



# NATIONAL MERIT GUIDE

DISCOVER THE NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM AT USF



UNIVERSITY of  
**SOUTH FLORIDA**



# GO BIG. GO BOLD. GO BULLS.

USF is proud to offer National Merit Scholars a fully funded, well-rounded educational experience at our Preeminent University, where you can get the resources you need to make a big impact. All USF students benefit from 200+ dynamic academic programs, 600+ clubs and student organizations, and a prestigious faculty known for their outstanding research. As a National Merit Scholar, you'll also enjoy a wealth of financial, academic, career and personal support — including free tuition, room and board; study abroad funds; special consideration for admission to our exclusive Honors College; research and internship opportunities; and individualized coaching to help you achieve your goals.

Located on the sunny Gulf Coast of Florida, USF is a bold and diverse community that explores uncharted terrain, unleashes innovation and changes lives. As one of the top 50 public universities in America in the 2024 U.S. News and World Report (USNWR) National University Rankings, it's easy to see why we attract some of the nation's best and brightest students.



## EXPLORE USF ANYTIME, ANYWHERE

Want an up-close view of USF's three vibrant campuses? Check out our virtual tours! Featuring multiple stops, each tour offers sweeping 360-degree panoramic views of our modern, palm-tree lined campuses. Explore the exceptional places where you'll live and learn, including residence halls, classrooms, student centers, dining halls and more. It's the next best thing to being here!

[VIEW TOURS](#)





## FOCUS ON ACADEMICS, NOT FINANCES

Shalini chose USF not only for its academic rigor, but also its supportive environment featuring community-based schooling and professors and advisors who really care. The biomedical sciences major felt like she was at home the moment she toured campus. She found a multitude of opportunities here, including the ability to engage with students of diverse backgrounds, experiential learning at nearby medical facilities and the capacity to focus entirely on her studies thanks to generous financial aid.

*"The financial aid was a wonderful surprise, because the full scholarship – including housing, all my meals and textbooks – enables me to focus on my coursework instead of worrying about the finances."*



# NMS FINALISTS ENJOY BIG BENEFITS

## All Expenses Paid

If you are named a finalist and designate USF as your first-choice school, you won't have to worry about balancing a part-time job and your classes or graduating with a mountain of debt. USF's National Merit Scholars receive a combination of scholarships covering their entire **cost of attendance**, including tuition, room and board. Without financial burdens to bear, you'll be free to focus exclusively on academic and student life pursuits at USF.

## Florida Residents

Scholarship for the full cost of attendance during fall and spring semesters, including:

- Benacquisto Scholarship
- National Merit Award
- USF National Merit Tradition of Excellence Award (\$20,000/\$5,000 per year)
- **Study abroad scholarship** (USF Passport Scholarship - \$2,000)

## Non-Florida Residents

Scholarship for your full cost of attendance during fall and spring semesters for four years or until completion of the bachelor's degree, including:

- USF Golden Achievement Scholarship
- National Merit Award
- **Study abroad scholarship** (USF Passport Scholarship - \$2,000)

## EXCLUSIVE CAMPUS ADVANTAGES

All finalists who designate USF as first choice also receive the following:

- Special consideration for admission to the Judy Genshaft Honors College
- On-campus housing in our Judy Genshaft Honors College Living-Learning Community (student must submit LLC application for consideration)
- Research opportunities early in your enrollment at USF
- Access to expert advising for prestigious national and international awards
- A designated National **Merit Scholars Coordinator** (based on Tampa Campus) to support you throughout during your USF journey
- Assistance in securing internships
- Funding for academic conferences, research and publication
- Access to free preparatory courses for standardized tests, such as the MCAT
- Leadership development with mentoring by faculty and community leaders



# A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITY

Whether you're studying global health in Peru or creating transformative studio art on campus, USF gives you the chance to see and change the world. We offer unique study abroad programs in more than 25 countries and on-campus research options as early as your freshman year. Our National Merit Scholars Coordinator will coach and support you throughout your four years at USF, so you can make the most of every opportunity. You'll join your fellow Scholars in exclusive academic workshops and leadership development programs that keep you at the top of your game. Best of all, you'll find a sense of community and belonging with like-minded peers as passionate about making a difference as you are.



## ACADEMIC PRESTIGE AND SUPPORT

For USF medical sciences major Zaydi, a growing university that provided a path to medical school was of utmost importance. He knew that USF was on the rise and heard about the new medical school in downtown Tampa.

That exciting investment was a huge factor in why he chose USF, along with the seven-year medical school program. He also appreciated the support services offered at USF. The people he met at USF inspired him, pushed him to be better, encouraged him to take the next step and motivated him to keep pursuing his career goals.

*"On top of a great financial contribution, USF hosted group meetings for National Merit Scholars, and they would talk to us about what we wanted to do and how to help us get there. I found that really welcoming, especially during my first year."*



**EXPECT MORE.  
GET IT AT USF.**



## Three Campuses, Bigger Opportunities

Seamlessly access university resources and academic programs across three diverse campuses: the large, metropolitan Tampa campus; the mid-size, waterfront St. Petersburg campus; and the personalized, hometown Sarasota-Manatee campus.

## State-of-the-Art Facilities

Live, learn and play in some exceptional spaces — from the high-tech library study spaces at our Tampa campus to off-site teaching labs (including the Mote Marine Laboratory) at the Sarasota-Manatee campus to our waterfront boathouse (where you can learn to sail) at the St. Petersburg campus.

## Diverse, Global Community

You'll fit right in. USF is home to a diverse student body of almost 50,000 students representing over 145 different countries.

## Prominent Honors College

Enjoy the extensive resources of a top research university with the personal attention and close-knit community of our top-tier Judy Genshaft Honors College.

## Amazing Location

The Florida Gulf Coast is a subtropical paradise with award-winning beaches, a thriving arts scene, professional sports teams and vibrant night life. Plenty of sunshine fuels outdoor adventures all year long. Grab your paddleboard, and let's go.

## Plentiful (and Prestigious) Academic Programs

More than 200 undergraduate majors and concentrations are available across all three campuses. From engineering and medicine to the arts and business, we offer a broad array of world-class academic programs to fit any interest.



# FIND OUT HOW TO BECOME A SCHOLAR

Starting in your junior year of high school, follow these steps to becoming a National Merit Scholar\*

OCTOBER, JUNIOR YEAR

1

## Take the PSAT/NMSQT®

The junior year PSAT/NMSQT® is offered in October and is the only qualifying entrance exam into the National Merit® competition. Cutoff scores to achieve Semifinalist standing vary by state.

SEPTEMBER, SENIOR YEAR

2

## Semifinalists Announced

In early September of your senior year, The National Merit® Scholarship Corporation (NMSC®) announces approximately 16,000 Semifinalists of those who tested.

OCTOBER, SENIOR YEAR

3

## Apply for Finalist Standing

Semifinalists must apply for Finalist standing by mid-October. Approximately 90 percent of all Semifinalists will advance to Finalist standing in the competition.

JANUARY, SENIOR YEAR

4

## Send SAT® or ACT® Scores

NMSC® will accept your best composite score on either the SAT® or ACT® through the December test date. Update or send new scores through the College Board at [sat.collegeboard.org](https://sat.collegeboard.org) or through ACT® at [act.org](https://act.org). You must have a record of consistent high academic performance in grades 9 through 12 and in any college courses taken. Your SAT® score must complement your PSAT/NMSQT® performance. Visit [nationalmerit.org](https://nationalmerit.org) for details.

FEBRUARY, SENIOR YEAR

5

## Finalists Announced

In February of your senior year, NMSC® will mail notification letters to Finalists. Those who do not advance to Finalist standing are notified in January. *Colleges are not notified of students who do not advance. Please notify us if you advance to a Finalist so we can upgrade your scholarship award offer.* Finalists may list a “school of choice” at [osa.nationalmerit.org](https://osa.nationalmerit.org). You may change the school listed for you as many times as you would like prior to the NMSC® “school of choice” deadline.

MARCH, SENIOR YEAR

6

## Corporate and National Award Winners Notified

A Finalist could receive one of three sponsorship offers. Those receiving the Corporate or National sponsorships will be notified in March. Corporate sponsorships are generally given to students with family ties to an NMSC® partnering corporation. These corporations can be found in your PSAT/NMSQT® Student Guide. Roughly 10 percent of Finalists in each state will receive a National Award sponsored by NMSC®.

MAY, SENIOR YEAR

7

## Designate “School of Choice”

To be guaranteed entrance into USF's National Merit Program, admitted Finalists must designate USF as their “school of choice” with NMSC® by the NMSC® designated deadline. Students who previously listed “undecided” or who received a Corporate or National-sponsored award must designate USF as their “school of choice” at [osa.nationalmerit.org](https://osa.nationalmerit.org) in order to receive USF's National Merit Awards (Benacquisto Award or Golden Achievement Award).

MAY, SENIOR YEAR

8

## College Sponsor Award Letters Mailed

In May, NMSC® will begin mailing the College Sponsored award letters from partnering institutions to Finalist recipients. USF is a partnering institution (not all colleges sponsor). All students who select USF as their first choice school will receive a college sponsored award.

APRIL-JUNE, SENIOR YEAR

9

## Accept Award Offer

Somewhere between late April and June, admitted Finalists are designated as National Merit® Scholars upon accepting the one award offer received and naming USF as their “school of choice.” The official Scholar announcement by NMSC® is not made until the summer.

\*Information is subject to change based on updates from the National Merit® Corporation.

For a complete list of competition rules and deadlines, visit [nationalmerit.org](https://nationalmerit.org)

University of South Florida | Office of Admissions | (813) 974-1749 | [scholarships@usf.edu](mailto:scholarships@usf.edu) | [admissions.usf.edu/nms-process](https://admissions.usf.edu/nms-process)





# NEXT STEPS\*

After you've been named a Semifinalist and applied to USF, follow these steps to give yourself the best chance of success. And don't forget to mark USF as your first-choice school!

## 1 Ensure You Meet All Program Requirements

- Be progressing normally toward high school graduation or completion as a traditional or homeschooled student
- Be a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident, or have applied for permanent residency and intend to become a U.S. citizen as soon as possible
- Be enrolled in your last year of high school and plan to enroll full time in college in the fall after your senior year
- Be fully endorsed and recommended for Finalist standing for a National Merit® Scholarship by your high school principal or designated school official

## 2 Continue to Display a Consistently Excellent Academic Record

This proof of academic accomplishment needs to extend all the way from grade 9 through your senior year. It also includes any college courses you took. If you're currently enrolled in college, you must submit an official transcript of your record.

## 3 Complete the NMSC® Application & Submit All Materials

- Academic record
- Activity and leadership information
- School curriculum and grading information
- A personal essay
- Recommendation from high school principal or designated school official
- Your first-choice college

To submit these items, **create an account with the NMSC®.**

## 4 Report USF as your first-choice college

The National Merit® Scholarship can only be used at colleges in the U.S. that hold accredited status with a regional accrediting commission on higher education. NMSC® needs to know that you will attend a qualifying college, so they will request you name a first-choice college. You can always log in to your application and change the school you selected by the NMSC deadline.

## 5 Promptly Provide Anything NMSC® Requests

NSMC® will tell you if you've been selected as a finalist in February of your senior year. Until then, continually monitor your email and National Merit® Scholarship Corporation account for anything you may be missing.

## GET MORE NATIONAL MERIT® SCHOLAR ANSWERS

Still have questions about becoming a **National Merit® Finalist?**

Reach out to Winsome Nisbett, Assistant Director High Ability & Scholarships, at **[scholarships@usf.edu](mailto:scholarships@usf.edu)**.

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