



Finding colleges that fit

It's about YOU!

Finding the right college means searching for a program that meets your needs academically, socially, *and* financially. Avoid applying to a certain college or program just because you've heard the name or because "everyone else is." This is about you; it's your search. There are likely to be several colleges that fit your "must haves." Give some thought to the following:

Type of college

Do I want a two-year college, a four-year college or university, or a technical/vocational program? Coed or single gender? Religious affiliation?

One- and two-year schools may offer a general education or specialized job-training program. Four-year programs include general education requirements in addition to major coursework.

Major/academic program

What do I want to learn? What field of study interests me?

A college "major" is a particular subject—such as education, engineering, or history—in which a student concentrates his or her studies. Other options include internships, study abroad, and opportunities for interdisciplinary and self-designed majors.

Size

What size student body, campus, and classes are right for me?

Smaller colleges may mean you might get to know most of the students; larger schools may have more academic and extracurricular activities. Do you want individual attention? Regular access to faculty? Check the faculty-student ratio. Do you prefer a large lecture auditorium or small group discussions? Keep in mind that class sizes typically get smaller as you move further along in your major.

Selectivity

How do I compare academically to accepted students? What are my chances of getting in?

A school's selectivity may be based on the average GPA (grade point average), class rank, and SAT/ACT scores of admitted students, as well as the percentage of applicants accepted. Refer to each college's Web site or catalog for its specific admissions requirements.

Location

Do I want to stay close to home or go farther away? City, rural, or suburban?

Choose a location and community that appeals to you.

TIP

Organize the clutter. The paper load will grow senior year. Organize applications materials, deadlines, and financial aid forms in 7- to 12-pocket file folders. Use one folder for application info and a second folder for financial aid deadlines and forms.

Campus atmosphere, student life, and diversity

What type of “personality” does the campus have? How do students spend their time? How diverse is the student body? What opportunities and activities are available?

Every campus has a different “feel,” which you can best get a sense of by visiting the campus and talking with students. Also look at the school newspaper, talk with faculty and staff, and check out campus activities, housing, and food. Do students stay on campus on the weekends? How much time do they spend on academics each day/week? Are there support services available? Look for campus activities and volunteer opportunities that interest you. Consider the students on campus (where they are from, what background they have), too. Go with your gut feeling: Can you imagine yourself as a student there?

TIP

Lower your costs.

Applying to schools at which you’re near the top of the applicant pool academically may qualify you for more merit-based financial aid from the college.

And by taking your general education coursework at a community college and then transferring to a four-year program to focus on your major, you may be able to cut your college costs.

Cost and affordability

What is the cost of attending college, and what type of financial aid is available?

Total costs cover tuition, room and board, fees, books, and personal expenses. Cost is a major concern for most families, so have that discussion early on. Don’t rule out a college because it seems too expensive; what you actually pay may be well below the “sticker price.” Use <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov> to start building your college list. You’ll find info on tuition and fees, housing, admission, graduation rates, campus safety, and more. Apply to colleges in different price ranges, and check with VSAC and college financial aid offices about your options.

Start your search

Using the College Scorecard at <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov>, you can search by type of degree you want, tuition, by field of study, and more. Another useful search tool is the College Board’s Big Future at <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges>.

Use the chart on the next page to compare the colleges on your wish list.

Factors	My “wish list”	college name	college name
Major/academic program	<i>good science program possible bio major</i>		
Selectivity	<i>my GPA = 3.2 so far</i>		
Type of college	<i>4 year? (maybe 2-year and transfer?)</i>		
Size	<i>some big classes OK, want lots of options</i>		
Location	<i>near a small city</i>		
Campus atmosphere, student life, and diversity	<i>outdoorsy, eco-club, friendly, ultimate frisbee</i>		
Cost and affordability	<i>need to talk to parents! find job this summer</i>		



College comparison chart

As you investigate colleges, use this worksheet to keep track of schools in which you're most interested and to compare them to your wish list of ideal characteristics. In the second column, list all 12 factors in order of importance to you — 1 for most important, 12 for least important.

Factors to consider	my factor rank (1-12)	my wish list of college characteristics	college name	college name	college name
Type (technical, two-year, college, university)					
Major/academic program					
Size of school					
Location (setting/surroundings)					
Selectivity					
Academic atmosphere					
Student life/activities					
Diversity of student population					
Housing					
Facilities (library, theater, cafeteria, sports)					
Cost (college budget) and affordability					
Other					