

Finding the College for You

If there is a preamble to the college selection process, it is that there is no single “right” college for you...there are many. In finding these, focus first on yourself by asking questions within the following “top four” list of what to consider in a college.

1. Location

- Close to home or are you ready to go far from home?
- Small town/big city – what do you need?

2. Size

- Homey feel of a small campus (or camped)?
- Hustle and bustle of a big university, or lost among so many? If you like to have a few close friends and study best in peace and quiet, then huge schools are not for you.
- Does the campus itself need to have a lot of open spaces and tree-filled lawns?

3. Academics and Activities

- Are the average grade point average, class rank, and SAT/ACT scores in line with your own qualifications? You need to be challenged, but you also need to be able to meet that challenge.
- What percentage of a typical freshman class actually graduates from the college?
- Is there an overseas study option? An honors program? A January term?
- Will a degree from the college enhance your chances of being admitted to a graduate school or help when it comes time to look for a job?
- Does the school offer your major?
- What is a typical class size? If you learn best in an environment where there is lots of class discussion, you should look for schools without monster-size lecture courses.
- Does the school have the extra-curricular activities that interest you?

4. Culture and Personality

- Are the staff and students conservative or liberal?
- Are staff and students friendly?
- Are the students competitive with each other?
- How diverse is the student body?
- Are faculty members easy to talk with?
- What do students value – academics, social life, political activism, the arts?
- Is it a “suitcase” college? Will there be lots of activities on weekends?

- How strong is campus security?
- Do professors teach undergraduate courses or do teaching assistants?
- Are the dormitories comfortable and well furnished?
- Does the food service meet your dietary needs?

After reviewing all the factors that are important to you, do an online college search to find colleges that match your preferences. Gather information on these schools by talking with your school counselor, your teachers, and contacting current college students for the inside scoop. There are also countless tools – college guides, videos, and web sites. Finally, take advantage of campus visits and college fairs. HINT: Do not put a lot of weight into “ratings” since there is absolutely no way to fairly compare one institution to another!

After preparing a college comparison checklist to help you weigh advantages and disadvantages, you are ready to create a final list. This list should include one or two “reach” schools (admission is competitive and only a small percentage of applicants are admitted), a couple of “mid-range” colleges (your qualifications closely match those of the typical admitted student), and one or two “safety” schools (your statistics exceed the profile of most students).