We know the path to National Merit Finalist standing can be confusing, and we’re here to help! Contact the Office of Admissions to learn more about USF and what we can offer you.

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.

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.

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.

4. Send SAT Score
   NMSC will accept your best composite score through the December test date. Update or send new scores through the College Board at sat.collegeboard.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 for details.

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. You may change the school listed for you as many times as you would like prior to the NMSC “school of choice” deadline.
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.

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.

Designate “School of Choice”
To be guaranteed entrance into USF’s Golden Achievement Scholarship 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 in order to receive USF’s Golden Achievement Scholarship.

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.

For a complete list of competition rules and deadlines, visit nationalmerit.org.