



## INFORMATION ABOUT THE NATIONAL MERIT® SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITION

August 2011

In each annual National Merit Scholarship Program, about 50,000 academically talented high school students are honored, but only some 16,000 of them are named Semifinalists. Students who qualify as Semifinalists based on their performance on the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®) are the only program participants who have an opportunity to advance to the Finalist level and compete for National Merit Scholarships. About 8,400 of the outstanding Finalists will be chosen as Merit Scholarship® winners in the 2012 competition.

Initiated in 1955, the National Merit Program is conducted by National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC), a not-for-profit organization that operates without government assistance. A sizable number of National Merit Scholarships to be offered in 2012 will be underwritten by NMSC with its own funds, but most will be supported by some 440 independent corporate organizations and higher education institutions.

A description of the current National Merit Program—including entry requirements, groups of honored students, and scholarships to be offered—was in the 2010 Official Student Guide to the PSAT/NMSQT distributed to students before they entered the competition. This document gives additional information for Semifinalists and includes a chart of steps in the 2012 scholarship competition.

### How were Semifinalists designated?

The 2010 PSAT/NMSQT served as an initial screen of more than 1.5 million entrants to the 2012 National Merit Scholarship Program. The Selection Index scores of students who met program participation requirements were used to designate a pool of about 16,000 Semifinalists on a state allocation basis. Semifinalists are the highest scorers in each of the 50 states and represent less than one percent of each state's high school seniors. Although Semifinalist qualifying scores vary from one state to another, the scores of all Semifinalists are extremely high.

In addition to those designated in each of the 50 states and without affecting the allocation to any state, Semifinalists were named in other selection units established by NMSC for the competition. These units are for participants who attend schools in the District of Columbia, schools in U.S. territories and commonwealths, schools in other countries, and U.S. boarding schools that enroll a sizable proportion of their students from outside the state in which the school is located.

### How will NMSC honor Semifinalists?

Semifinalists in the 2012 National Merit Program will be recognized in an announcement sent to news media nationwide for release on September 14, 2011. By spotlighting Semifinalists, NMSC hopes to increase general interest in academic excellence and encourage broader support for the education of talented young people. To help enhance their educational opportunities, a list of Semifinalists (by high school) will be sent to four-year U.S. colleges and universities.

### What is the next step for Semifinalists?

Before they can be considered for Merit Scholarship awards, Semifinalists must qualify as Finalists by completing the *National Merit Scholarship Application* and

fulfilling several other requirements. (See *Requirements and Instructions for Semifinalists* which is posted in the "Competition Instructions" section of the *National Merit Scholarship Application*.) Semifinalists who do not meet all specified requirements and deadlines cannot become Finalists; they will be notified by NMSC or an official of their high school that they have been withdrawn from the competition.

### How will Semifinalists know if they become Finalists?

By mid-February, NMSC will notify Finalists at their home addresses. NMSC also will inform high school principals about the status of their Semifinalists and provide a *Certificate of Merit* for presentation to each one who qualifies as a Finalist. NMSC does not make a news media announcement about Finalists because Semifinalists are publicly honored, and approximately 90 percent of the Semifinalists are expected to reach the Finalist level. A Semifinalist can advance to Finalist standing and be considered for a National Merit Scholarship in only **one** specific annual competition.

### What Merit Scholarship awards will be offered?

About 8,400 National Merit Scholarships of three types will be offered in 2012:

- ❖ 2,500 single-payment National Merit \$2500 Scholarships for which **all** Finalists will be considered;
- ❖ about 1,000 corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards for which Finalists who meet a company or business grantor's specified criteria will be considered; and
- ❖ some 4,900 college-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards for which only Finalists who will attend their respective sponsor institutions are considered.

All Merit Scholar<sup>®</sup> designees are chosen on the basis of their abilities, accomplishments, and potential for success in rigorous college studies—without regard to gender, race, ethnic origin, religious preference, or family financial circumstances. Although all students who become Finalists are outstanding, not all Finalists receive a Merit Scholarship award. Slightly more than half of the approximately 15,000 Finalists will win an award, and no student will receive more than one scholarship offer from NMSC.

**How are National Merit \$2500 Scholarship winners selected?**

Every Finalist is considered for one of the National Merit \$2500 Scholarships. Although most of these one-time scholarships are supported by NMSC’s own funds, corporate sponsors help underwrite them with grants they provide to NMSC in lieu of paying administrative fees. As in the designation of Semifinalists, these awards are allocated on a state representational basis according to the state’s percentage of the national total of high school graduates; winners are also named in the other selection units established for the competition. Each Finalist competes with all others in the state/unit that includes the high school in which the student is enrolled when winners are chosen.

In late January 2012, a committee of experienced college admission officers and high school counselors will meet to choose the winners of National Merit \$2500 Scholarships. Committee teams analyze and evaluate all Finalists’ scholarship applications based on information supplied by students and their schools, which includes:

- ❖ the academic record;
- ❖ the school’s recommendation of the Finalist;
- ❖ a student essay;
- ❖ extracurricular activities; and
- ❖ scores on the PSAT/NMSQT and SAT<sup>®</sup>.

Because every Semifinalist who qualifies as a Finalist has an excellent academic record and outstanding test scores, the school official’s characterization of the student and the student’s essay play an important part in the process of choosing Merit Scholar designees. The student’s own essay should provide insight into values, interests, plans, goals, and leadership potential. Activities, awards, and employment are also considered. Winners in each state (or other selection unit) will be the Finalists judged by committee members to have the most distinguished credentials and potential for academic success, without consideration of financial need, college choice, or major and career plans.

**Who can win a corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship award?**

About 1,000 corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards will be offered in 2012 to Finalists who meet specified criteria. Most of the 240 corporate sponsors that underwrite these scholarships designate them for children of their employees; however, some sponsors specify their awards for residents of communities in which the company has plants or offices, or for Finalists pursuing college majors and careers the grantor organization wishes to encourage. (See *Sponsors of National Merit<sup>®</sup> Scholarships* which is posted in the “Competition Instructions” section of the *National Merit Scholarship Application*.)

Information Finalists supply on their *National Merit Scholarship Applications* will be used to identify candidates for corporate-sponsored awards. NMSC’s professional staff will choose almost all recipients from the pool of eligible candidates, based on an evaluation of their abilities, academic records, and accomplishments both in and out of school. Officials of a few sponsor organizations will make their own selections from eligible Finalists.

Each corporate sponsor specifies the monetary limits of scholarships it finances and decides whether the awards provide one-time payments or stipends that can be renewed for up to four years of undergraduate study. Renewable awards provide either a fixed yearly stipend or an annual stipend that can vary by individual. Stipend ranges are given in the table below.

Type of Award	Type of Stipend	Stipend Ranges
Renewable	Variable	Minimum: at least \$500 Maximum: \$2,000 or more per year
Renewable	Fixed	\$1,000–\$5,000 per year
One-time	Single-payment	\$2,500–\$5,000

Although financial need is **not** considered in the selection of award recipients, **after** winners of scholarships with variable-amount stipends are chosen, those who wish to be considered for more than the minimum annual stipend must provide family financial information to NMSC. When scholarship offers are sent to winners, annual stipends are set at the minimum, but instructions are given for submitting family financial information. Variable stipends are then individually determined, taking into account the financial circumstances of the Scholar’s family and college costs.

**Which Finalists can be considered for college-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards?**

About 200 colleges and universities have made arrangements with NMSC to sponsor National Merit Scholarships in the 2012 competition, and it is expected that some 4,900

of these awards will be offered to Finalists next spring. (See *Sponsors of National Merit® Scholarships* which is posted in the “Competition Instructions” section of the *National Merit Scholarship Application*.) To be considered for a college-sponsored award, a Finalist must meet **all three** of the following conditions. The Finalist:

- ❖ must have notified NMSC that the sponsor college is his or her first choice;
- ❖ must have applied for admission to that institution; and
- ❖ must **not** have been offered any other National Merit Scholarship.

Every college-sponsored award is offered with the condition that the Finalist has been admitted and will attend the sponsor college. Because every college-sponsored award can be used **only** at the institution financing it, the scholarship is canceled if the winner changes college choice.

Also, if NMSC receives notice of a change in college choice from a Finalist to whom a college-sponsored Merit Scholarship offer has already been mailed, the student **cannot** be offered another college-sponsored award—even if the new choice of college is one that also sponsors Merit Scholarship awards. (See page 3 of the *Requirements and Instructions* document which is posted in the “Competition Instructions” section of the *National Merit Scholarship Application*.)

Early in March, NMSC will begin notifying each sponsor college about Finalists who have reported that institution as their first choice. College officials will choose all winners of their Merit Scholarship awards from among these Finalists. A sponsor college may decide to offer a Merit Scholarship award to every Finalist who is admitted or choose to limit the number of awards it provides. After receiving the college’s report of its winner selections, NMSC will mail formal scholarship offers to the selected Finalists.

Within limits of \$500 to \$2,000 per year, college officials will set each winner’s Merit Scholarship stipend, using financial information filed with the institution. The college may choose to offer a financial aid “package” that includes grants, loans, and employment; however, unless the student’s total financial need (as calculated by the college) is met with gift aid, the Merit Scholarship stipend must represent at least half the winner’s need, up to a maximum stipend of \$2,000 per year.

### **Are there requirements that National Merit Scholarship winners must meet?**

Yes. Terms of the scholarship are specified in the formal offer NMSC sends each winner. These govern acceptance and receipt of the award and, in the case of four-year scholarships, specify additional requirements for scholar-

ship renewal in subsequent academic years. The Scholar must apply and be admitted to the college at which the scholarship will be used. All Merit Scholarship payments must be used exclusively for undergraduate education at a college or university in the United States that holds accredited status with a regional accrediting commission on higher education; NMSC scholarship stipends are not payable, however, for attendance at service academies, virtual universities, or certain institutions that are limited in their purpose or training. Merit Scholarship recipients also must enroll in college in the fall following selection, must attend college full time during the day, and must pursue a course of study leading to one of the traditional baccalaureate degrees. Although a college transfer cancels a college-sponsored Merit Scholarship award, all National Merit \$2500 Scholarships and almost all corporate-sponsored awards are transferable from one regionally accredited U.S. institution to another.

### **When do winners receive scholarship stipend payments?**

Next September, recipients of one-time awards will be sent a single payment in the full scholarship amount. At that time, winners of renewable awards will be issued the first installment of their annual stipend; additional payments will be sent on a scheduled basis (usually twice annually) for up to four years of undergraduate study or until baccalaureate degree requirements are met, whichever occurs first. NMSC sends stipend checks for scholarship recipients to their college financial aid offices.

### **When will Finalists learn whether they have won a National Merit Scholarship?**

In March 2012, NMSC will begin mailing scholarship offers to winners at their home addresses, with confidential notification to their high school principals. (See the schedule in the *Requirements and Instructions* document.) After NMSC receives award acceptances, the names of Merit Scholar designees will be released to news media nationwide in four announcements, one for each type of award on three dates in April and May and a second release of college-sponsored award winners in July.

In mid-May 2012, NMSC will notify Finalists who have not won a National Merit Scholarship. However, a few additional scholarships may become available after this date; recipients of those awards will be notified and their names released to media during the summer.

Direct questions about the competition to:

*National Merit Scholarship Corporation*

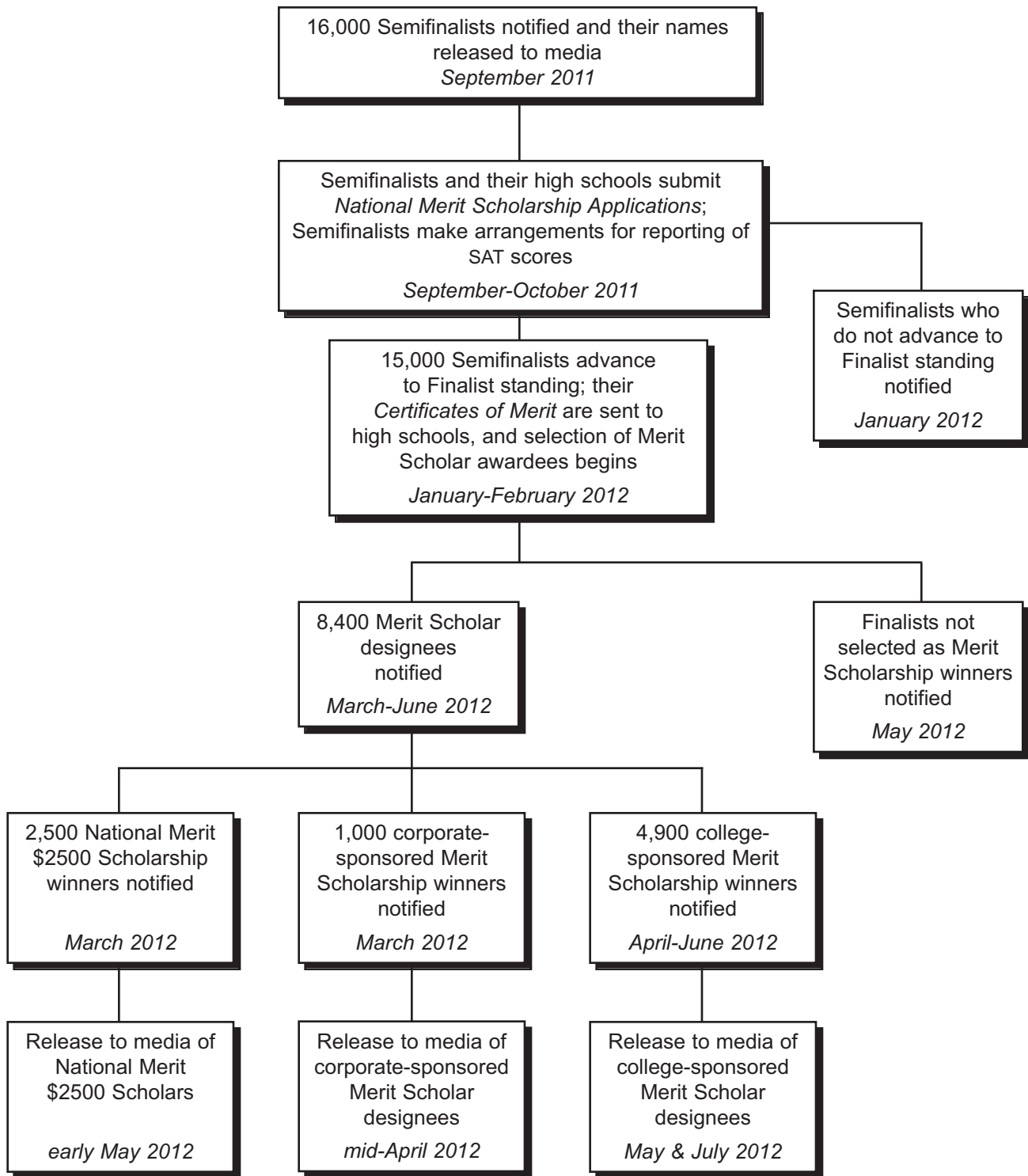
*Attn: Educational Services*

*1560 Sherman Avenue, Suite 200*

*Evanston, IL 60201-4897*

*Telephone (847) 866-5161*

**2012 NATIONAL MERIT® SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITION**



For a complete explanation of steps, requirements, and dates for the competition, see pages 1–3 of this document and the *Requirements and Instructions for Semifinalists* document. Both documents can be found at [www.nationalmerit.org/forms.php](http://www.nationalmerit.org/forms.php)