

ADMISSIONS 101

ACT & SAT | COLLEGE APPLICATIONS | DEGREE OPTIONS

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Your gateway to West Virginia's colleges and universities

The College Foundation of West Virginia, online at cfwv.com, provides FREE resources to help students and families plan, apply, and pay for education and training beyond high school. You can explore West Virginia's colleges and universities and even use the site to apply directly to most of the state's two- and four-year schools!

Applying through cfwv.com can save you time because you can apply to several schools at once without having to re-enter your basic information (such as your name and address). Plus, the site helps you stay organized by automatically saving your applications to your portfolio.

ADMISSIONS 101

Making smart college choices

Thinking about college? Well, you should be! College graduates are more likely to be employed, earn more money, and find work in careers they love!

Most workforce and education leaders use the word “college” to include any type of postsecondary education or education and training beyond high school. That means you have many options when it comes to attending college. But it also means a high school diploma is no longer enough.

Every West Virginia student should plan to complete some type of education beyond high school. **Options include:**

- ✓ technical and professional certifications
- ✓ career and technical school programs
- ✓ apprenticeships
- ✓ two-year degrees
- ✓ four-year degrees
- ✓ military service

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KNOW YOUR OPTIONS

Types of institutions

When it comes to planning your education after high school, you have a lot of options. Different types of educational institutions offer different experiences — and some will be a better fit for you than others. To get started in exploring your choices, it is important to understand that there are five main types of postsecondary institutions:

- » **Public career and technical schools:** Career and technical schools offer training to help you develop skills that are in-demand in the workforce. Students often can complete these programs within six to 18 months. Graduates of these programs often receive certificates that document their knowledge or skills in a specialized area, like plumbing, child care, culinary arts, or appliance repair. Often, students can complete these programs while still in high school or while working full- or part-time.
- » **Public two-year colleges:** These colleges offer two-year associate degree programs in a wide variety of areas, such as English, music, computer science, business administration, medical assistance, and automotive technology. Many also offer certificate programs.
- » **Public four-year colleges:** These colleges offer bachelor's degree programs in a wide variety of subjects, such as chemistry, biology, history, psychology, engineering, music, art, communications, and education. Students traditionally take four years to earn a bachelor's degree. Many of these schools also offer graduate programs, such as master's degree programs and doctoral degree programs.
- » **Non-profit private colleges and universities:** There are many types of non-profit colleges and universities offering a wide variety of degrees and programs. Although tuition and fees often are higher at non-profit colleges and universities, many are able to offer large scholarships through funds provided by their donors.
- » **For-profit colleges and universities:** For-profit colleges and universities are businesses. For-profit colleges often offer programs in more convenient time frames or formats, but their tuition and fees often are higher. Additionally, many classes and credits offered by for-profit institutions are not recognized by other types of colleges — so these classes may not count toward a degree if you decide to transfer.

Understanding degrees and credentials

When you complete an education or training program or earn a diploma, you are earning a “credential.” Credentials serve as documentation of your knowledge, skills, or qualifications. Some careers require very specific credentials. For example, you must earn a medical degree (M.D. or O.D.) to work as a doctor. In other instances, credentials are more flexible and serve as symbols of advanced skills that help you compete in the workforce.

COMMON TYPES OF DEGREES AND CREDENTIALS

Certificate

Signifies that a student has earned knowledge in a very specific area of study often focused on a specialized trade or professional subject, like automotive technology or 9-1-1 and emergency services operation. Typically does not involve taking general education courses and usually can be completed in days, weeks, or months, rather than years; often serves to enhance a student's field of study. For example, a student pursuing a bachelor's degree in education might also earn a certificate in special education.

Associate Degree

Traditionally a two-year degree program requiring students to earn approximately 60 hours of college credit; often awarded through community and technical or junior colleges.

Bachelor's Degree

Traditionally a four-year degree program requiring students to earn approximately 120 hours of college credit; also known as a baccalaureate or undergraduate degree.

Master's Degree

A graduate degree, meaning it is typically earned after graduating from a bachelor's degree program (however, some can be earned simultaneously); usually takes two to three years to complete.

Doctoral Degree

A terminal degree, meaning it is the highest level of education that can be completed in a particular field of study; typically takes five to seven years to complete and requires intensive academic study and research. Many doctoral programs require students to complete a master's degree first. Ph.D. programs are a common type of doctoral program.

Professional Degree

A degree required to enter a specific profession; typically earned after completing a bachelor's degree program. For example, a Pharm.D. degree for pharmacy or a Doctor of Jurisprudence (J.D.) for practicing law.

Terminal Degree

A general term, referring to the highest academic degree available in any particular field of study.

THE RIGHT FIT

Know what's important (and what's not)

Finding the school or college that fits your needs and interests is incredibly important. It can be the difference between a positive and negative college experience — and whether or not you graduate.

You should definitely consider...

✓ Programs and majors

Does the college offer the program you want to pursue? Is their program known to be of high quality? How is the program taught — hands on, lecture and research, or online? How will your classes help you meet your goals?

✓ Academics

Will you be attending a college that will challenge you academically? What is the average GPA and/or ACT/SAT score for students at the college? How do those grades and scores compare to yours?

✓ Finances

How much will you pay to attend the college? Can you afford it? Keep in mind that financial aid options vary from school to school and student to student — so don't just consider "sticker price."

✓ Success rates

What is the school's graduation rate? How likely are its graduates to get a job in their fields? How likely are its graduates to default on student loans? How will the school help you succeed? Compare schools' graduation rates to get an idea of how well they're doing.

✓ Environment

Do you feel excited to be on campus? Do you feel safe? Does the school offer opportunities for you to experience new things that interest you? Will you be able to focus on your education there?

✓ Location

Do you like the town and area where the school or college is located? How does the student body interact with the community? Do you want to explore new places, or do you want or need to stay close to home?

You should ignore...

X Your friends' choices

Choosing a path for your future is a personal decision. Going to school with your friends might sound like fun, but their choices might not be right for you. Think of it this way: if your friends suddenly backed out, would you still want to go?

X Sports records

Everyone likes to be part of a winning team, but unless you're a student athlete, choosing a school based on its sports records is a bad idea. Even if you are an athlete, the factors listed above should come first — and don't count on a sports scholarship until you've received an offer in writing.

X Sticker price

The amount of financial aid you may qualify for depends on your personal situation — and available aid varies from college to college. Before you rule out a college based on its cost, talk to a financial aid representative at the school.

X Residence halls

Residence facilities should be safe, clean, accessible, and reasonably comfortable. Everything beyond that is a perk — not a necessity. Fancy residence halls, fitness facilities, and student lounges are nice, but these amenities shouldn't be deciding factors in choosing a college.

X Your nerves

Everyone gets nervous about starting college — it's a normal and healthy reaction. You should choose a college that will challenge you to push yourself, try new things, and step outside your comfort zone. However, if you're terrified, it might be time to reconsider your choice.

FINDING THE RIGHT SCHOOL OR COLLEGE FOR YOU

College Fit Worksheet

Use this worksheet as a template to make notes on colleges. Then compare your options to find the best fit for you. The following resources can aid you in finding this information:

- >> cfwv.com: offers detailed information about all WV colleges and colleges nationwide
- >> collegeresults.org: offers information about the success rates of students including graduation rates

NAME OF COLLEGE: _____

DOES THIS COLLEGE OFFER MY MAJOR/AREA OF STUDY?

yes no

IS THIS COLLEGE ACCREDITED?

yes no

LOCATION: _____

APPLICATION DEADLINE(S): _____

FOCUS: trade/career 2-year 4-year

TYPE: public private non-profit for-profit

TOTAL # OF STUDENTS: _____

AVG. # OF FRESHMAN STUDENTS: _____

AVG. % OF STUDENTS WHO RETURN 2ND YEAR: _____

AVG. 6-YEAR GRADUATION RATE: _____

PERCENT OF APPLICANTS ADMITTED ANNUALLY: _____

AVG. ACT/SAT SCORES OF ADMITTED STUDENTS: _____

AVG. GPA OF ADMITTED STUDENTS: _____

AVG. FINANCIAL AID PACKAGE: \$ _____

ON-CAMPUS HOUSING AVAILABLE? yes no

SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED BY THIS COLLEGE THAT I MIGHT RECEIVE:

APPLICATION DEADLINES:

ACTIVITIES/SERVICES OR OTHER ASPECTS OF CAMPUS THAT INTEREST ME:

HOW LIKELY AM I TO BE ADMITTED?

- it's possible, but it will be a stretch
- very likely
- definitely

► **Quick tip:** Consider the average range of grades and test scores for students admitted to this college. How do yours compare? If this college only admits a small percentage of applicants and your scores are toward the bottom of the range, consider this a “reach” college.

Give yourself options: apply to four

Are you submitting too many college applications? Or not enough? Experts say that applying to between four and six colleges is about right for most students.

Research shows that students who apply to more than one college or program are far more likely to attend college and succeed. That's because those students are more likely to receive help from admissions offices in preparing for college — and are more likely to find the college or program that's the best fit for them. But applying to dozens of schools can be overwhelming and actually prevent students from making a final decision.

Follow this rule of thumb for applying:

- » Apply to one “reach” college or program.
- » Apply to two or three “fit” colleges or programs.
- » Apply to one or two “safety” colleges or programs.

Reach, fit, or safety?

There is no master list that says whether or not a college or program represents a “reach,” “fit,” or “safety” option because those categories vary from student to student. A college that's a fit for you might be a reach for someone else. Use the worksheet on the previous page to gather information about each college you're considering. Then answer the questions below to categorize each of your college options as “reach,” “fit,” or “safety” according to your academic ability and comfort level. Remember, this is simply a tool to help you begin to consider whether or not a college might be a fit for you — it's not an exact predictor of college fit.

1. How do your grades and test scores compare to the average range for students admitted to this school or program?

- a. My grades/scores are on the high-end of the range or higher than those of most students enrolling in this school or program.
- b. My grades/scores are in the middle of the range.
- c. My grades/scores are just below or on the low end of the range.

2. Does this school or program make you feel more excited or intimidated?

- a. Excited.
- b. Intimidated.

3. Does this program or college offer options to challenge you? (Ex. Can you work with highly respected experts or enroll in an honors program?)

- a. Yes.
- b. No.

4. Does this school or program admit fewer than 20 percent of its applicants?

- a. Yes.
- b. No.

5. Does this school or program have an open admissions policy, meaning that if you meet their basic academic criteria, you will definitely get in?

- a. Yes.
- b. No.

Scoring:

- 1. _____ a = 0 b = 1 c = 3
- 2. _____ a = 0 b = 2
- 3. _____ a = 2 b = 0
- 4. _____ a = 3 b = 0
- 5. _____ a = 0 b = 2

Where does your score fall on the scale?





ENTRANCE EXAMS

ACT and SAT

If you apply to a four-year college, the institution will probably require you to take a college entrance exam to help determine whether or not you are ready for college-level work. The most common entrance exams are the ACT and the SAT. Most West Virginia colleges and universities will accept scores from either the ACT or the SAT, but you should check with the institution you plan to attend to be sure.

Your scores on these tests can help decide what colleges you can attend, the amount of financial aid you can receive, and even which classes you can take your freshman year of college. So yeah, they're "kind of a big deal." It's important to know a little about each exam, so you are prepared to do your best.

ACT: The ACT consists of four sections: English, mathematics, reading, and science. There also is an optional writing component that we encourage you to take. Students receive five scores, one for each required section and an overall "composite" score. Scores on each section range from 1-36. The composite score represents the average of the four main sections, with the highest possible score being a 36.

SAT: The SAT consists of three parts: reading, mathematics, and writing. Scores range from 200 to 800 for each section. Adding your scores on the reading and math sections will allow you to determine your "combined" score, with 2400 being the highest possible score on the test.

Both the ACT and the SAT require you to register to take the tests, and students must pay a testing fee. If you are unable to pay the fee, ask your school counselor about applying for a fee waiver. The earlier you register, the more money you'll save because you'll avoid late fees. To register, view current testing fees, or find test dates and locations, visit act.org for the ACT or collegeboard.org for the SAT. Both tests also have rules about what you can bring to the testing site (including the type of calculator you can use), so read through these rules on the ACT and SAT websites.

Preparing for the ACT and SAT

Study: Don't underestimate the importance of studying. Start studying early in your junior year. There are plenty of guides, classes, and tutorials to help you study—and the state of West Virginia even offers FREE online ACT and SAT test prep courses at cfwv.com.

Retest: Maybe you took the test and your score was great. Or maybe you didn't score as high as you'd hoped. Either way, you can take these exams more than once to try to get a better score. According to ACT research, 55 percent of students increase their composite scores the next time they take the exam. And guess what — most colleges and scholarship programs will use your highest score!

Relax: Most students have test anxiety, but an easy way to reduce the pressure is to start practicing early. Don't wait until the last minute to prepare or take the tests. Taking the exams as early as possible will give you a feel for the structure of the tests, and you'll know you have time to take them again if necessary.

COLLEGE LINGO

»» **Accreditation:** It is important to go to a college that has been accredited, meaning that a reputable outside organization has verified that the college meets a minimum level of quality. To learn more and check to see if a school is accredited, visit ope.ed.gov/accreditation.

»» **Admissions office:** The admissions office oversees your application to the college, determines whether or not you will be admitted, and facilitates transfers.

»» **Advanced Placement (AP) credits:** Refers to advanced classes taken in high school that allow students to earn early college credit by passing a final exam.

»» **Adult learner:** A student, usually older than age 25, who attends college after an extended period outside of the education system. Adult learners are sometimes referred to as “non-traditional students;” however, the term is misleading, because adult learners make up a significant portion of the college student population.

»» **Application deadline:** The last date to submit your application and be considered for acceptance for a particular term. Application deadlines vary for each college.

»» **Application fee:** A fee some colleges charge to process your college application.

»» **Audit:** An evaluation of a student’s previous coursework conducted to determine whether or not the student can count this work toward completion of his or her degree. Transfer students or adults who previously attended college but did not finish may want to request an audit. Speak with an admissions counselor to learn more about these options.

»» **Catalog:** A document containing rules and policies for your college. The catalog

also often includes class offerings and descriptions, academic requirements for the college’s various degree programs, and information related to expenses.

»» **Co-curricular activities:** Activities a student participates in beyond those required as part of the regular school day; examples include volunteer programs, sports, school clubs, faith-based groups, and part-time jobs. Many colleges and scholarship programs consider a student’s co-curricular activities in evaluating students for their program. Co-curricular is also referred to as “extra-curricular.”

»» **College Level Examination Program (CLEP) credits:** Refers to college credit that is earned by taking an exam in a specific subject area. Students who pass the exam can earn credits without completing additional coursework. There often is a small fee to take CLEP exams. Check with your college’s admissions office or your academic advisor to see if your college accepts these credits toward your degree.

»» **Credit hours:** Units of value given to courses, which equate to academic credits toward your degree. Credit hours are loosely based on the number of hours you are expected to spend in a particular class each week (not counting homework or other out-of-class study time). Different courses are worth different credit hours. Most classes are worth three credits. Most academic programs require students to complete a minimum number of credit hours for graduation. For example, most associate degree programs require 60 credit hours. Most bachelor’s degree programs require 120.

»» **Deferred admission:** The practice of allowing an accepted student to postpone enrollment, usually for one year, without having to reapply.

»» **Early admission or action:** Colleges may admit or accept students into college programs before they have completed high school as a gesture of confidence that the student can attend the institution upon graduation, should he or she choose to do so. Early admission does NOT limit the student’s ability to receive state or federal financial aid, and students are not “locked in.”

»» **Early decision:** At some (but not many) colleges, students can apply and request an “early decision” on their admissions application. If a student applies for early decision, he or she is indicating that the college is his or her first choice and that he or she will definitely attend if admitted. A student should not apply for early decision at more than one college because he or she will be obligated to attend the early decision college if selected. However, a student can apply for early decision at one college and regular admission at others.

»» **Enrollment:** The process a student must complete after he or she has been accepted in order to be an “official” student at the college. To enroll, students typically must complete all forms required by the college, pay tuition and fees, and sign up for classes.

»» **Entrance exams:** Tests students take to measure their ability to complete college-level work. Typically, students take the ACT or SAT, but other tests, such as ACCUPLACER, are common. A student’s scores on these exams are sometimes used to determine whether or not the student is accepted to a college and what classes he or she is required or able to take. For example, a student who scores below a minimum required score may be required to take developmental courses to “catch up” during the first year of college.

» **Financial aid:** Money provided to a student to help pay for college. A financial aid package is the combination of grants, scholarships, loans, and work-study stipends or funds a student receives to help offset the cost of attending college. The most important step in applying for financial aid is completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

» **Graduate school:** A degree program for students who have already completed a bachelor's degree and wish to earn a higher-level degree. Not all four-year colleges offer graduate programs.

» **Honors programs or colleges:** Students who have excelled academically in high school may be eligible to enroll in an honors program or "honors college" in college. Honors programs offer students the chance to take more difficult classes. Some scholarship programs require their scholarship recipients to participate in honors programs. Many honors programs offer additional support for honors students, such as personalized tutoring or priority registration for classes.

» **Major:** The subject or discipline in which a student chooses to specialize. Schools typically offer many different majors or programs of study. Students who are unsure about what field they wish to study can enter college as "undecided" and work to complete their general education requirements while they decide. Students also can change majors. Changing majors or staying "undecided" too long can prevent students from graduating on time — so it is important to talk to an academic advisor when making decisions about academic majors or adjusting your program of study.

» **Minor:** An additional area of focus or emphasis of study, often to provide students with secondary skills related to their major or to expand on a particular interest area. Minors require fewer credit hours to complete than majors.

» **Open admissions:** Typically means that the admissions process is NOT competitive. In other words, students who meet the college's minimum requirements will likely be accepted to the school.

» **Orientation:** Events hosted by a college to help new students understand the enrollment process and become familiar with campus. During orientation, students often learn how to register for classes; how to use the school library, cafeteria, fitness center, and other school services; how to pay tuition and fees; and how to take care of other important details.

» **Postsecondary education:** Education and training beyond high school.

» **Priority deadline:** A date set by each college allowing students who apply to the school before the priority deadline to be given first consideration for acceptance. Students can apply after the priority deadline, but may not be as likely to be accepted. Priority deadlines are NOT the same as application deadlines, which are the absolute last dates to submit applications and be considered.

» **Room and board:** Refers to charges applied to a student's account for living on campus or eating in the dining halls. "Room" applies to the cost of housing (living in the dorms) and "board" refers to the cost of meal or dining plans.

» **Selective admissions:** Typically means that the admissions process is competitive. In other words, students who apply to institutions with a selective admissions process are compared to other applicants, and only those judged to be the best fit or most qualified are accepted to the institution. Selective admissions processes often require students to write essays, describe community activities in which they have participated, and list awards received. Institutions that have selective admissions processes often require higher academic achievement.

» **Semester:** A way of dividing the school year into two main sessions or terms. Traditionally, colleges divide the school year into fall and spring semesters. Typically, college courses do not last more than one semester. Some students also take courses during the summer, but class schedules and term lengths during summer tend to vary. At some colleges, multiple summer sessions are offered.

» **Transcript:** The official record of college courses a student has completed and grades earned. Upon graduation, your transcript also documents the title of the degree you completed and any academic honors you earned.

» **Transfer:** Students who have completed college coursework at another institution often can transfer their course credits to a different institution. Students who started college but stopped short of earning a degree and students who completed college classes while in high school should be sure to speak with an admissions counselor about transferring their credits.

» **Tuition and fees:** This refers to the cost of the education provided by an institution. It does not include other expenses, such as room and board or the purchase of books. Tuition and fees are typically paid by semester.

» **Undeclared/Undecided or General Studies Major:** Students who are unsure which degree program they wish to enter can enroll in college and begin taking general education classes as an undeclared/undecided or general studies major. Students with undeclared majors may be required to take special classes or workshops aimed at helping them determine their career interests.

» **Undergraduate:** A college student who has not yet earned an associate or bachelor's degree.



WEST VIRGINIA COLLEGES

Two-year public schools

1. Blue Ridge Community and Technical College
2. BridgeValley Community and Technical College, Montgomery
3. BridgeValley Community and Technical College, South Charleston
4. Eastern WV Community and Technical College
5. Mountwest Community and Technical College
6. New River Community and Technical College
7. Pierpont Community and Technical College
8. Southern WV Community and Technical College
9. West Virginia Northern Community College
10. West Virginia University at Parkersburg

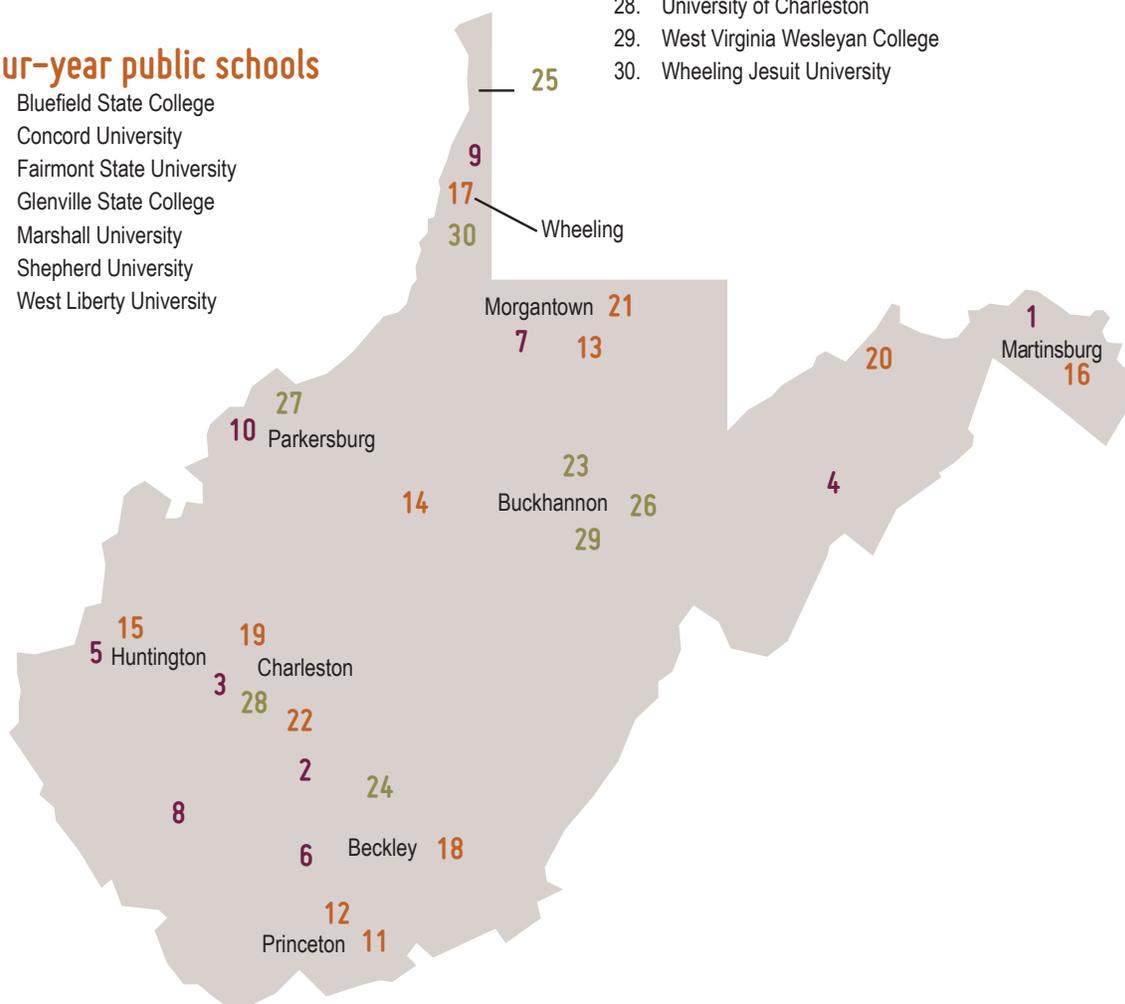
18. West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine
19. West Virginia State University
20. Potomac State College of WVU
21. West Virginia University
22. West Virginia University Institute of Technology

Independent non-profit schools

23. Alderson Broaddus University
24. Appalachian Bible College
25. Bethany College
26. Davis and Elkins College
27. Ohio Valley University
28. University of Charleston
29. West Virginia Wesleyan College
30. Wheeling Jesuit University

Four-year public schools

11. Bluefield State College
12. Concord University
13. Fairmont State University
14. Glenville State College
15. Marshall University
16. Shepherd University
17. West Liberty University



Pursuing a program not offered in West Virginia? Under an agreement called the “Academic Common Market,” you may be able to enroll in an out-of-state program and receive the in-state tuition rate at the college or university you attend. To learn more, visit cfwv.com, click on “college-planning,” then click on “explore schools.”

FREE ACT, SAT, AND GRE TEST PREP

The State of West Virginia offers free resources to help you prepare for entrance exams including the ACT, SAT, and GRE. (The GRE is the most common test required for graduate school). Log on to the state's free college-planning website, cfwv.com, to take practice tests, get study tips, review test-taking strategies, and expand your vocabulary.

1. Go to cfwv.com.
2. Click on "college planning" at the top of the screen.
3. Click on "test prep" in the navigation bar immediately below the main navigation links.



About the College Foundation of West Virginia:

The College Foundation of West Virginia (CFWV) offers free college- and career-planning resources, including cfwv.com, a free website to help students and families plan, apply, and pay for education and training beyond high school. CFWV is coordinated by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission in conjunction with the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education, the West Virginia Department of Education, and the West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts.

