

A Guide to CSU Admissions Policies

The California State University (CSU) system, which has 23 campuses across the state, traditionally accepts the top third of the state's students based on high school grades and admissions test scores.

This guide describes CSU admissions policies generally. For more detailed information, talk to your high school counselor or the administrator in charge of helping students get into college. You can also go to www.csumentor.edu. In addition, see www.californiacolleges.edu for information on all colleges and universities in California.

What high school courses are required?

To meet *minimum* eligibility requirements for CSU, you must pass (with *at least* a C) 15 one-year courses, referred to as the “a–g” college-prep sequence:

- two years of history/social science—one year on the United States and one year on the world;
- four years of English language arts;
- three years of math through at least Algebra II or Integrated Math III;
- two years of laboratory science—one biological and one physical;
- two years of the same foreign language;
- one year of visual/performing arts; and
- one year of an elective from one of the above subjects.

You must take at least seven of these “a–g” courses during your junior and senior years. Your high school counselor will have a list of the courses at your school that meet CSU requirements. Because these are the same courses required by the University of California (UC), most high schools list their approved courses on the UC website:

www.ucop.edu/doorways/list

Some students take some of these courses—such as Algebra I or a foreign language—in middle school and receive high school credit, often by passing a proficiency exam. In addition, if you can demonstrate knowledge that is equivalent to two years of studying a foreign language, you may be able to waive the foreign language requirement.

If your native language is not English and you have not taken three full years of high school English, you must pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). See your high school counselor or go to www.ets.org/toefl to find out more. Also check with the CSU campus you are interested in to see what your TOEFL score must be to be admitted.

Which grades count?

For the eligibility formula, the grades you earn in the “a–g” college-prep courses taken during your sophomore and junior years count toward the grade-point average (GPA). The GPA is based on a 4.0 scale (A=4). Add one extra point for each A, B, or C grade earned in up to four approved honors, Advanced Placement (AP), or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses. (For example, an A in an honors course would equal five.) Many campuses will grant college credit for AP or IB courses if you do well on an end-of-course exam.

Is taking the minimum enough?

Just taking the minimum courses required may not be enough to qualify you for the campus or major of your choice. A few highly competitive campuses, such as Cal Poly at San Luis Obispo (SLO), choose students who have taken extra courses in advanced math, foreign language, science, and English. They also look at whether students have participated in extracurricular activities, done community service, held leadership positions, and worked. If students are applying for a particular major, work experience in that major is especially helpful.

Competitive campuses and high-demand majors are referred to as “impacted campuses” or “impacted programs.” To see which campuses and programs are impacted, go to: www.calstate.edu/ar/impactioninfo.shtml

CSU campuses also consider your senior year grades and courses before granting final admittance. Impacted campuses may review your high school freshmen grades as well.

Students with a GPA below 2.0 are generally not admitted to a CSU. At some impacted campuses, the average student has a GPA between 3.5 and 4.0. If you earn a 3.0 GPA, you are considered eligible for CSU no matter how well you did on admissions tests. But being eligible does not always translate into being accepted at your campus of choice. If you are eligible, your qualifications will be weighed against others who are also applying.

What admissions tests are required?

CSU requires students to submit scores on *one* of two tests that include math and English:

- the ACT Assessment; *or*
- the new SAT, which is sometimes referred to as the SAT-R. (The “R” stands for “reasoning.”) It replaces the SAT I.

Most California students choose to take the SAT, which was changed in March 2005. Students in the class of 2006 should take the new SAT, which has 2400 total possible points and is divided into three sections—writing, critical reading, and mathematics. Each count for a third of the exam. The new exam includes a student-written essay and topics from Algebra II (or Integrated Math III).

Most high schools offer students an opportunity to take the exam at school. Some offer preparation courses, or you can go online for sample test questions at www.collegeboard.com. In addition, you can take the new PSAT, which is offered in October of your sophomore and junior years, as a practice test. Books that help you prepare for the SAT or ACT are sold in bookstores and are available in public libraries. Your school library, counseling department, or College/Career Center may also have them. Or go to a free, interactive website at: <http://testprep.cavhs.org>

If you don't do well the first time you take an admissions exam, you can take it again and use the higher score when applying for admission.

How does CSU determine my eligibility?

CSU considers your grades and test scores to determine your eligibility. Higher grades in the college-prep courses can offset lower test scores and vice versa. The eligibility index is at: www.csumentor.edu/planning/high_school

How do I apply to CSU?

Unless there are special circumstances, CSU wants you to apply online. Ask your high school counselor or administrator for help and also go to the CSU website at www.csumentor.edu. You need to send an application to each campus you are interested in attending, but you can use the same application form.

Applying to more than one campus gives you more chances for acceptance at a campus of your choosing. CSU also provides a re-routing option to eligible applicants who are rejected by their campuses of choice to other campuses. CSU designates geographical “service areas” for its campuses. Eligible applicants from high schools in a campus’s service area are guaranteed admission to some program at that campus with one exception: Cal Poly at SLO. Students in that service area who don’t qualify are re-routed to a nearby campus.

Application fees are \$55 per campus. Applications should be submitted during the initial filing period between Oct. 1 and Nov. 30 for admission the next fall. Each year some campuses—particularly impacted ones—only accept applications during the initial filing period. Check www.csumentor.edu/filing_status to see which campuses have limited filing periods for the year you plan to enter.

If the cost of applying is a concern, apply for a fee waiver, which is built in when you apply online.

Do I have to take placement tests?

Once you are accepted to a CSU campus, you will have to take placement tests in English and math (unless your SAT or ACT scores reach a certain level). These placement tests determine which level of courses you are ready for. If the tests show you are not yet ready for college-level work, you will be placed in a remedial class that offers no credit.

At some high schools, you can take an expanded version of the English and math STAR tests taken by juniors each spring. If you test proficient in the enhanced test, CSU considers you ready for college and you do not have to take placement tests. If you don’t test proficient, then you can take steps to improve your skills and knowledge by taking English and math courses offered at your high school or community college during your senior year.

Although all high schools must offer the STAR tests, each high school can decide whether to offer the expanded CSU version. If you are a junior, ask your high school counselor or administrator if it would be appropriate for you to take this expanded version.

There is extra help for some students

Some organizations are aimed at students who are underrepresented in college:

- The California Student Aid Commission, www.csac.ca.gov provides financial aid to low-income students.
- The United Negro College Fund, www.uncf.org, helps African Americans.
- The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) at www.maldef.org aids Latinos. MALDEF also helps recent immigrants understand the requirements of Assembly Bill (AB) 540, which permits undocumented high school graduates to enroll in either CSU or UC and pay the state resident fee. High school counselors or other administrators may also know about AB 540.

What if I can’t afford to go to college?

The average fees in 2003–04 for a CSU campus were \$2,550 plus an additional \$1,195 for books. Other expenses depend on where you live.


There are many ways students can finance a college education, including academic or need-based scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study programs. If you need help, go to the CSU website, www.csumentor.edu, and click on “Financial Aid.”

Students can also qualify for loans and Pell grants (which don’t have to be repaid) from the federal government. Go to <http://studentaid.ed.gov> for information in both English and Spanish. The “free application for federal student aid” (FAFSA) form can be used to apply for all federal student aid. You can get that form at www.fafsa.ed.gov or call 1-800-4-FED-AID.

Corporations, nonprofit groups, and individuals offer scholarships based on a wide range of criteria. For more information, see FinAid at www.fafsa.org. You can also do a search on the Internet and in your local library and talk to the counselor or the Career/College Center at your high school.

What if I don’t meet CSU’s eligibility requirements?

Each CSU campus also has an Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) for students who are low-income, academically underprepared, or lacking the required high school courses, grades, or tests scores but who have demonstrated the potential for academic success. Go to the website of the CSU you would like to attend and search for its EOP program to see if you can qualify.

Or you can first attend a low-cost public community college (see www.cccco.edu) and then transfer to a CSU or UC (see www.ucop.edu). Two EdSource guides on community colleges can be downloaded for free at www.edsource.org (click on Publications in the yellow bar). 



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EdSource thanks the Stuart Foundation for its investment in our work.

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