

Securing Scholarships

More than any other part of the college planning and selection process, securing scholarships is based on how hard you work. I'm not talking about how hard you worked to earn the GPA and test scores on your applications. I'm talking about how hard you are willing to work to locate and apply for scholarships. Practically gone are the days of the "full ride" academic scholarship. These days, students who have all their college paid for are likely to have pieced together their "full ride" with several smaller scholarships — some from their college or university, others from various outside organizations.

If you're serious about securing scholarships to pay for college, you're going to have to spend a good deal of time locating and then applying for them. Below, you'll find my suggestions as to where to find those scholarships.

First, though, read my May 31, 2007 College Answer Guy Column, entitled "Organizing your College Selection Process" (www.collegeanswer.org/columns). It suggests ways to organize the scholarship information you accumulate, and keep track of all the deadlines.

Information Sources

High school counselor's office (check back regularly, they are notified often of new scholarships)
 School and local library/librarian
 Local civic groups (Kiwanis, Elks, women's groups, local professional organizations in your major, etc.) and unions
 Your church, mosque or temple and at the district and/or national level in your denomination, etc.
 Web sites

Professional organizations in your major
 Fastweb.com
 FederalStudentAid.ed.gov
 "Google" the following phrases: scholarships, college scholarships, scholarship competition, money for college, pay for college, etc. Be careful here. While you'll probably find some good leads doing this, you'll also probably find some companies who want to charge you for locating scholarships on your behalf. I don't encourage using these kinds of services because you could find all the same information yourself, for free with a little work.
 The Scholarships/Financial Aid office at your school(s). Also, call someone with that office to ensure you have located all the appropriate resources available on campus
 The college and school/department/major at your school(s)

Duo-Search - Volunteer to help someone a year ahead of you find scholarships. Mount an extensive search and agree to give them all the information you come up with, and they agree to give you all their information when the year is over. As long as both of you are truly working at it, it will be beneficial to both of you. Then hand-pick someone you know in the class below you when you're a senior, and do the "duo-search" thing with them. Pass along to them what you collect when you're through.

Talk to friends and acquaintances who went to college recently and have your parents do the same with their friends and co-workers who have children who recently went to college. Ask if they are aware of any scholarship sources.

Once you've gathered all the applications, it's time to apply. Make sure you give yourself plenty of time to complete each application — start early. Remember to edit carefully everything you submit, and try to have someone else read through your responses. Keep copies of everything you submit, particularly anything you mail in. Also, double-check that the address on the envelope matches the address on the application.

Send your questions to lance@collegeanswer.org and visit <http://www.collegeprep101.com> and <http://www.collegeanswer.org>.