**Guide to College Applications 2017-2018**

**By**

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**&**

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**2017 STEP-UP Program**

**Universities of California (UC’s)**

* 9 universities (+ UCSF which doesn’t have an undergraduate college).
* These universities are: Berkeley (Cal), Davis, Irvine, Los Angeles, Merced, Riverside, San Diego, Santa Barbara and Santa Cruz
* UC’s are less expensive than private schools. Their tuition/fees is about $14,000 for CA residents and $38,024 for nonresidents. This is not counting room and board and other fees, which is about an additional $20,000. **However, this price does not take into account financial aid/scholarships/etc. For example, at Berkeley about 50% of applicants receive some financial aid.**
* Universities vary in location, admission rates, average GPAs, strengths, campus cultures, rivalries (for example, DON’T wear a Stanford shirt at Cal) etc.
* But! There is one application for all the UC’s! Yay!
* However, you do have to pay the admission fee for every UC to which you apply, which is $70 per application (unless you have a fee waiver). So don’t apply to all the UC’s just because.

*Admission requirements:*

* + **Completed “a-g” requirements** (with a C or better) by end of 12th grade. Note: These are often similar (but not identical) to high school graduation requirements. See <http://www.ucop.edu/agguide/a-g-requirements/>
  + **Minimum (weighted) GPA** of 3.0 (for CA residents) or 3.4 (for out of state) in 10th and 11th grade in a-g requirements. Must have no grade lower than a C.
  + **Fees:** $70 per campus you’re applying to. You can request a fee waiver for up to 4 campuses. If you think you are eligible for a fee waiver, apply for one. There’s no harm in trying.
  + **Standardized Testing:**
    - ACT plus Writing or SAT Reasoning Test. Take these no later than Dec. of senior year, and better if you take them earlier. Just taking the exams are not enough. Make sure you actually **send** your results to the UC’s!
    - SAT Subject Tests (or SAT II’s) are not required, but some majors may recommend them.

*Actually Applying:*

* Applications are done online through the UC application website. You can (and do) use one application to apply to any or all of the UC’s. To apply, go to <https://admissions.universityofcalifornia.edu/applicant/login.htm>
* November 1: Application window opens.
* November 30: Application deadline for all UC’s. Don’t wait until midnight of November 30 to apply! The website could crash. A meteor could strike Earth/your computer.
* The application will request you to fill in demographic information, prospective majors, activities lists, jobs, community service, etc. Some universities may ask some specific questions.
* You also will have to complete two personal statements (see below).
* **No letters of recommendation required** for the UC’s – with a few exceptions – UC Berkeley may ask selected applicants for letters ***after they apply***. Do not worry if you are asked or are not – either way you are still being considered.
* Proofread, proofread, proofread. Have someone else proofread, proofread some more. Don’t say how much you love Stanford when you’re applying to Cal (it happens). Sometimes the system messes up italics and tabs and paragraph breaks.
* Then take a deep breath and send in the application. Maybe eat a snickerdoodle (that’s what I did when I sent in my UC app).
* Usually you’ll hear back from UC’s in March.

*Personal Statements:*

Students choose 4 out of the 8 total UC essay prompts and respond with 350-word answers. The prompts were updated as recently as last year, so we can anticipate no change for the 2017-2018 application season.

Here are the UC Essay Prompts:

1. Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time.

2. Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.

3. What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?

4. Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.

5. Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

6. Describe your favorite academic subject and explain how it has influenced you.

7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

8. What is the one thing that you think sets you apart from other candidates applying to the University of California?

*Hint – try to make sure these sound like answers and not essays. You may cover some of the same ground as in your Common App essay or supplements; but the UCs want more straightforward style answers.*

*Helpful Links:*

UC requirements: <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/counselors/freshman/minimum-requirements/index.html>

A-G requirements: <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/counselors/freshman/minimum-requirements/index.html>

UC application: <https://admissions.universityofcalifornia.edu/applicant/login.htm>

Information about fees and fee waivers: <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/application-fees/index.html>

Tuition and Fees: <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/paying-for-uc/tuition-and-cost/>

Personal Statements: <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/personal-statement/>

**Private Universities and Colleges**

Most private universities and colleges in the US use the Common Application process, and then some also ask you to complete supplemental essays.

*Common Application:*

* This is the king, the queen, the president of college admissions. Most private universities use this website, except for the few like MIT which are too cool for a communal website. **The UC’s do not use Common App.**
* **To apply, go to:** <https://www.commonapp.org/Login>
* Once you’ve created an account on common app, you can use it to apply to over 500 colleges. Common app allows you to fill out lists of your activities, grades, demographic information, etc once and only once. You **don’t** need to go to the websites of individual colleges to apply, although you might get useful info from their websites. Nor should you fill out additional paper applications.
* You do have to pay a fee for every university to which you apply. However, you can sometimes get fee waivers.
* You also use Common App to send recommendation letters. Many colleges require one or two teacher letters of rec, as well as a letter from a counselor, and sometimes an additional letter. **Make sure to ask your recommenders well in advance.** You’ll need to send your letter writers a link, so they can create an account on common app and write a letter.
* There is also a Common App essay that goes to all the universities that use this application. The universities don’t expect or want you to personalize this essay for their specific university. So absolutely do not say anything specific about a particular school in the main essay! Save that for the supplements!
* Because universities like to make innocent high schoolers suffer (sorry, build character?), many colleges have supplements. These are additional, often shorter essays, specific to each college. Make sure you complete these too! These can be quite important in admissions. The good news is that many supplements are similar, and not all colleges have supplements. A common question is “Why College X?”
* Make sure to submit both the common app (essay and questions) and the university’s supplements.
* **Also don’t forget to send SAT’s/ACT’s to common app universities!** The common app won’t do that for you.
* As with the UC prompts, it is a good idea to complete supplements and Common App essay on a word document and then copy and paste it onto the application.
* Universities have different app deadlines, usually in January. The Common App can and does have issues and malfunctions, so try not to wait until the last minute to submit applications.
* Notification Dates vary by university. Usually you’ll hear by end of March/early April. The Ivy League schools generally all notify students on the same day.

***Common App Prompts (Pick one) 650 words***

1. 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. [No change]

2. 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? [Revised]

3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome? [Revised]

4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution. [No change]

5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others. [Revised]

6. 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? [New]

7. 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. [New]

*Stanford Supplements: (answer all) 250 words max.*

*1. Stanford students possess an intellectual vitality. Reflect on an idea or experience that has been important to your intellectual development.*

*2. Virtually all of Stanford's undergraduates live on campus. Write a note to your future roommate that reveals something about you or that will help your roommate—and us—know you better.*

*3. What matters to you, and why?*

*Helpful Links:*

Common App Prompts: <http://blog.commonapp.org/2015/03/31/2015-2016-essay-prompts/>

Common Application Website: <https://www.commonapp.org/Login>

Common Application Member Colleges: <https://www.commonapp.org/Login#!PublicPages/AllMembers>

MIT Application (doesn’t use Common App): <https://my.mit.edu/uaweb/login.htm>

Stanford Supplements <http://admission.stanford.edu/application/freshman/essays.html>

US News (good for stats like tuition cost, number of students, etc.) <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges>

**General Advice:**

*Applications:*

* Be careful about applying to the right school. Some schools have similar names. Columbia College and Columbia University are not the same school. Also often the engineering college and general liberal arts college within a university have separate admissions.
* Generally you don’t need to send in a resume, but some colleges give you that option. The application will have space to list activities, jobs, awards, etc.
* Don’t send in 10 extra letters of recommendation, or five additional essays, or a ten foot sculpture. Some colleges allow you to send art supplements or an additional letter or rec or two, but don’t go overboard.
* Do look through your mail. I got a couple of fee waivers in letters. You can always ritually recycle/burn your college mail later.
* Also check your emails. Sometimes colleges will email if they’re missing something.
* **Don’t dismiss a university because you think it’s too expensive. Many many private universities offer significant financial aid. Some universities offer merit-based scholarships as well.**
* **If you are a California resident make sure you apply for Cal Grant – you will need to talk to your high school counselor, principal, or registrar about your school filing your GPA Verification Form by March 1 or 2 of your senior year.**

***Essay Writing:***

* It is ok, indeed it is expected, to ask family, friends, counselors, teachers, neighbors, random people to read or proofread or give advice on your essays and personal statements. It is not ok to ask someone to write your essays for you. Also be careful that your essay doesn’t start to sound like your English teacher, instead of like a high school senior.
* Certain topics should be avoided: drug use, anything to do with dating, criminal activity, etc. Some topics are really cliché: a person who inspired you (ends up being about the other person, and not about you), travelogues, sports victories. You can still write about these cliché topics (I did) but try to make them not just “I scored the winning goal!”
* Reduce, reuse, recycle. Within reason. If you just apply to UC’s, you will just have to write two essays and be done. But if you apply to ten different schools, that’s at least ten different supplements to write. I think I wrote 20 different essays for college. So if two schools ask you about your community, you can reuse that essay. If you love a sentence you wrote in one essay, maybe it can find its way into another essay. However, make sure you are still answering the prompt, still writing for the right school, and not submitting collages of quotes instead of essays. Don’t write how much you love the East Coast for an essay explaining “Why Stanford” or write UCLA when you meant USC.
* Be creative. Also within reason. The admissions officers read a lot of essays. What makes you unique?
* Brag. It’s ok. Everyone else does. As long as you don’t seem too arrogant, some bragging is acceptable.

*When you hear back from colleges...*

* Celebrate! Getting into college is a big deal! Wherever and whenever and however you get in, it’s exciting.
* A deferral is not a rejection. I was deferred Early Action from a university in December and was accepted in March.
* Read your colleges admissions website. A lot of people at my school (Columbia) were surprised by the really strict general education curriculum...after they had already decided to go. Make sure you know about majors, requirements, study abroad, etc. so you aren’t surprised when you show up at college.
* It’s not all about prestige. Campus culture really matters. Do you like the kind of people at the university. Do you like the classes that they offer? The clubs? On a Friday night, do you want to go to a party? See a show? Watch a movie? Catch up on homework? Can you do that at your prospective college? I don’t know anybody who says “Ugh! I wish my school had more Nobel Laureates!” but I do know people who are unhappy at their college because they can’t make friends.
* Generally you have to choose a university by May 1.
* Once you’ve decided on a college, don’t forget to send in final transcripts and AP Scores!

*Other Things:*

* College Confidential is evil. It can provide some helpful advice, but it can also cause undue stress. Same with Yahoo Answers.
* It’s ok to change your mind during the college application process. Two years ago if you’d asked me where I wanted to go to college, I’d have said a liberal arts school in a quiet suburb. I ended up at a medium sized university. In New York City.

**Lastly**, college is fun. I wish someone had told me that earlier. Forget the prestige and the waiting and the admissions, college is really, really fun.