

Assessing your list of colleges

As you develop a list (mental or otherwise) of colleges that interest you, be sure you can answer these questions about them.

The basics

- Where is the college? Can you locate it on a map? Is it too close to home? Is it too far? Is it too cold or too hot there?
- Have you taken the course work the college requires for admission?
- What size is the college? How many students are undergraduates?
- What is the college's selectivity ratio (what proportion of applicants were admitted last year)?
- Does the college offer majors that interest you?
- Is the college coed or single sex?
- What percentage of students live off campus?
- How many of the students graduate in four years? Five years? Six years?
- How many first-year students return for their sophomore year?
- How much does the program cost? What is the total per-year expense?
- What type of financial aid is available?

Where would you fit in?

- What are the college scores for the SAT® or ACT? Where does that place you?
- What were the high school GPAs of most of the freshmen last year?
- Are freshmen guaranteed on-campus housing? If not, where do they live?
- Are there extracurricular activities that interest you?

Visit the colleges' Web sites, read the guidebooks, and look at their literature

- What are their strong academic programs? (Ask a college representative, students, graduates, and teachers.)
- What courses are required for graduation?
- Are the courses you need/want available each semester? At convenient times?
- Are there special programs that interest you (study abroad, internships, etc.)?
- What is the social life like? What percentage of students join fraternities or sororities?
- Do the pictures and the language the college uses to describe itself attract you?
- What is your general impression of the college?

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- Is the school accredited?
- If professional certification is required for employment in the field that interests you, how many students enrolled in the school's program pass the certification exam?

Admissions process

- When are applications due?
- Does the college accept the Common Application? If so, does it require supplemental forms?
- What does the application contain? Are essays required?
- Is an interview suggested or required? Is an interview available from staff or alumni?
- When may you visit the college? What is its policy regarding campus visits?
- What are the financial aid deadlines? What financial aid forms are required?

Now answer these questions

- Am I a strong candidate for admission to this college?
- If I am not a strong candidate, what are my chances?
- Do I want to visit this college?
- What additional information do I need?

Source: *Susan Staggars, Cary Academy, North Carolina*

College questionnaire for parents or guardians

Name of Student: _____

1. Do you have a preference for how far from home your child's college is located?
2. Do you have a preference for an urban, suburban, or small-town campus?
3. Indicate any preferences you have for the location of your child's college:

<input type="checkbox"/> Southeast	<input type="checkbox"/> Midwest
<input type="checkbox"/> Southwest	<input type="checkbox"/> Northeast
<input type="checkbox"/> West Coast	<input type="checkbox"/> No preference
<input type="checkbox"/> Northwest	
4. Do you have a specific preference for: a public college/university?
 a private college/university?
 a college with a religious affiliation?
 no preference
5. Please list specific colleges/universities you would like your child to learn about.
6. What particular area of study interests your child?

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7. How do you view your child's actual academic progress so far?

8. What do you believe are your child's strengths in applying for college?
 - a. Academic strengths:

 - b. Other strengths:

9. You are invited to write a letter to the college counselor describing your child, specifically narrating events or anecdotes that characterize or illustrate your child's personality. What would you like us to know about your son or daughter? What experiences have shaped his or her personality? What makes your child special? Are there special circumstances you would like the college adviser to know about that would help with the college search? What do you hope your child will gain from the college experience?

Parent/Guardian Name(s): _____ Date: _____

Source: *Susan Staggers, Cary Academy, North Carolina*

Tips for parents on finding a college match

How can your child find colleges that match his or her needs? First, identify priorities. Next, carefully research the characteristics of a range of schools. Finally, match the two. Here are some college characteristics to consider.

Size of student body

Size will affect many of your child's opportunities and experiences:

- range of academic majors offered
- extracurricular possibilities
- amount of personal attention your child will receive
- number of academic resources (e.g., books in the library)

In considering size, your child should look beyond the raw number of students attending. For example, perhaps she's considering a small department within a large school. She should investigate not just the number of faculty members, but also their accessibility to students.

Location

Does your child want to visit home frequently, or is this a time to experience a new part of the country? Perhaps he would like an urban environment with access to museums, ethnic food, or major league ball games. Or maybe he hopes for easy access to the outdoors or the serenity of a small town.

Academic programs

If your child knows what she wants to study, she can research the reputations of academic departments by talking to people in the fields that interest her. If your child is undecided, as many students are, she may want to choose an academically balanced institution that offers a range of majors and programs. Students normally don't pick a major until their sophomore year, and those students who know their major before they go to college are very likely to change their minds. Most colleges offer counseling to help students find a focus.

In considering academic programs, your child should look for special opportunities and pick a school that offers a number of possibilities.

Tips for parents on finding a college match (page 2)

Campus life

Your child should consider what college life will be like beyond the classroom. Students have to maintain a balance between academics, activities, and social life. Before choosing a college, your child should learn the answers to these questions:

- What extracurricular activities, athletics, clubs, and organizations are available?
- Does the community around the college offer interesting outlets for students?
- Are students welcomed by the community?
- Is there an ethnic or religious group in which to take part?
- How do fraternities and sororities influence campus life?
- Is housing guaranteed?
- How are dorms assigned?

Cost

In considering cost, look beyond the price tag. For most students, today's college costs make finances an important consideration. At the same time, most colleges work to ensure that academically qualified students from every economic circumstance can find financial aid that allows them to attend.

Diversity

Your child should explore what she might gain from a diverse student body. The geographic, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity of the students can help students learn more about the world. Investigate which student organizations or other groups with ethnic or religious foundations are active and visible on campus.

Retention and graduation rates

One of the best ways to measure a school's quality and the satisfaction of its students is to learn the percentage of students who return after the first year and the percentage of entering students who go on to graduate. Comparatively good retention and graduation rates indicate that responsible academic, social, and financial support systems exist for most students.

Source: www.collegeboard.com

College resources for students and families

General Web sites

ACT, Inc. The Web site for information on the ACT, including registration, test dates, etc. www.actstudent.org.

Campus Tours: Virtual College Tours. Virtual tours with still pictures and descriptions, webcams, campus maps, and videos of hundreds of colleges throughout the United States. Provides a first look at colleges. www.campustours.com.

The College Board. A complete site, with college and scholarship searches, information about the SAT* and SAT Subject Tests™, and other material pertaining to the college search and application process. Easy-to-use college search feature. www.collegeboard.com.

Collegiate Choice Walking Tours Videos. A site run by a group of independent counselors in New Jersey who offer videos of walking tours of more than 350 colleges, providing “an unedited recording of an actual student-guided campus tour offered at that college.” www.collegiatechoice.com.

eCampusTours.com. Virtual tours of colleges. Useful for its 360-degree views of dorm rooms and other buildings. www.ecampustours.com.

NCAA Eligibility Center. Official NCAA Web site that gives details of student-eligibility requirements to play NCAA sports. Watch this site for changes in eligibility; students can print the “Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete.” www.ncaaclearinghouse.net.

Peterson’s Education Portal. An all-purpose site including a college search, as well as information about summer programs, summer camps, and jobs. The site asks you to register before using some of the search engines and other resources, but there is no registration fee. There is a charge for some of the services provided. www.petersons.com.

U.S. Department of Education. The federal government’s Web site is easy to use and an excellent source of information on financial aid, much of it in Spanish as well as English. www.ed.gov.

Financial aid Web sites

The College Board. Has a scholarship search, a loan calculator, and an online application form for the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE* form, which is required by some colleges. www.collegeboard.com.

FAFSA on the Web. The Web site for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. This form must be submitted in the senior year (after January 1 and by June 30) for families applying for need-based aid. Students may complete it electronically at this site. www.fafsa.ed.gov.

FastWeb. Extensive information on merit- and need-based scholarships and aid. www.fastweb.com.

FinAid! Good site for information about types of financial aid and applying for financial aid. www.finaid.org.

College resources for students and families (page 2)

Books

Comprehensive objective directories

Barron's Profiles of American Colleges. New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc. Updated every two years.

The College Board College Handbook. New York: The College Board. Published annually.

Peterson's Guide to Four-Year Colleges. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides. Published annually.

Peterson's Guide to Two-Year Colleges. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides. Published annually.

Subjective guides

Fiske, Edward, and Robert Logue (contributor). *The Fiske Guide to Colleges*. Illinois: Sourcebooks Trade. Updated annually.

Greene, Howard, and Matthew W. Greene. *Greene's Guide to Educational Planning: The Public Ivies*. HarperCollins, 2001.

Greene, Howard R., and Matthew W. Greene. *The Hidden Ivies: Thirty Colleges of Excellence*. New York: HarperCollins, 2000.

Pope, Loren. *Colleges That Change Lives: 40 Schools You Should Know About Even If You're Not a Straight-A Student*. New York: Penguin, 2006.

Staff of *Yale Daily News*. *The Insider's Guide to the Colleges*. New York: St. Martin's Press. Updated annually.

Specialized topics

Aaron, Scott. *Jewish U: A Contemporary Guide for the Jewish College Student*. Urj Press, 2002

College Board Book of Majors. New York: The College Board. Published annually.

Detailed descriptions, written by professors, of more than 180 popular majors, plus lists of 900 majors and the colleges that offer them.

Getting Financial Aid. New York: The College Board. Published annually.

Mathews, Jay. *Harvard Schmarvard: Getting Beyond the Ivy League to the College That Is Best For You*. New York: Prima Publishing, 2003. Good insights on the college choice process from the education columnist for the *Washington Post*.

Nelson Reference. *Nelson's Complete Guide to Colleges & Universities for Christians*. 2002.

Princeton Review et al. (eds.). *The Hillel Guide to Jewish Life on Campus*. 14th ed. New York: Random House Information Group, 1999.

Princeton Review et al. (eds.). *K&W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder*. 8th ed. New York: Random House Information Group, 2005.

Schoem, David. *College Knowledge: 101 Tips for the College-Bound Student*. University of Michigan Press, 2005. Practical advice on how to become engaged in college intellectual and cultural life.

Windmeyer, Shane L. *The Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students*. Boston: Alyson Publications, 2006.

Strichart, Stephen S., and Charles T. Mangrum, II (eds.). *Peterson's Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder*. 7th ed. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides, 2003.

College Comparison Worksheet

COLLEGE NAME			
Location —distance from home			
Size —enrollment —physical size of campus			
Environment —type of school (2- or 4-year) —school setting (urban, rural) —location & size of nearest city —co-ed, male, female —religious affiliation			
Admission Requirements —deadline —tests required —average test scores, GPA, rank —notification			
Academics —your major offered —special requirements —accreditation —student-faculty ratio —typical class size			
College Expenses —tuition, room and board —estimated total budget —application fee, deposits			
Financial Aid —deadline —required forms —percentage receiving aid —scholarships			
Housing —residence hall requirement —food plan			
Facilities —academic —recreational —other			
Activities —clubs, organizations —Greek life —athletics, intramurals —other			
Campus Visits —when —special opportunities			