

The National Merit Scholarship Program

The National Merit Scholarship Program is an academic competition for recognition and scholarships that high school students enter by taking the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®) during October of their Junior year. It is the test that serves as an initial screen of approximately 1.5 million entrants. Scholarship winners represent less than 1% of the initial pool of student entrants.

To participate in the National Merit Scholarship Program, a student must

- Take the PSAT in October during their junior year of high school
- Be enrolled as a high school student, progressing normally toward graduation or completion of high school, and planning to enroll full time in college no later than the fall following completion of high school
- Be a citizen of the United States; or be a U.S. lawful permanent resident and intend to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law.

In September of the following year, students are notified if they have qualified as Semifinalists. To advance to be a Finalist, a student must meet further requirements and deadlines, which include completing a scholarship application, writing an essay and earning an SAT score (typically in the Fall of senior year) that confirms their qualifying PSAT test performance.

Semifinalists who meet academic and other requirements will be notified in February of their graduating year if they have advanced to Finalist standing. Of the approximate 15,000 Finalists, about 8,000 receive Merit Scholarship awards.

The complete National Merit Student Guide with a complete list of the requirements, sponsoring corporations, and sponsoring colleges can be found at

[Official Student Guide to the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test](#)

Types of Merit Scholarship Awards

National Merit® \$2500 Scholarships - Every Finalist competes for these single payment scholarships, which are awarded on a state representational basis. Winners are selected without consideration of family financial circumstances, college choice, or major and career plans. Generally, these awards are transferrable from one regionally accredited US institution to another.

College-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards – About 200 colleges and universities sponsor approximately 5,000 college-sponsored awards each year. Officials of each sponsor college select winners of their awards from Finalists and Semi-Finalists who have been accepted for admission and have informed NMSC by the published deadlines that the sponsor college or university is their first choice. These awards are renewable for up to four years of undergraduate study; however, these awards are not transferrable to another college. Merit Scholarship stipends are between \$500

and \$2,000 per year. However, some colleges may also offer a financial aid “package” that includes grants that in some cases are as much as a full-ride scholarship.

Here is a [list](#) of colleges that have provided partial to full rides to Merit Finalists or Semi-finalists. In the past. This list changes from year to year. Please research this possibility for any school that you may be interested in attending. In order to be eligible a student MUST name the college as their first choice by the reporting deadline. Be sure to review the website of your first choice college for any other requirements or deadlines.

Corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarships awards – Finalists who meet criteria specified by a corporate sponsor; usually, children of employees, residents of specific communities, or finalists with certain college majors or career plans. These scholarships may either be renewable for four years of undergraduate study or one-time awards and the award amounts vary.

Special Scholarships - Every year some 1,300 National Merit® Program participants, who are outstanding but not Finalists, are awarded Special Scholarships provided by corporations and business organizations. To be considered for a Special Scholarship, students must meet the sponsor's criteria and entry requirements of the National Merit Scholarship Program. They also must submit an entry form to the sponsor organization. These scholarships may either be renewable for four years of undergraduate study or one-time awards.