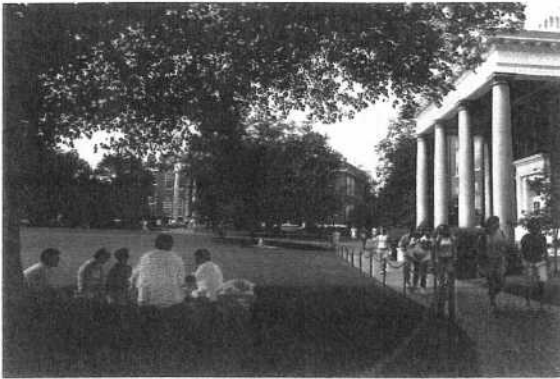


HOW TO CHOOSE A COLLEGE

WHERE TO START?

Like most students your age, you're about to begin a process that will lead to one of the most important decisions of your life—which college or university to attend. The information in this publication is meant to help you gain a greater understanding of the college admission process so that you'll feel better prepared to choose a college or university that will fit your individual needs, both academically and personally.



IS THERE ONLY ONE PERFECT COLLEGE FOR ME?

In a word—no. There are probably several institutions that can meet your academic and social needs. But each college or university is unique, having its own characteristics and its own personality. As you begin to gather information and look at various colleges, it will become apparent that certain types of institutions have more appeal to you and that some factors are more important than others in your college decision.

It's important for you to keep an open mind. There are lots of excellent colleges that you may not be familiar with that might offer just what you're looking for. And there may be some well-known schools that you've heard of ... but only because their football team is on TV. The point is, you should gather lots of information, ask plenty of questions, and ultimately make a decision that feels right to you.

WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION DO I NEED?

There's no shortage of information about colleges. You'll receive a number of brochures, viewbooks, and emails from colleges and universities. You might want to attend several college fairs or college night programs in your area. You'll want to seek the advice of parents, friends, guidance counselors, and teachers. And, of course, there's tons of information online.

It is important for you to put together information from several sources, read between the lines, and look

beyond the color photographs of beautiful campuses and attractive students. Then visit the colleges that appeal to you the most. A few hours well spent on a college campus can tell you more about an institution than any other kind of experience.

Whether gathering general information about a college or university, or preparing for a campus visit, there are certain types of questions that you'll want answered. You can start with the following topics.



ACADEMIC QUALITY

No matter where you decide to attend college, the quality of the academic program should be your primary consideration. There is a wide range of types of institutions offering quality academic programs, but some may be more suited to your particular needs and wants. The following questions may help you determine whether a college is the right academic match for you.

- What academic programs and majors are offered?
- Is there a sufficient range of course offerings in your area of interest?
- Is there flexibility to allow you time to choose a major or to tailor the program to your own needs?
- Who teaches in class - faculty or teaching assistants?
- What are the scholarly credentials of the faculty?
- How large are typical freshman classes?
- How good are the facilities—such as classrooms, laboratories, studios, and computer access?
- What types of library resources are available?
- Are faculty members accessible to students outside the classroom?
- Is there an effective system for academic advising?
- Is the college's academic program respected by graduate schools and employers?
- What is the academic profile of students who attend the college?
- How many students complete degree programs and how many drop out or transfer to other institutions?



CAN I GET IN?

Colleges vary greatly in terms of admission selectivity. College publications and websites will give you some idea of what the “average” admitted freshman looks like. Keep in mind that most institutions accept students with a range of backgrounds and abilities. Many factors are taken into account in admission decisions, so don’t necessarily rule out applying if you don’t meet the average on all criteria. Here’s some steps to take when assessing your own strengths and weaknesses:

- **Consult with your guidance counselor.** They often know what certain colleges are looking for.
- **Visit a college campus.** You can learn from an admissions officer what type of student is typically accepted.
- **Choose your high school courses wisely.** Take the best program of study that you can, given the offerings of the school and your own abilities. Continue to take strong courses through your junior and senior years.
- **Strive for the best grades possible.** Colleges look for evidence in your record that you are thorough, consistent, and put forth your best effort.
- **Look at the full range of test scores for accepted students.** Colleges use the SAT or ACT as only one factor among several in making admission decisions. The amount of weight placed on test scores will vary by institution. You may want to ask about the weight placed on SAT-II Subject Exams or other tests that are required.
- **Investigate the importance given to personal qualities.** In some cases, being a great musician, star athlete, class leader, or champion debater can make a difference. So, too, can involvement in church or community activities or successfully holding down a part-time job. Don’t be shy about expressing your unique qualities.



CAN I AFFORD IT?

Sooner or later, for most students and their parents, the question of cost enters the college decision process. This is not surprising, given the seemingly high cost of education today. However, a college education is one of the best investments you can ever make. And you may be able to receive financial assistance to help ease the burden of attending the college or university of your choice. Be sure to research scholarships and financial aid opportunities—local, national, and those related to the schools you may be applying to.

Many people believe in the myths that “you only get what you pay for” and that “you must pay for all you get.” Neither of these is necessarily true when it comes to colleges. There are many state-supported colleges and universities that offer excellent programs at very moderate prices. On the other hand, many fine private institutions are affordable because they provide substantial financial aid and scholarship programs. So look beyond just the apparent price of an institution. Consider the net out-of-pocket cost to you and the quality of education you’ll receive in return for your dollar.