

How to Narrow Your College Choices

Don't begin your college search in a whirlwind. Take time to sit back and carefully assess the kind of characteristics you seek in a college. Think clearly and be honest with yourself. Think about Basics: First, consider all the most basic questions you should ask yourself about the college experience you want. Give full thought to each item.

Location:

- Do you want to stay near your home or travel several times a year? (Consider how much travel expenses will cost, especially during holidays)
- Do you want the fast-paced life of a metropolitan campus or the easygoing serenity of a small college town?
- Is it important for you to be nearby mountains for skiing or oceans for swimming, etc?
What kind of weather do you really like?

Student Body:

- Is a single sex or coed school more to your liking?
- Are you looking for a student body drawn from across the nation or from a smaller geographic area?
- Do you want to be surrounded by thousands of classmates or only a few hundred?

Academic Requirements:

- How do you realistically view yourself as a student?
- Do you have the academic record to be seriously considered by a highly competitive institution?
- Do you want an academically demanding college program or would you prefer a school where you can make respectable grades without knocking yourself out?
- Do you expect to be aiming for graduate school?
- Do they have the major that you are interested in?

Academic Structure:

- Do you feel attracted to a larger university encompassing many schools and colleges or to a small single-purpose institution?
- Does a liberal arts or a professional curriculum seem more in line with your career interests?
- Do your interests require specialized facilities?
- Are you looking for a specific major?
- Do you need a highly structured academic framework in order to work effectively or can you work with a curriculum that allows for independent projects or has no requirements at all?
- Do you need the incentive of grades or would you work equally well under a pass/fail or comment grading system?

Campus Life:

- Do you want to live in a dormitory or off campus? How much are the dorms? What is the availability of off campus housing?
- Is it important to you that there be something happening on campus every minute or would you be happiest in a more leisurely setting?
- Are you interested in fraternity or sorority life?
- Are you an inveterate joiner who is looking for a school with a wide assortment of extracurricular activities?
- Can you live with restrictions and regulations?
- Do you want an extensive athletic program?

Costs:

- Is your family able to pay the generally higher tuition of a private college (or can you get a scholarship) or does a public college seem more feasible?
- Are you interested in work-study programs, in which the college officially combines or alternates periods of employment with periods of study? (cooperative education)
- If you are sure you won't qualify for scholarship assistance, would you be willing to work part-time and/or take loans to pay for your education?