



Requirements and Instructions for Semifinalists in the 2021 National Merit® Scholarship Program

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

- ❑ Read this document completely and make sure you understand what is required of you. If you have any questions about the information presented here, please contact the Scholarship Administration department by phone. We are available at (847) 866-5161 Monday–Friday from 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Central Time.
- ❑ Use National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC)'s Online Scholarship Application (OSA) to submit your National Merit Scholarship Application. Be sure to follow all instructions to ensure your application is complete and no information is truncated.
 - ⇒ **DEADLINE:** Your completed National Merit Semifinalist Application is due to NMSC on October 7, 2020. Your high school may indicate a different date by which they would like you to complete your part of the application.
- ❑ Check page 2 to see if you need to complete any additional steps because you attend high school outside the United States and are not a U.S. citizen or you have already left high school and are enrolled full time in college.

REQUIREMENTS FOR BECOMING A FINALIST

As a Semifinalist named in the fall of 2020, you must advance to Finalist standing before you can be considered for a Merit Scholarship® award to be offered in 2021. You must meet **all** specified requirements and deadlines, or you will be withdrawn from the competition. To qualify as a Finalist, you must:

1. Continue to meet the program entry requirements published in the 2019 [PSAT/NMSQT® Student Guide](#).
2. Be enrolled in the last year of high school and be planning to enroll full time in college in the fall of 2021 **or** be enrolled in the first year of college, if you completed grades 9 through 12 in three years or less.
3. Attend high school in the United States, District of Columbia, or U.S. commonwealths and territories; or, meet the citizenship requirements for students attending high school outside the United States (see page 2).
4. Be fully endorsed for Finalist standing and recommended for a National Merit Scholarship by your high school principal (or school official designated by the principal). Your high school official will provide their endorsement when they complete your application, but they also reserve the right to revoke their endorsement at any point in the competition.
5. Have a record of consistently very high academic performance in all of grades 9 through 12 and in any college course work taken. Your school must provide a complete record of high school courses you have taken, grades earned, and course work you will take in grade 12. Your school is instructed to notify NMSC of any noticeable decline in your academic performance during the current year. If you are now in college, high academic performance must continue and must be documented by an official transcript of your record (see page 2).
6. Submit the completed application to your high school official as soon as possible using NMSC's Online Scholarship Application (OSA). The school official will complete the school's sections of the application for final transmittal to NMSC by October 7, 2020.
7. Provide any additional documentation and information that NMSC requests.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: Due to the global pandemic and the resulting lack of available test administrations, SAT and ACT scores will not be required or considered for Finalist standing in the 2021 National Merit Scholarship Program.

SEMIFINALISTS ATTENDING HIGH SCHOOL OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES

If you attend high school outside the United States, you must be a U.S. citizen, or be a U.S. lawful permanent resident (or have applied for permanent residence, the application for which has not been denied) and intend to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law.

☐ If you attend high school outside the United States and have not yet become a U.S. citizen, to become a Finalist you must submit with your completed National Merit Scholarship Application:

- A letter signed by you explaining your plans for becoming a citizen, including the date on which you expect to be eligible and will apply for U.S. citizenship.

AND

- If you are a U.S. lawful permanent resident, a copy of your Permanent Resident Card (Green Card); or a copy of your passport including the identity/biographical page and the "I-551" stamp showing that you have been granted lawful permanent resident status.

OR

- If you have applied for U.S. lawful permanent residence, a copy of Form I-797 Receipt Notice from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) that verifies you filed the "Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status" (Form I-485).

⇒ **DEADLINE:** Your letter and documentation must be received by NMSC on or before January 31, 2021.

IMPORTANT: NMSC will not share citizenship information with any other organization or agency.

SEMIFINALISTS NOW ENROLLED FULL TIME IN COLLEGE

Officials at the high school you last attended will be responsible for the high school's portion of the National Merit Semifinalist Application. They must complete the school's sections of the application for final transmittal to NMSC by October 7, 2020.

If you report a college choice using the OSA, it should be the college you plan to attend during the 2021–2022 academic year.

To be considered for Finalist standing, you must meet all requirements specified on page 1, and:

- ☐ Immediately after the end of the current term**, you must arrange to have your college send an official transcript of all college course work you have taken to NMSC. NMSC will review your transcript to make sure you continue to meet Requirement #5 on page 1.

COLLEGE CHOICE

College choice is not considered in determining whether a Semifinalist qualifies as a Finalist or in the selection of National Merit® \$2500 Scholarships.

NMSC requests your college choice because every National Merit Scholarship can be used only for attendance at a college or university in the United States that holds accredited status with a regional accrediting commission on higher education. Merit Scholarship stipends are not payable for attendance at service academies or certain institutions that are limited in their purposes or training.

All National Merit \$2500 Scholarships and corporate-sponsored awards are transferable from one regionally accredited U.S. institution to another, but college-sponsored awards are not (as explained on page 4).

You are asked to report your first-choice college (to which you are applying for admission) on your National Merit Scholarship Application using the OSA. However, if you are unsure, indicate “undecided” on your application and report your first-choice college to NMSC as soon as possible.

It is your responsibility to apply and be admitted to the college you plan to attend.

- ⇒ **IMPORTANT:** Remember to keep your college choice up to date during the academic year. To report your college choice or a change in your choice, log back in at osa.nationalmerit.org using the username and password you created when you set up your account. You will receive a confirmation email acknowledging your request for a change in first choice college. **It is your responsibility to ensure your request to change your college choice has been successfully submitted.** (Please note that you may not make a change to your college choice until your high school transmits the completed application to NMSC.)

REPORT OF A SPONSOR COLLEGE AS FIRST CHOICE

Consideration for a college-sponsored Merit Scholarship award is limited to Semifinalists who qualify as Finalists and who also:

1. report to NMSC that a sponsor college is their first choice (see [Sponsors of National Merit Scholarships](#));
2. have applied for admission to the sponsor college; and
3. have not been offered any other National Merit Scholarship (corporate-sponsored, National, or another college-sponsored award). No student will receive more than one scholarship offer from NMSC.

A college-sponsored Merit Scholarship award can be used only at the institution financing it and therefore is canceled if the winner changes college choice.

SCHEDULE SPECIFIC TO COLLEGE-SPONSORED AWARDS

MARCH 1, 2021

A Finalist who has reported a sponsor college as first choice **before** March 1 will be included in the first group referred to that institution for scholarship consideration. Only the sponsoring college you have listed as your first choice will be notified.

MARCH 1 THROUGH MAY 31, 2021

Periodically NMSC will notify sponsors of additional Finalists who have reported (by May 31) the college or university as their first choice. Only the sponsoring college you list as your first choice will be notified.

MAY 3, 2021

NMSC will begin mailing college-sponsored Merit Scholarship offers.

- ⇒ **IMPORTANT:** If NMSC receives notification of a change in college choice from a Finalist after mailing a college-sponsored Merit Scholarship offer to that student, the change in college choice will not be processed and the Finalist cannot be offered another college-sponsored Merit Scholarship award. This applies even if the new choice of college is one that also sponsors Merit Scholarship awards. Therefore, a Finalist who has previously reported a sponsor college as first choice but is uncertain about it may change their college choice to “undecided” to prevent being made an offer from a school the Finalist is uncertain about attending; such notification must be submitted online at osa.nationalmerit.org **before** May 3. The Finalist can subsequently report a firm college choice that NMSC receives by May 31.

MAY 31, 2021

Deadline date for NMSC to receive reports of a sponsor college as first choice. Because it is necessary to treat all Finalists consistently and conclude the annual competition in a timely manner, only college choice reports that NMSC receives by May 31, 2021, will be used to identify the final group of candidates to a college or university that sponsors awards.

If you have any questions about the information presented here, please contact the Scholarship Administration department by phone. We are available at (847) 866-5161, Monday–Friday from 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Central Time.

SCHEDULE AND DEADLINES FOR THE 2021 MERIT SCHOLARSHIP® COMPETITION

2020

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|--------------------|--|
| September 9 | NMSC releases names of about 16,000 Semifinalists to news media |
| October 7 | Schools transmit completed National Merit Scholarship Applications to NMSC using the OSA |

2021

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| January 24 | Selection committees begin choosing Merit Scholarship award winners |
| January 31 | Last day for NMSC to receive documentation required for Finalist consideration |
| February 1 | NMSC mails notification to high school principals about the status of their Semifinalists; a <i>Certificate of Merit</i> is provided for each Semifinalist who qualifies as a Finalist |
| February 8 | NMSC mails letters to Finalists' home addresses informing them of their status |
| March 1 | Finalists who have reported a sponsor college as first choice before this date will be included in the first group referred to the institution for scholarship consideration |
| March 10 | NMSC begins mailing offers of corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards |
| March 25 | NMSC mails offers of National Merit \$2500 Scholarships |
| May 3 | NMSC begins mailing offers of college-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards (see IMPORTANT note on page 4) |
| Mid-May | Finalists who have not yet been selected to receive a Merit Scholarship award will be notified at their home addresses |
| May 31 | Deadline for NMSC to receive reports of college choice for identifying the final group of candidates for college-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards |

NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARSHIP WINNER ANNOUNCEMENT DATES

After NMSC receives award acceptances, the names of Merit Scholar® designees will be released to news media nationwide in four announcements:

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| April 21 | Corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship winners |
| May 12 | National Merit \$2500 Scholarship winners |
| June 2 and July 12 | College-sponsored Merit Scholarship winners |