

CHOOSING A COLLEGE

Before you can decide which colleges to apply to, you must consider many factors:

- **Location:** How far do you want to be away from home? Consider costs and travel-time to and from school in your selection. Distance may limit your ability to come home on a regular basis. Do you want access to museums, ethnic food, or major league ball games? Or maybe you want access to the outdoors or the serenity of a small town?
- **Climate:** Here's your chance to choose where you want to live for the next four to five years. Consider all four seasons, and climates (warm, cold, wet, dry). Research the downsides of moving to a climate that is different from home.
- **Campus Setting:** Which type of campus setting motivates you the most? Consider: major cities, urban, suburban, or even rural settings to optimize your collegiate experience. Remember that each setting offers varied and different activities and social opportunities.
- **School Type:** It is important to incorporate your unique personality and learning preferences into your school selection process. Choose between public, private, or community colleges and conservative vs. liberal schools to make sure the campus culture and learning environment is right for you.
- **Educational programs available:** Special academic programs, student-to-professor ratio, facilities, classroom environment, study abroad, or internship programs all play a role in finalizing your school selection. Research academic departments and confirm that the selected schools offer an appropriate degree program in your chosen field of study.
- **Cost:** Will you qualify for enough financial aid to attend a particular college? Do look beyond the price tag because colleges work to ensure academically qualified students get the financial aid that allows them to attend.
- **Size of student body:** Do you want to be a big fish in a small pond or a small fish in a big ocean? The campus size can impact the social opportunities, clubs, sports, and the student-to-professor ratio.
- **Selectivity:** What are your chances of being accepted? Are your GPA and test scores similar to the GPA and test scores of students generally accepted to a particular college?
- **Religious affiliation:** Do you want to attend a college affiliated with a particular religious organization?
- **Housing:** Is there on-campus housing or do many students live off campus? Find out what is available. The more options the better! Make sure your school selection offers you the appropriate housing choices.
- **Campus activities:** Are club and intramural sports, performing arts and activities of interest to you available? What is the campus social life like? Do many students join fraternities/sororities? Does the community around the college offer interesting outlets for students? Are students welcomed by the community?

- **Diversity:** Do you want to attend a college where many races and religions are represented? Have you considered a women-only or men-only college? For African-American students, are you interested in historically black colleges?
- **Retention and graduation rates:** A good way to measure a school's quality and the satisfaction of students is to learn the % of students who return after the first year and the % of entering students who remain to graduate.
- **Special needs:** Will the college be able to accommodate any special needs you may have (i.e., physical or learning disabilities, religious, dietary)?
- **Choosing a career:** Start researching potential careers early in your college planning process. Almost 50% of all students choose a major based on earning potential, family demands, or time pressure. **DO YOURSELF A FAVOR AND SELECT A CAREER BASED ON WHAT YOU REALLY WANT TO DO!**

After serious thought about these issues and discussion of them with your family and friends, you will be ready to develop a list of schools. To gather information about colleges:

- **Read a general college guide.** These guides are good sources of general information about colleges and make it easier to compare colleges. The Counseling Office has many guides available for check out, or you can purchase one at a bookstore or on the internet.
- **Contact colleges you are interested in** and ask to be placed on their mailing list. You can do this by telephone, mail or internet. Come to the Counseling Office to get telephone numbers, addresses and web sites.
- **Set up a place at home** to collect and store all the paperwork you'll accumulate.
- **Use the internet.** Every college has a web site.
- **Visit each of the colleges** you are considering. Contact the admissions office to schedule a campus tour. Talk to current students and ask questions about the school.

After you've gathered and studied all the information, narrow down your choices and start the application process. Many students ask how many applications they should submit. Keep in mind that every application requires a **fee**. You should narrow your choices to schools you have a genuine interest in attending. Apply to a range of schools: schools you feel confident will accept you; schools that are within reach based on your academic and extracurricular record; and schools that are a "stretch" for you.

Recommended Further Reading:

The Fiske Guide to Colleges (Edward Fiske)
College Match (Octameron Press)
Selecting the Right College (Dr. Norman R. Smith)
A Parent's Guide to College Admissions (Kaplan)
A is for Admission: The Insider's Guide to Getting in to the Ivy League
Getting In: Inside the College Admissions Process (Bill Paul)
College Prep 101
Acting the College Application