We handpick every product we feature. We may receive compensation from the links on this page. Advertiser Disclosure

Best student credit cards

Heading off to college for the first time? Prepare for emergencies and start building credit by dipping one of these student credit cards into your wallet.

By Beth Bouserman, Reporter for SFGATE | Aug 11, 2021

Making smart fiscal choices and building credit while in college can help set you up for financial success as you move into the real world. Special to SFGATE

College students know that the friends that they make and the skills that they learn often last for the rest of their life. But they may be less aware of the fact that many of the money decisions that they make during this time can also have a lasting impact.

Making smart fiscal choices and building credit while in college can help set you up for financial success as you move into the real world. One of the key steps in building credit is getting and responsibly using a credit card.

But it can be hard to know which credit card is best for you. Here's a look at eight credit cards that we think students should consider.

Best credit cards for students

Capital One SaverOne Student Cash Rewards Credit Card

Best for earning cash back on everyday purchases

What we like about this card

The highest cash-back categories for the Capital One SaverOne Student Cash Rewards card are ones where students tend to spend a lot, including dining, entertainment, and streaming services.

Pros

- No annual fee
- Earn 10% cash back on Uber and Uber eats, 3% cash back on dining, entertainment, streaming services and some grocery stores, 1% cash back on everything else (capped through December 31, 2021 at 3% on groceries and our related purchases through Capital One 1% cash back on all other purchases
- Flexibility to receive your cash back in a statement credit or check on demand; or to set up automatic cash back at a specific calendar date or when your rewards reach a specific threshold

Cons

- Those whose expenses largely fall outside of the bonus categories, can likely find cards with better cash back rates

Capital One Quicksilver Student Cash Rewards Credit Card

Best for straightforward cash back

What we like about this card

The Capital One Quicksilver Student Cash Rewards Credit Card pays back 1.5% cash back on all purchases 10% on Uber purchases), making it the simplest reward structure of all the cards on this list.

Pros

- No annual fee
- Unlimited 1.5% cash back on all purchases; 10% bonus cash back on Uber and Uber Eats
- Flexibility to receive your cash back in a statement credit or check on demand; or to set up automatic cash back at a specific calendar date or when your rewards reach a specific threshold

Cons

- Cardholders who spend a lot in specific categories might do better with cards that reward them at a higher rate for those purchases

Capital One Platinum Secured Credit Card

Best for students who don't have a cosigner

What we like about this card

Students under age 21 will need a co-signer in order to get a traditional credit card. If that's not an option, a secured card is a great first step to start building credit.

Pros

- No annual fee
- No need for a cosigner or credit check
- Potential to upgrade to an unsecured card after establishing a track record of paying on time

Cons

- Requires a refundable security deposit of $49, $99 or $200 (the higher your deposit, the higher your credit line)
- Relatively low maximum credit line of $1,000

Capital One Quicksilver Secured Cash Rewards Credit Card

Best for earning rewards without a credit history

What we like about this card

This is another secured credit card that doesn't require a cosigner or a similar credit score for approval. It also allows you to earn up to 1.5% cash back on gas and restaurant purchases (up to $1,000) and 1% on everything else.

Pros

- No annual fee
- No cosigner or credit check required
- Can request a credit limit increase after six months of on-time payments
- Offers modest rewards on popular categories

Cons

- Initial credit limit is only $200
- Requires a $200 refundable deposit
- APR is high, at 30.49%

Discover it Student Chrome

Best for commuters and those who frequently eat out

What we like about this card

Discover automatically matches any cash back earnings at the end of your first year, meaning you can earn the equivalent of 4% cash back on spending at gas stations and restaurants.

Pros

- No annual fee
- Earn 2% cash back at gas stations and restaurants up to a combined $1,000 in purchases; 1% cash back on everything else
- Unlimited cash back match after your first year of spending

Cons

- Cap on 2% cash back categories limits earning potential
- High spenders, or those who spend in categories outside of gas stations and restaurants, may be able to earn better rewards with a different card

Discover it Student Cash Back

Best for students who like tracking reward bonus categories for additional cash back

What we like about this card

Discover automatically matches any cash back earnings at the end of your first year, meaning you can earn the equivalent of 1% cash back on spending if you activate rotating bonus categories.

Pros

- No annual fee
- Earn 5% cash back on rotating cash back categories (the current category is gas stations and digital wallets) once you've opted into the bonus, up to $1,500 per quarter; 1% cash back on all other spending
- Unlimited cash back match after your first year of spending

Cons

- Cap on 5% cash back categories limits earning potential
- Tracking rotating bonus categories requires tracking them and opting in

Blue Cash Everyday Card from American Express

Best for soon-to-graduate students

What we like about this card

The American Express Blue Cash Everyday Card offers bonus cash back in groceries, online shopping and gas — that align well with the type of purchases students and soon-to-be graduates make when they move out of the dorm and into their first apartment.

Pros

- No annual fee
- Earn 3% cash back on groceries, most online retail purchases, and gas up to $6,000 per year category; 1% cash back on all other purchases
- Statement credits of $84 per year for the Disney streaming bundle and $150 per year for Home Chef

Cons

- Rewards in bonus categories are capped; limiting earning potential for big spenders
- This is the only card on our list with a foreign transaction fee (2.7%); making it a poor choice for students planning to study abroad
- You must have at least good credit to be approved for this card, so it's a better choice for students nearing graduation who have some credit history already.

Petal 2 "Cash Back, No Fees" Visa Credit Card

Best for students who don't like fees

What we like about this card

Like all other cards on this list, Petal 2 does not have any annual fees, but it also has no late fees or returned payment fees.

Pros

- No fees
- Earn 1% cash back on all purchases; after six months of on-time payments, earn 1.5% cash back

Cons

- The 1% starter cash back rate is lower than on some other cards
- Petal has limited card options, so you'll have to choose a different issuer when you're ready to graduate to a card that offers richer rewards

What is a student credit card?

A student credit card is a credit card designed for college students just starting their credit journey. They typically have lower credit limits and less valuable rewards than other cards, since they're meant for students with less experience managing their credit. That said, the barriers to entry are lower in some cases you can be approved with either poor or no credit, which makes them accessible to almost anyone.

How to choose a student credit card

The best credit card for you will depend on several factors, including whether you have a cosigner (required for anyone under age 21 without proof of sufficient independent income), the categories in which you spend the most, and whether you want to spend time opting into rotating categories.

How to get a student credit card

If you're under age 21, you'll typically need a cosigner to get approved for a credit card. If that's not an option, you can apply for a secured credit card, which will require a refundable deposit (typically between $50 and $200). Whichever route you choose, you'll need to apply for the card by providing basic information, such as your Social Security number and employment information, if applicable.

Should college students have credit cards?

College students are ok able to pay off their credit card every month can get a great start building their credit for the future. However, college students who expect to carry a balance might be better off waiting to get an better financial footing.

Can you pay student loans with credit cards?

You can't pay federal student loans with credit cards, but you may be able to use them to pay for private loans. However, credit cards typically carry higher interest rates than student loans, so in most cases it's a good idea to trade one form of debt for the other.

Want some other options? Start your search for a new credit card here.

Editorial Disclosure: All articles are prepared by editorial staff and contributors. Opinions expressed therein are solely those of the editorial staff and have not been reviewed or approved by any advertiser. The information, including rates and fees, presented in this article is accurate as of the date of the publish. Check the lender's website for the most current information.

This article was originally published on SFGate.com and reviewed by Lauren Williamson, who serves as Finance and Home Services Editor for the Hearst E-Commerce team. Email her at lauren.williamson@hearst.com.

Beth Bouserman is a freelance writer, covering mostly about personal finance and travel for SFGATE. Throughout her 20 year career as a journalist, she's loved helping people see how making smart money decisions can open up a world of possibilities. She started her as a newspaper reporter, before moving into the world of magazines and personal finance. A former Money magazine writer, Beth has been a frequent contributor to a variety of national and regional publications, including magazines like Real Simple, Consumer Reports, and AARP and online at sites like CNBCdailymoney.com, Yahoo!Finance, and Bankrate.com. She's received recognition for her work, including recognition from the American Society of Business Publication Editors, the Society of Professional Journalists, Editors and Writers, and the New York Financial Writers Association. Beth's work has been featured in the Best Business Writing series of the Year in Ideas, Newsweek, Science of Blind Communications at Syracuse University. She also holds a master's degree in business reporting from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

MORE PERSONAL FINANCE

RELATED ARTICLES

The best savings account interest rates for August 2022

Lock in a 5% interest rate on a 12 Today. Compare offers

Revamp rates today. Compare the best mortgage rates

Car insurance rates soar. Here's where to find the best rates

Compare current mortgage refinance rates

Best HELOC rates for August 2022

Personal loan rates are rising. Now's a good time to refinance

Should you "worry the house, date the cars"?

The best home equity loan rates, August 2022

Mortgage rates for August 16. When will mortgage rates drop?

Bank's great CD rates for August 2022

Mortgage rates for August 2: Below-keep climbing — where will...

Bank's great CD rates for August 2022

Bank's great CD rates for August 2022

Mortgage rates for July 5: Fed rate hike dampens rates to 7%

TOP TO PICK

Best balance transfer credit cards for August 2022

Best airline credit cards for August 2022

The 4 best pet insurance carriers of 2022

The best internet providers in San Francisco

The 4 best home security systems we reviewed

The 5 best IRAs for 2022

The best towing rates of 2022

Best online banks for August 2022

Best loans for August 2022

Best student credit cards

Bank's great CD rates for August 2022

5 Best Moving Companies in Berkeley, CA

5 Best Moving Companies in Fresno, CA

5 Best Moving Companies in Reno, NV

5 Best Moving Companies in Las Vegas, NV

Return To Top ^