

YOUR JOURNEY TO COLLEGE

The Top 5 Statistics to Know about a College



Retention Rate

The retention rate refers to the percentage of students that return to a particular college after freshman year. This number is not always easily found on a college website but can be found through other sources including the Department of Education website: www.collegenavigator.ed.gov. The national average for college student retention is 75%. That means, across the nation a quarter of our freshmen do not return to the same college the next fall. This statistic provides information about how happy and successful students are on an individual campus. There are several key factors that contribute to student satisfaction. Student advising is one of them. It is imperative that students have accessibility to work with advisors that can support their goals and guide them to the course selection necessary to meet those goals. Does the college provide faculty advisors that are knowledgeable, accessible and can communicate effectively? Do they assist the students in getting the courses that they need?

Another service of importance to student satisfaction is the resources available for academic support. The transition to the college setting is a rude awakening for many students. Many students have difficulty with this transition and require the support of a tutoring program or learning center on campus to assist with the demands of the college curriculum. Does the campus provide a well-staffed learning center? Is there support in the area of writing and math? Visit the learning center on campus to see the operation and environment. Do the professors provide office hours to support student questions or do teacher assistants provide study sessions for larger size classes? Another factor to consider in student satisfaction is the amount of campus involvement for students. Are there activities that include the student body and faculty? Are there a myriad of activities offered to meet the needs of student with differing interests? Look at the campus newspaper, magazine or bulletin boards to see what is happening after class and on weekends. Are there activities for students interested in cultural or political events, athletic events or special interest groups? Look at the listing of clubs and sports offered on the school website and look for the most popular offerings.

Being aware of this number is of key importance. If the school you are considering has a retention rate of 60%, it would be wise to investigate why this might be the case. Conversely, a school where the retention rate is ninety percent guarantees that the majority of students are academically successful and happy with the way the campus is run.

The graduation rate is different than the retention rate. Slightly more than half of the full-time freshmen who remain at the same college graduate within 6 years. This is a significant number. This statistic does not factor in students that study on a part-time basis nor those who transfer to the school after freshman year. This number, of course, will rise for students graduating from selective colleges where the students come to the school more prepared for the rigors of the college curriculum. Inquire about the graduation rate at the schools you are considering as well. If it is above the national average (over 51%), that is a positive sign.

Student to Faculty Ratio

Colleges provide this statistic on their website, but the numbers can be misleading. Do they count part-time faculty in their number? Do they count teacher assistants in this ratio? You must do some research in this area to get the correct answer. 15:1 is a good ratio to strive for but this is not a precise statistic. It may be better to ask what the average class size is or to ask students on campus about their experiences. Inquire about the introductory classes – are they presented in large settings, possibly averaging four hundred students per course? Look at the class listings on the website and see what the maximum enrollment is for each course. Do students feel like they are part of a campus community and have a sense of belonging or does the campus have an impersonal feel? If you visit a campus and ask students, not just the tour guides, about their experiences in classes, they will be more than happy to give you valuable information. How many graduate students or teacher assistants teach courses? Typically the larger the university, the better chance you have to be taught by a graduate student and to receive some large lecture hall type courses, particularly in some general education classes. It is important to make sure you can learn and do well in that type of setting if that occurs. It is also important to identify the supports available for students outside of class and the type of setting. It is recommended that you sit in on classes and see for yourself. It is also recommended that when deciding upon a particular college, you arrange for an overnight visit. You can ask to sit in on classes in your major and to spend a night in the dorm. You can also spend the next day on campus to see if the fit is right for you. Try to schedule this on a Friday to Saturday so you see the campus in action and on the weekend as well. There are many colleges that offer “Accepted Student Weekends” but if not, you can contact

the Admissions Office and arrange for an overnight visit on your own. This experience will provide invaluable information in making a decision.

Commuter Rate

Going away to a college where only 30% of the students dorm on campus will be a different experience than a college where 85% of the students live on campus. It may be advisable to look for a campus where over 60% of the students live on campus. Students residing at a commuter campus will find that it becomes very quiet at night and on the weekends. There may be less of a community feel and possibly less activities going on at that time. You can begin by comparing the undergraduate enrollment on campus with the dorm capacity and compare the percentage. If there are 15,000 students on campus and dorm capacity for 3,000, you can assume it is mainly a commuter campus unless it is in an urban setting where there are a lot of off campus housing opportunities. In this case you need to look at the location of the school and its vicinity to an urban center. It is important to check the number of part-time students as well. If there are more than 10% of the undergraduate populations attending on a part-time basis, it may be a commuter school. Being termed a commuter school does not mean that the school will not have sound academic offerings and instruction. It just means that if you are living on campus your residential, social, and extracurricular experience may be different because of that. Again, a great way to ascertain this information is by visiting the college and talking with the students on campus. They are generally more than happy to share their experiences at the college with interested parties. An overnight visit will provide you with information as well.

GPA and SAT/ACT Scores for the Middle 50th Percentile of the College Population

Students typically apply to 8 – 10 colleges; though there are times when this number may need to be higher. It is critical that students know what the typical GPA and SAT/ACT scores are for the colleges they are interested in. Every college will display this information on their website and it can also be found in a myriad of other college search programs. These numbers are critical because they will let you know how likely it is that you will be accepted to a particular college. When applying to college, it is essential that you have colleges on your list that fall into the “safety” and “match” categories and only a few colleges that fall into the “dream” category. For example, if a college advertises that their typical student has a 3.8 grade point average or an average of 89 - 93

and an SAT score range of 1200-1240 (reading & math only), you can assume that the middle 50% of last year's entering class falls within this range. Twenty-five percent will fall above this range and 25% will fall below. This does not mean that you will not be accepted if you do not fall within this range; rather this gives you an idea of what your chances are. These numbers are critical. If you apply only to colleges whose average statistics fall above yours, you risk the chance of not being accepted anywhere or having very limited options. You should have several safety schools within your list – schools where your highest average numbers fall above that of their average student. A safety school should be one where you would expect to be admitted and one that you would like to attend. It can be a school where you may be asked to be part of their Honors program or where you may expect to receive scholarship money. It makes no sense to apply to safety schools that you have no interest in attending. You can find schools in the “match” category that you could see yourself attending. Schools that fall within the match category are ones in which your scores fall solidly within the range of their average students. You can reasonably expect to be admitted to these schools and feel they are a good match for you in regard to your preferences and goals. This category of schools should be the basis of your list. Keep in mind that there is no one perfect school for every student. Students can expect to find a number of colleges they would be happy to attend and that meet their criteria. The schools in the match list should be reflected here. The “dream” category can contain schools where your average statistics are lower than their average student. A college may also fall into this category because of college costs or popularity. Ivy League colleges always fall into this category due to their competitiveness, although your scores may match that of their average student. There should only be 2-3 schools in this category on your list unless you intend to add more schools to your application list in general. Remaining cognizant of these statistics will enable you to develop a list of colleges that meet your needs and that give you a broad range of options.

Percent of Students Receiving Financial Aid, Grants and Merit Aid

These statistics can be found on the college website as well as the Department of Education website. These numbers are important but are often easily misinterpreted. The percent of students receiving financial aid includes students receiving loan packages as well as grants. For example, if a college reports that 90% of their students receive financial aid, this may mean that there are a significant number of students who are receiving loan packages to cover their costs. The percentage of students receiving grants is a more accurate number of students who are receiving monies that do not have to be paid back after graduation. Each college should also provide the average loan or grant award amount given each year. If a college costs \$50,000 per

year and their average grant award is \$5,000-that is not a significant contribution toward the overall cost for the student. There are colleges that offer “no loan policies” which means that they will provide financial support for accepted students without having them incur substantial debt. This list of colleges changes from year to year based on the colleges’ financial situation. Inquire about the possibility of a “no loan program” at the colleges you are considering. The percent of students receiving merit aid is a significant number as well. Merit aid is scholarship money that a student is awarded based on their academic accomplishments in high school or at college. The percentage of students receiving this award will vary from college to college. You may see that a particular college only offers 2% of their population scholarship money. You may assume from this statistic that scholarship money is not easy to come by at this particular institution and if you are accepted, you may be asked to pay the entire tuition bill. If you see that another institution offers 30% of their population merit aid, this may tell you that you have a much better chance of being offered some money if your numbers are above their average student accepted. If awarded scholarship monies, it is important to inquire about the grade point average necessary to continue receiving this money for the remaining years. There is a great website to explore for further information: www.meritaid.com. This site will give you the specific scholarships offered at every institution and what the specific criteria is required for each school. It is well worth a call or a visit to the Financial Aid Office to meet with an officer who can give you the specific programs and options that each college offers.

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