

YOUR JOURNEY TO COLLEGE

Finding the Right Fit: Factors to Consider in College Selection



Selecting colleges to visit and apply to can seem like a daunting task considering the thousands of college choices there are nationwide. Below are some key factors to consider when searching for a college that will be a good match for you:

Major:

Many prospective college students are asked to disclose what they intend to major in but the majority do not have any specific major in mind when they apply; this is very typical. We ask seniors in high school what they would like to select as a career at a time when they are just getting to know themselves and the options available to them. Many are unsure. That being said, if a student is focused on an area that is of interest to them, it is advisable to seek out colleges that are known for those programs. A good resource is the *US News & World Report Rankings Edition* and *Rugg's Recommendations on the Colleges*. Students can choose a school based on an intended major but should find other factors that match their preferences as seventy-five percent of students who choose a major end up changing it at least once. Students can choose a college based on the type of institution, such as a liberal arts based college, one that specializes in the areas of STEM (science, technology, engineering & math), a large university center, colleges with a special focus such as art colleges or conservatories, colleges with specific religious affiliations or historically black colleges. Understanding the differences in these types of institutions will help narrow down the search. It is not unusual, nor is it viewed in a negative light, to apply to college with an undecided major. You can do some research to find out if the college allows students to design their own major, how easy it is to switch a major and at what point must students declare a major.

Cost:

It is important to have a family discussion in regard to the cost of college by the beginning of junior year. This will assist the student and family in choosing colleges to visit and apply to that the student would like to attend, but will also fit the student's or family's financial budget. It is disappointing for students to apply and be accepted to colleges that they find they cannot afford to attend. While researching the cost of colleges, it is important to inquire about all costs, including

tuition, room & board and all fees. It is also important to ask what the rate increase has been for the last three years for these figures. The cost of traveling home and the cost of personal expenses should be factored in as well. It is advisable to meet with a member of the Financial Aid Office if a college is under serious consideration in order to receive an estimate of what financial aid and scholarship money the student could expect to receive as well as the procedures and forms needed for this office. Ask what percentages of students receive need based or merit aid and what the average package is. If the prospective student has scores (GPA and SAT/ACT) well above the norm and the college is generous with aid, the college may be worth applying to even if costly.

Setting:

The importance of this factor often overlooked but does play a large part in a student's happiness on campus. While visiting colleges, choose schools in an urban setting where the campus is a part of the city. Visit a rural campus that does not have a college town nearby, and visit a campus that has an active college town easily accessible from the campus. Have the student give thought to which setting appeals to them. Give some thought to the accessibility of cultural events, athletic events or transportation to a nearby city center. Are those factors of importance? Giving thought to how far from home the student will be as well as how easy it is to come home for a long weekend if the student chooses is another thing to consider. Is housing guaranteed for four years? If the student is commuting to the college, the ease of the commute should be a factor. The type of college setting also pertains to the student body. Consider if the student would like a quieter campus or one with more activity. Think about the surrounding area preference: city, country, beach, or mountains. Is campus diversity an important factor for the student? Are there sororities or fraternities on campus? What is the scope of extracurricular activities? What about athletic team rankings? Is studying abroad an interest? Identifying what is important for the student in regard to college setting is crucial to happiness on campus. Check the *Princeton Review's College Rankings* for information on various school types. Considering these factors will help a student select a good match for them regardless of a choice in a major, which is likely to change.

Size:

Campus sizes range from several hundred students to over thirty thousand students and there are vast differences in the feel of the campus based on size of the enrollment. Visit colleges that vary in size and see what feels like a good fit. Is a large school overwhelming and difficult to navigate? Does a small school feel too limited? Only the student who visits the campus while in session and spends time taking a tour and attending the information session can answer that question. There are advantages to all size campuses and the student needs to decide what fits their temperament and learning style best. Inquire about the average class size and investigate if there are mandatory

large introductory classes. Ask about the percentage of students who commute and live on campus as well as the practice of Teacher Assistants teaching courses. Take the time to investigate which type of campus size best meets your needs and this will eliminate other college choices.

Admissions Requirements:

It is important to investigate what high school curriculum is mandatory for admission to a particular college; each college should identify this information on their website. Some colleges may require specific high school courses for general admission or for specific majors. It is important to investigate what type of admissions exams are needed as part of the application process, such as SAT or ACT and SAT Subject Tests. Each college will publish the *average* statistics for the student body and provide the *average* grade point average and SAT/ACT score on their website. These are important figures to know and will help the student select colleges they have a good chance of being admitted to. Selecting a number of colleges where the student falls below the scores of the average admitted student may result in disappointment later in the process. These numbers are crucial to know. If a student is interested in transferring AP course credit and college credit to a university, it is also imperative to know the particular college's policy on granting credit for these exams or courses. It is important to investigate the percentage of applicants admitted and to remain cognizant of the applications deadlines. It is also essential to inquire about the importance of extracurricular activities in the admission's decision as well as the weight of the essay and letters of recommendation.

Although there are a number of factors to consider, the impression that the student receives upon visiting the campus is one of the most important. If a student can see themselves on this campus for four years and feels it can be a second home, it is one worth considering.