

STEPS TO SELECTING A COLLEGE

Pray

- Ask God to guide you through this process. He cares about you and your future more than anyone, and this is a great time to take Him up on his promise to never leave or forsake you.

Use the guide below to get started (from www.collegeboard.com)

Although there's no magic formula for choosing a college, you can start by asking yourself some questions that help most students find the right fit. Use this guide to:

- Learn about some key college search categories.
- Answer questions to discover what's important to you.
- Get advice from college students and educators.

Dig deeper: www.thecollegesolution.com/12-ways-to-find-and-research-colleges ;
www.thecollegesolution.com/whats-critical-college-admission-checklist

Kinds of Colleges

Most students start by thinking about the kind of college they want to attend. As you do so, keep in mind that you have lots of options. More than 1,600 colleges — mostly community colleges — accept almost all high school graduates.

Begin by considering these questions:

- Do I want to go to a two-year or four-year college? At a two-year college, students can earn an associate degree. At a four-year college, students can earn a bachelor's degree. Many students begin at a two-year college on the path to a bachelor's degree at a four-year college.
- Am I limiting my choices by focusing on whether a college is public or private? Many students exclude private colleges because they think they're more expensive, but that's not always the case. Financial aid can sometimes make private colleges as affordable as public colleges. And private colleges are not always more selective.

Dig deeper: www.thecollegesolution.com/do-you-know-the-difference-between-a-college-and-university

Location

Many students begin their college search by setting a limit on how far away from home they want to be. This might be an easy way to narrow the many options out there, but it doesn't mean you'll find the best colleges for you. Keep your mind open and think about these questions:

- How close to home do I want to be? Close enough for meals and laundry, to visit on weekends, or to only come home on breaks?
- Do I want to stick to a setting I'm used to or try something new?
- If I look just a little farther — a few more miles or another half hour away — what other opportunities open up to me?
- Am I staying close because I think it will be less expensive? Sometimes out-of-state schools are more affordable.

Campus Setting

Many students say that campus size and feel was a big part of their college choice. Whether or not you already have a mental image of what college life should be like, visiting a college and talking to students is a great way to get to know a campus. But first, consider these questions:

- Do I see myself at a college with lots of students or in a smaller community?
- Do I want to be at a college where students stay on campus most of the time? Do I want to live in a dorm?
- Do I want to be around lots of different kinds of people or people with interests similar to mine?
- Do I want to be at a school where sports are a big deal? Or one that's known for its activism? Or for its hard-working students?

Cost

For many families, cost is a big concern — understandably. But it doesn't have to be such a big hurdle. College is usually more affordable than you think. Here are a few things to consider:

- Do I have the facts about what colleges will cost? Students don't usually pay the published price because of financial aid — and shouldn't rule out colleges early in their search because of cost.
- Will I qualify for financial aid? All students should apply for aid, whether or not they think they will qualify. Most students get financial help from the government or the college itself.
- Am I eligible for scholarships? Certain characteristics or accomplishments might qualify students for private or college scholarships that award money they do not have to pay back.

Dig deeper: Check college websites for Net Price Calculators to get an estimate of how much you personally would pay out-of-pocket to attend a particular college (based on your financial situation, grades, etc.)

Majors

A college major is the subject area you'll spend the most time studying. Many students think they have to know what their major will be before they start college. In fact, you have plenty of time to decide on a major, and a lot of students change their major more than once. These questions can help you think about majors that may interest you:

- What are my favorite school subjects? What do I like doing when I'm not in class?
- Do I want to take classes in many different subjects or focus mainly on one subject?
- What do I want to do after college and which majors can help me get there?

Dig deeper: www.thecollegesolution.com/digging-deeper-when-researching-colleges

Learning Environment

As you know, college is about learning! So it makes sense to imagine your ideal learning environment. Don't get stuck on things like a college's reputation, rank or selectivity. What's more valuable is how well a college's academic style fits you. Consider the following:

- Do I learn best when I'm academically comfortable or academically challenged?
- Do I prefer to be part of small group discussions or to listen to lectures? How much interaction do I want with my professors?
- What sort of balance am I looking for between studying and having a social life?
- Do I want to choose most of my classes myself, or do I prefer more structure?

Dig deeper: Use collegeboard.org (or similar sites) to look up colleges' average class sizes, student to faculty ratio, and average ACT and SAT scores (to get a rough idea of the academic level/rigor)

Match yourself with admissions standards

Before you consider your college search complete, compare your academic and personal qualifications to those of students typically admitted to schools where you want to apply.

- To find this information, look up any college at www.collegeboard.com. Click on the *Applying* and *SAT & ACT Scores* tabs.
- As you narrow your college list...
 - Select 1 or 2 “reach schools” if you'd like — schools you'd want to attend but whose admissions standards may be too high for you
 - **Make sure your final list includes a number of “mid-range” colleges**—schools where your qualifications closely match those of the average student.
 - **Include a “safety” school** or two, where your statistics exceed the profile of most students. Give at least as much thought to your “mid-range” and “safety” schools as you do to your “reaches.” Apply only to schools at which you believe you would be happy for four or more years (or two years at a community colleges).