



Columbia College Promise High School Class of 2025

Overview

The Columbia College Foundation now offers an opportunity for local high school seniors enrolling at Columbia College. The **Columbia College Promise** makes it possible for every qualified local public high school graduate or GED recipient to attend Columbia College fulltime, tuition free, for up to two academic years when enrolling for the Fall semester immediately following graduation. The program launched as a three-year pilot in fall 2018 and is funded by gifts from individuals and community partners who care deeply about education for local youth. With additional funding from the College, the Foundation recently was able to expand the program. Qualifying students will be able to attend fulltime, tuition free for **two full years** of consecutive semesters if they enroll immediately after graduation. The program service area has recently expanded to include high school graduates throughout the Columbia College service area as well as Mariposa, Calaveras counties, Oakdale and Riverbank.

FREQUENTY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the Columbia College Promise?

The Columbia College Promise pays for tuition and enrollment fees for up to 60 units of study during the first two academic years beginning the fall semester immediately following high school graduation or earning of a GED - a value of \$2,400 to \$3,000 based on the number of units taken per semester. In addition, Promise students will receive specialized guidance and support to help ensure success.

What is the goal?

The Columbia College Promise will remove the tuition barrier that often stops promising young high school graduates from pursuing their education. The goal of the program is to increase the number of local high school graduates who attend Columbia College, thereby boosting the population of workforce-ready young adults who complete a degree, certificate or training program or successfully transfer to a 4-year college.

Why offer this program?

Only a fraction of students in our community successfully complete college or career training after high school, leaving them underprepared for the future. Some students qualify for merit scholarships, those who do not qualify often find that education is unaffordable and out of reach. Others, with no family history of attending college, may need special support and guidance to succeed.

Who is it for – How will it work?

- The Columbia College Promise will be offered to every public high school graduate who lives in the Columbia College service area (see eligible high school districts below), the Calaveras Unified School District in Calaveras County or the Mariposa County Unified School District and enrolls fulltime at Columbia College for the fall semester immediately following graduation.
- All students must first apply for federal and state grants by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or California Dream Act application and accept all federal or state money prior to the Promise funding. Some exceptions will apply.
- All students are eligible for the Columbia College Promise whether or not they receive financial aid.
- Promise awards will vary according to the total cost of tuition and fees and the amount of state awards that are granted to student applicants. The Columbia College Promise will pay tuition and fees directly to Columbia College, at no time will students receive money directly through this program.

Is there a cap on the number of students who can receive the Columbia College Promise?

No. All students who qualify by following the steps outlined for acceptance will receive the Promise.

What schools are included?

- All Tuolumne County public high schools (including Sonora High, Cassina High, Ted Bird High, Summerville High, Connections Academy, Long Barn High, South Fork High, Cold Springs High, Mountain High, Tioga High, Don Pedro High and Gold Rush Charter School)
- Calaveras County public high schools (including Bret Harte High, John Vierra High, Vallecito High, Calaveras High and Gold Strike High)
- Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools Alternative Education
- Amador High
- Oakdale High
- Riverbank High
- Mariposa County High
- Mountain Oaks Charter School (limited to graduates who live in Tuolumne County or Calaveras County)
- Connecting Waters Charter School (limited to graduates who live in the Columbia College service area).

Will the Columbia College Promise cover all the costs of college?

For a fulltime student taking a minimum of 12 units for two consecutive semesters, tuition and fees cost \$1244 per year. Books and supplies can cost \$1700 for an approximate total of \$3000 per year per student.

The Columbia College Promise covers Columbia College enrollment fees (\$46/unit tuition) for up to 30 units per year during the first two academic years after high school with consecutive enrollment and the Columbia College Activity Fee, Health Fee, Student Representation Fee, and Student Center Fees, after receipt of any applicable state financial assistance. The Columbia College Promise does not cover individual course material fees, test or certification expenses, books, parking, or other individual course expenses.

Promise funds will be available to students whether or not they receive other merit or needs-based scholarships. Additional scholarship funds provided by private donors and philanthropic organizations make it possible to apply funds over and above the cost of tuition and fees toward the purchase of required books and other learning tools.

What are the criteria to qualify for fall 2025?

To qualify for the Columbia College Promise, a student must be a 2025 graduate (or GED recipient) from a qualified public high school (see above) and reside within the boundaries of the Columbia College service area, Calaveras County or the Mariposa County Unified School District. Students must then complete the following steps:

Required Steps to Qualify:

1. Apply to Columbia College via CCC Apply (cccapply.org).
2. Complete the 2025-26 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA - www.fafsa.gov) or the 2025--26 Dream Act Application (<https://dream.csac.ca.gov>).
3. Complete the Promise Application.
4. Complete the CC on-line orientation.
5. Complete a comprehensive education plan with a CC counselor during Fall 2025 semester.
6. In preparation for Semester 4, update and refine your comprehensive education plan.
7. Agree to an exit interview at any point if you do not continue with the Promise Program.
8. **Enroll in and maintain 12 or more units at Columbia College for the Fall 2025 and Spring 2026 semesters** (If needed, up to one Modesto Jr. College (MJC) course each semester can be included in the 12 plus units but MJC tuition and/or fees will not be paid for by the Promise). Reduced unit requirement available for students meeting specific criteria.

9. Submit official high school transcripts to CC Admissions with proof of graduation, or GED, by 8/18/25.

Is there an application deadline?

Highest priority will be given to students who complete Required Steps 1-5 by June 7, 2025.

The last day Columbia College Promise Applications will be accepted is **August 18, 2025**, and all required steps must be completed by the first day of the Fall 2025 semester – August 25th (date subject to change)

Are undocumented students eligible for the Promise?

Yes, they will need to complete the California Dream Act application as part of the eligibility process.

How to I maintain eligibility in the Promise program?

1. In order to remain eligible, how many units must I enroll in after the first semester?

Students are eligible to have their tuition and fees paid for up to four consecutive primary terms (Fall and Spring semesters) when they enroll in at least 12 units for the Fall semester that immediately follows their graduation from high school or earning their GED. Continued eligibility will require enrollment in and completion of at least 12 units per semester. Up to 60 total units can be covered by the Promise, regardless of units already completed in dual enrolled high school student status.

2. What additional steps do I need to complete after the first semester?

- Update educational plan at least annually to ensure courses align with career and/or transfer goals
- Submit new financial aid application with each new academic year
- Reduced unit requirement may be available for students meeting specific criteria

How will the program be administered?

The program will be administered through a partnership between Columbia College offices of Financial Aid, Student Services and the Columbia College Foundation.

Is there a scholastic requirement for enrolling in the second, third or fourth semesters?

In order to continue receiving the Promise a student must have completed at least 12 units each semester.

If a student enrolls in summer school immediately following graduation from high school will those costs be paid? Will units earned during that summer be deducted from the 30 unit limit in the first year?

The Promise program will cover up to 30 units in the first year, beginning in the fall immediately following graduation. Students will not be reimbursed for units taken in the summer immediately following graduation and units taken will not reduce the student's ability to be reimbursed for 30 units beginning in the fall.

Will units at MJC be counted toward the 12-unit minimum?

Understanding that a particular class may not be available at Columbia College at a convenient time for an individual student, the Promise program allows that one class per semester can be taken at Modesto Junior College (MJC) toward the 12-unit minimum. Courses taken at MJC are not paid for by the Promise.

Can a student still qualify if he/she takes a semester off after graduating high school?

No, students only qualify if they enroll for the fall semester immediately after their high school graduation.

What happens if a Promise student drops a class and falls below 12 units during the first semester?

You will not be charged for dropped units, but you will not qualify for the spring semester. You should work with your counselor to find alternate classes/late start options to fill your schedule.

What if a student qualifies for a reduced unit load through the DSPS program?

DSPS students will be considered full-time at their reduced unit load, if verified by a counselor.

Will unit fees be paid for by the Promise for summer classes?

The Promise program will cover fees for up to 30 units total for a student's first academic year. Summer courses that follow their first academic year may be included in this total.

What can I do to get help with my education after I have used what I am eligible for though the Promise?

Many resources are available to help you afford your college education – including financial aid, scholarships, potential tax credits and student loans (when used prudently). Consider taking a budget and money-management class (Guide 35), and look into our Columbia College scholarships (www.gocolumbia.edu/scholarships).

The Internal Revenue Service provides guidance on educational tax credits that may be available to students and their families. Visit www.irs.gov/Individuals/AOTC and read Publication 970, "Tax Benefits for Education," to learn more.

According to the IRS, "...the American Opportunity Tax Credit may give you the break you are looking for... Even if you [or parents if you are a dependent] don't make enough money to owe taxes, you may still qualify. Money you paid for tuition, fees, and course materials may qualify for the credit. Visit www.irs.gov/Individuals/AOTC and read Publication 970, "Tax Benefits for Education," to learn more."