



Building Your Profile: Advice to Freshmen and Sophomores

National merit scholarships are awarded to outstanding students who strive for excellence, both in academics and personal development. The profiles of successful candidates indicate strong achievements in academics, leadership, and community service. Your freshman and sophomore years are an opportune time to lay the groundwork for future success.

- Challenge yourself academically; honors classes and foreign language classes are highly valuable for scholarships, graduate school and life.
- Maintain a high GPA; most prestigious scholarship foundations seek a minimum GPA of 3.5 or higher.
- Find your mentors; develop relationships with faculty, administrators, and advisors. The best letters of recommendation come from those who know you well and the association has developed over a period of time.
- Get involved in undergraduate research, creative opportunities, leadership activities or public service.
- Explore your interests; connect your academic goals with extra curricular activities that are meaningful to you.
- Seek out leadership opportunities in clubs or organizations that reflect your values and goals; it is better to make an impact in one organization than to be a participant in many.
- Expand your knowledge of the world; participate in intercultural events, travel or study abroad, read books, newspapers, and national news magazines to stay current on world events.
- Maintain a portfolio of all your activities and honors.
- Research scholarship opportunities extensively to find the ones that are a good fit to support your academic, career or personal goals *and* where your qualifications reflect the profile of their recipients.
- Start your research and application preparation early! Scholarship applications have many components and often require extensive rewrites.

