

How To Choose A College

Source: <http://www.egcsd.org/columbia/guidance/documents/How%20to%20choose%20a%20college.pdf>

SELF UNDERSTANDING IS THE FOUNDATION UPON WHICH YOU CAN BASE YOUR COLLEGE CHOICE.

There is no such thing as “the one-and-only-perfect-college” for any student.

How Colleges Select You:

The most important factors in a college selection committee’s review are your grades and the quality of your program of study. You could be the greatest athlete, the best cheerleader, the most talented actor, or the most charismatic class officer, but if you do not present a challenging transcript with strong grades, you’ve lost most of the battle. The primary areas of review:

1. Academic performance - indicated by courses taken and grades received (9-12)
2. Grade Point Average (GPA)
3. High school courses completed
4. Rank in class
5. Test scores (SAT, ACT, SATII)
6. Recommendations
7. Personal qualifications such as motivation, special skills or abilities, and leadership capabilities.
8. Personal Interview

You choose a college, then they choose you. It is not easy, because there are so many factors involved. But remember, your greatest asset is your transcript with solid courses and good grades. One other point about the selection process – and it’s an important one: many students have trouble getting started, getting adjusted to high school. Their 9th and 10th grade are not as strong as they could be. If your junior year is decent, the colleges will request your grades in the senior year. They are looking for an upward swing, a certain change on your part indicating motivation, maturity and serious scholarship. If it is there, it opens doors for you and allows your teachers and counselors to be optimistic in their recommendations.

So don’t take it easy in 12th grade, or look for easy courses, or select a minimum course load. When colleges check your transcript they are also looking to review courses in progress for grade 12. If your goal is to become a satisfied college freshman, the following tips can help:

I. What Qualities and Strengths Do I Bring to a College?

- Consider your academic record, activities, achievements and interests.
- What are your strongest and weakest subjects?
- Which subjects do you enjoy most? Least?
- How did you perform on college admissions tests?
- What club, sports, committees or cultural groups do you participate in actively?
- Which ones are important to you and why?
- Have you held any leadership positions?
- Have you participated in church/synagogue or community activities?
- What jobs have you held?
- What activities, hobbies, or other interests have been important to you?
- Do you learn best on your own, in small or large classes?
- Do you prefer large classes with lots of options or smaller class sizes but fewer choices?
- What are your career and professional goals?

II. What Do I Want in a College?

- Size
- What programs of study are offered?
- How far from home do you want to be?
- Urban, suburban or rural setting?
- How much challenge do you want from your fellow students?
- In what kinds of cultural, social, and sports activities would you like to participate?
- Coed or single sex?
- Religious affiliation?
- Dorms?

FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A COLLEGE

ACADEMICS

More than anything else, you go to college to get an education. The type of academic atmosphere and the variety of courses studied should be considered when choosing a college. Colleges can be ranked according to the selectivity of their admissions. For example, some colleges only take students with a 3.2+ grade point average and very high SAT I scores (1200+) or ACT scores (26+). These institutions are considered very selective in their admissions. Other colleges simply require graduation from high school or lower SAT I scores.

You should try to match your academic abilities to the college's selectivity. If you are a very good student, then a more selective college may offer you more challenge and stimulation. If your record has been weak, a less selective college may best fit your needs.

Also, college offers a variety of majors, or courses to study. If you are fairly sure you want to major in business, for example, you should check the business department of the colleges you are considering. If you are unsure of what your major will be, then look for an institution that has a wide variety of majors, usually called a liberal arts college.

SIZE

Colleges range in size from 150 to 80,000 students. There is a great difference and a large one (15,000-30,000), usually referred to as a university. Small colleges offer you more personal involvement, a community atmosphere, and small classes (from 10-30 students). Large universities tend to be more impersonal, allow you to be more anonymous, and offer larger class sizes, but also provide more options and opportunities.

You should ask yourself:

- Will I feel closed in at a small college?
- Will I welcome the personal, friendly atmosphere a small college affords?
- Will I feel lost and overwhelmed at a large university?
- Will I feel more independent and free at a large university?
- Will I want large or small classes?
- Would I like to have a good deal of interaction with my instructors during class?
- Would I prefer a large, more impersonal style of instruction?
- Will I want a campus that offers sororities and fraternities?
- Are the athletic facilities important to me?
- Size does make a difference.

ATMOSPHERE

Colleges, just like any group of people working and living together, create their own atmosphere. Each college has a particular atmosphere or environment that affects the performance and satisfaction of each student there. Some factors that go into creating a college's atmosphere are: personal or impersonal handling of student questions, concerns, and scheduling; an academic or less serious mood among the students and their approach to responsibilities; role of athletics and other student activities in the daily lives of students, number of student organizations available, fraternities and sororities, and whether the school is co-educational or single sex. The type of atmosphere a college offers can best be discovered by reading the catalogue carefully, and, of course, by visiting the campus and talking to as many people as you can.

COST

Obviously, a major factor to be considered is the cost of attending a college. The total cost for a year, as computed by the college financial aid office, includes tuition, fees, room and board, books, supplies, transportation, and personal expenses. Total costs vary widely.

While cost is undoubtedly very important, don't limit your choice of colleges to only those you can afford without financial assistance. Many of the more expensive private schools have solid financial aid programs, which may cover from twenty percent (20%) to the full cost, depending on your determined financial need. A good plan would be to choose several colleges, including one you can afford and several for which you need aid. We encourage every student to apply to appropriate public colleges or universities. Although financial aid may seem uncertain at times, limiting prospective colleges on a cost basis alone may exclude some excellent colleges from your list.

LOCATION

There are many reasons why the location of the college may be important to you. You should always consider the expense of travel, the need for independence versus the desire to stay near your family, and the effects of living in a particular climate. When considering the location of a college, think about the campus setting. The physical environment of the college you go to may be very important to you. Some people prefer the social, cultural, and economic activities of a large city or metropolitan environment. Others would be unhappy if they could not be near the ocean, mountains, or countryside. A major metropolitan area can offer many benefits, but a student must adjust to the lifestyle of a big city. A college or university, which is located in the heart of a city, is often compromised of multi-storied classroom buildings and high-rise dormitories. There are also many colleges and universities, which are in rural settings with widespread campuses, located many miles from the nearest metropolitan areas. In addition, many institutions are located close to, but not in, large cities. The decision of a location and campus setting for your college should ultimately include those institutions where you will be most comfortable living for the next two to four years of your life.

TEN THINGS YOU SHOULD DO TO MAKE SURE YOU CHOOSE THE RIGHT COLLEGE FOR YOU

1. Start thinking seriously about what you really need in a college.
2. Research, Research, Research!!!!
3. Talk to your guidance counselor.
4. Decide if you want to apply for Early Action or Early Decision.
5. Search and plan essay topics.
6. Cultivate your recommendation writers.
7. Determine what standardized tests you need to take and when.
8. Don't blow off your senior year!!!
9. Start thinking about how you will pay for college.
10. Plan, Plan, Organize, Organize!!!

EVALUATE YOUR COLLEGE PREFERENCE WITH THESE TEN QUESTIONS

1. What satisfactions and frustrations do you expect to encounter in college? What are you looking forward to? What worries you the most? What do you hope to gain from college? What is the overriding consideration in your choice of college?
2. Why do you want an education? Why are you going to college?
3. How do you want to grow and change in the next few years? What kind of environment would stimulate or inhibit the growth you would like to see?
4. Which interests do you want to pursue in college? Do your interests require any special facilities, programs, or opportunities? Consider all your interests in terms of fields of study, activities, community and cultural opportunities. Are you more interested in career preparations, technical training, or general knowledge and skills?
5. What degree of academic challenge is best for you? What balance of study, activities, social life suits you best? How interested are you in the substance of intellectual life – books, ideas, issues, and discussions? Do you want an academic program where you must work and think hard, or one where you can make respectable grades without knocking yourself out? How important is it to you to perform at the top of your class, or would you be satisfied in the middle or bottom of your college class? How well do you respond to academic pressure and competition from others?
6. How do you feel about going to college where you were rarely told what to do? How much structure and direction do you need?
7. How would you enjoy living in a different part of the country? How often do you want to be able to go home? What kind of change in your lifestyle and perspective might be exciting, or distressing and overwhelming?
8. What kinds of surroundings are essential to your well being? Are there certain places, activities, climate, or pace of life, which make you happy? Do you prefer a fast-paced environment where something is happening most of the time, or an organized environment where you can join a wide variety of planned activities? Do you prefer a more serene and relaxed environment where you can go your own way?
9. How would you feel about going to a college where the other students were quite different from you? How would you react? Would you find it an exciting or intimidating environment? Would you prefer to be with people who share your viewpoints and life-styles or who challenge and make you question your values?
10. How free do you feel to make your own college decisions? Do you and your parents agree about your plans for college? How important are the opinions of you parents, teachers, and friends, or considerations of familiarity, prestige, or reputation in your community?

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Name: _____ Hour _____ Date: _____

Date Assignment is due: _____ Why late? _____ Score _____ /29
Day of Week Date If your project was late, describe why

Directions Use the attached reading to complete this assignment. For this assignment, consider any kind of post-secondary education after high school that might apply to you, including 2-year schools, colleges, universities, and the military.

1. What are the top 8 factors that affect whether or not a student is accepted into a college? (1/2 pt each):

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

7 _____

8 _____

2. You choose a college, then _____

3. What is your greatest asset as a college applicant? _____

4. If you freshman and sophomore years are not the best in terms of grades, but your junior year is decent, what might colleges do and what are they looking for?

5. What are your academics strengths? List here: _____

6. What are your academic weaknesses? List here: _____

7. What club, sports, committees or cultural groups do you participate in actively? _____

8. What leadership positions have you held? _____

9. What community/religious activities or groups do you participate in actively? _____

10. What jobs have you held? _____

11. Would you prefer large classes with lots of options or small classes with fewer choices? _____

12. In general, what kind of college are you interested in? _____

13. Is a college/university that is close to home a priority, or would you be willing to go to a college more than a few hours from your home? Explain:

14. Would you prefer a challenging college or one in which it may be easier to succeed but has less recognition? Explain:

15. Are there any colleges that you would attend that you would consider "safety schools", or schools that you have a very strong chance of being accepted by? List and explain why you are interested in these schools:

16. What might be a school that you would consider applying to that would be challenging and harder for you to get into? List and explain why you are interested:

17. More than anything else, you go to college to _____

18. What would be a selective school, according to this reading? _____ GPA: _____

_____ SAT: _____ ACT: _____

19. How does your major affect what college to apply to? _____

20. Colleges range in size from _____ to _____ students.

21. How many students would a large university have? _____

22. What are the pros and cons of attending a large university? _____

_____ Pro's: _____

_____ Con's: _____

23. What are six factors that affect the atmosphere of a school? _____

24. What seven items are included in "total cost" of a school? _____

25. When it comes to cost, a good plan would be to _____

26. When it comes to the location of the college, what are three things you should consider? _____

27. Factors to Consider for College Choice: Rate the following factors according to the importance each has to you personally. Place a check in the appropriate rating column.

| | Very Important | Somewhat Important | Not Important |
|--|----------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Overall academic curriculum | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Good preparation for career/graduate school | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Outstanding department/program/professor | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Prestige of school | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Opinion of friends | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Parental pressure | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Part of country/beauty of campus | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Rural/urban/suburban | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Proximity of large city | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Proximity of parents' home | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Proximity to other colleges | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Coed or single sex | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Social life/activities | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Favorable impression of student body | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Size of school/housing set-up | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Cost of school/financial aid | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Good chance for admission | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Athletic facilities/organizations | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Religious and/or ethnic organizations | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Sister/brother/family alumni | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Possibility to exchange/transfer to another school | _____ | _____ | _____ |