
  - You can transfer from a community college after 2 years or a four-year university after 2 semesters. Most schools accept transfer students, and unique stories especially stand out.
  - It is often the best way to assemble a complete application if you did not have college prep in high school.
  - The transfer process is similar to the regular admissions process. You just ask your professors, instead of teachers, to write you letters of recommendation.
  - Once you have a certain number of credits (usually the equivalent of spending 2 years in a college), you will not have to provide high school transcripts or an SAT/ACT score with your transfer application (although a strong standardized test score will surely help).

### III. Sending Your Application

- You will most likely use one or more of the following to submit your application:
  - The Common Application
  - The Coalition Application
  - CUNY Portal
  - Other - some schools have their own application portals.
- You will need to ensure that the colleges receive your required documents and scores.
  - Follow up with recommenders to make sure they submit their letters on time.
  - Make sure to send your standardized test scores before the deadline.
  - Make sure transcripts are sent out ahead of the deadline.

## Chapter 4: External Resources

### I. College Counseling

- Goddard Riverside Options Center (*352 W 110th St, Manhattan*) - FREE
  - The Options Center is a nonprofit operating in Manhattan's Upper West Side.
  - They offer free college counseling and can help you through the process.
  - They have weekly drop-in hours on Wednesdays from 2-3:30pm, where you can stop be to meet with a counselor and ask questions about college and higher education.
  - Offer small scholarships every year.
- [The Door](#) - FREE
  - Offers college advising & tutoring among other resources.
- [CollegePoint](#) - FREE
  - Specific to [high-performing](#), low-income students
  - You would most likely receive a virtual advisor (online).
  - Offers step-by-step individual guidance for the entire college application process
    - Helps with compiling college list, preparing for interviews, editing essays, sending applications, finding scholarship programs

### II. Educational Institutions

- Brooklyn College - [BC Bound Program](#)
  - Brooklyn College has a program which allows students who have taken the high school equivalency exam (TASC) to enroll as first-year students in the four-year college.
  - They offer exclusive resources to students in this program, including tutoring and other workshops to ease the transition into college.
- Touro College

- Touro was established to cater to the wider Jewish community in higher education.
- They have many different divisions which might be useful to check out, including:
  - [Machon L'Parnasa](#)/Institute for Professional Studies - accepts students from all educational backgrounds (with/without high school equivalency, limited English proficiency) and is geared towards career preparation & advancement.
  - [School for Lifelong Education](#) - stated mission is to serve the academic needs of Chasidic community and caters to people with limited secular education.
  - [Lander College for Women](#)
  - [Lander College for Men](#)
  - [New York School of Career and Applied Studies](#) - serves students of all backgrounds.
- Testing and Training International ([TTI](#))
  - For some people, especially those who may be mid-career already, it might make sense to pursue a college degree without attending college. This approach isn't an alternative to attending college, as you will miss out on many of the less tangible benefits of attending college, such as meeting people from different walks of life, learning to interact with people in the outside world, extracurricular activities and more. However, if you are at a point in your life and career at which attending college for an undergraduate degree is not feasible, but you need a college degree to advance in your career or to apply directly to graduate schools, this approach may be for you.
  - There are some accredited colleges designed to allow adult learners with life experience to apply that experience toward earning a college degree. The two big ones in NY/NJ are Thomas Edison State University and Excelsior College. These schools will allow you to earn credit by exams in lieu of courses for approximately 116 out of 120 required credits. In some instances, they will also allow you to transfer credits from a yeshiva or seminary or from paramedic courses and the like.
  - A great resource for students from a Haredi background is TTI. For a fee (currently \$775), TTI will assist you in planning out your exams to earn the maximum credit from your experience and your knowledge of Judaic studies. If you are self-driven and determined, you can earn your degree in as little as six months.
  - Note that while some exams are easy and require no preparation (think Yiddish for example), the vast majority of exams require study and preparation. (Even an exam like Chumash will require the study of the assigned Rashis etc.) If English is not your first language you may also be eligible for an accommodation allowing for multiple choice exams. Ask your TTI advisor about it when working on your plan.
  - One advantage of this approach is that you may be able to avoid taking the TASC/GED exam by taking certain required exams such as English 101 and Math 101.
  - It is important to consider your long-term plan before attempting this approach. While some employers requiring college degrees aren't particular about the school or major, others are. If you are pursuing a specific career path, it is worth doing your research to make sure that the employers you want to work for aren't looking for graduates certain types of schools such as ranked business schools. If you are pursuing a bachelor's degree in order to apply directly to graduate school, it is very important that you know the requirements of the graduate school in advance. For example, if you want to apply to a highly ranked business school, it is unlikely that you'll be accepted on the basis of an



Excelsior College degree and a transcript consisting mostly of credit by exam. Graduate schools also have minimum GPA requirements you should be aware of.

- For more information about this route, please reach out to [hasidiccollegeaccess@gmail.com](mailto:hasidiccollegeaccess@gmail.com).

### III. Direct Services

- Public Libraries - FREE
  - Easy access to standardized test prep books
  - In order to take books out with you, you'll need to get a library card
    - Getting a library card requires a government-issued ID or school photo ID/report card/any photo ID + proof of NYS address (a letter to your home with your name).
  - The Brooklyn Public Library offers [free TASC prep classes](#)
- [Rockland BOCES](#) - FREE
  - Specific to students in the Rockland County area.
  - They offer free High School Equivalency (TASC) prep & ESL (English as a second language).

## Chapter 5: Conclusion + College Success Tips:

Some of the challenges students like you have faced before is that their first college application process didn't work out. If that's the case for you, keep trying, and keep aspiring. Others found that they got into top universities but didn't really have anyone to celebrate with. There will be many challenges - that's pretty much guaranteed - but just know that it'll all be worth it.

Once you get to school, there will be brand-new challenges (yay!). Academically (don't be afraid to ask for help, go to office hours, email professors, talk to academic advisors, utilize free tutoring); socially (get involved with clubs, attend events outside of class); personally (take care of yourself physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, utilize mental health resources). Above all, remember to have fun - research suggests you'll have the time of your life!

On the next page, you will see a list of schools that have accepted students like you in recent years in all admissions cycles: regular admissions, transfer admissions etc. Feel free to reach out to be connected with someone or to ask any questions: [hasidiccollegeaccess@gmail.com](mailto:hasidiccollegeaccess@gmail.com). We are all rooting for you!

## Chapter 6: Undergraduate institutions that have recently accepted students from Chasidic/ultra-Orthodox communities:

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*To show you the possibilities, these are schools which have recently accepted students from Williamsburg, Borough Park, Monsey, Monroe & New Square in the regular and transfer admissions process.*

Amherst College	New York University (NYU)
Borough of Manhattan Community College	Pace University
Brandeis University	Pomona College
Brown University	Rockland Community College
Case Western Reserve University	Rutgers University
Columbia College, Columbia University	Sarah Lawrence College
Cornell University	School of General Studies, Columbia University
CUNY Baruch College	Smith College
CUNY Brooklyn College	Stern College for Women, Yeshiva University
CUNY College of Staten Island	SUNY Binghamton University
CUNY City College	SUNY Broome Community College
CUNY Hunter College	SUNY Stony Brook University
CUNY Queens College	Syracuse University
Emory University	Tulane University
Georgetown University	University of Maryland, College Park
Harvard University	University of Pennsylvania
Johns Hopkins University	University of Rochester
Kingsborough Community College	Wellesley College
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	Wesleyan University
Mount Holyoke College	Williams College
Muhlenberg College	Yale University
New York City College of Technology	Yeshiva College, Yeshiva University