

HOW TO CHOOSE A COLLEGE THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

WHO ARE YOU, AND WHY ARE YOU GOING TO COLLEGE?

Start by examining your reasons for going to college. Why, really, are you going? What are your abilities and strengths? What are your weaknesses? What do you want out of life? Are you socially self-sufficient or do you prefer familial support? Talk with your family, friends, and high school counselors as you ask these questions. The people who know you best will be able to help you the most with these important issues.

SIZE MATTERS

Your college does not have to be bigger than your high school. Most good liberal arts colleges have a population of fewer than 4,000 for a reason. College is a time to explore, and many students find a smaller community more conducive to internal exploration. What really matters, however, is not the number of people, but the people themselves and the kind of community in which you will learn. Many large universities have established smaller “honors colleges” for these reasons.

A NAME-BRAND COLLEGE WILL NOT GUARANTEE SUCCESS

Think about the people in your life who are happy and successful. Find out whether they went to college and, if so, where they attended. Often you'll find that success in life has less to do with your college choice and more to do with your personal qualities and traits coupled with the experiences and opportunities you will have in college. Employers and graduate schools are looking for outstanding skills and experience, not college pedigree. As you search for colleges, ask about student outcomes. You will find that many colleges you've never even heard of actually outperform the Ivies and “name brands”! Visit the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) website for more information and as an alternative to popular rankings and media lists.

YOU DON'T NEED TO PICK A MAJOR YET

Very few high school students have enough information or experience to choose a major. Most students need the variety and depth of college coursework to determine their interests and aptitudes. In fact, many college students change their minds two or three times before they settle on a major and still graduate in four years! Being “undecided” can be a good thing; it will leave you open to exploring more academic experiences.

DON'T BE SCARED BY THE STORIES

If you pay attention to the headlines when it comes to college admissions, you might believe that no one is getting in anywhere! The truth is, the majority of the colleges and universities in this country admit more students than they reject. If you are worried about your chance for admission and are willing to explore beyond the very narrow band of highly selective colleges, you will find many options that could be a great fit for you. Compare your academic profile to those of recently admitted and enrolled students at any college you're considering. (Most colleges provide this information on their website, but contact the school if you can't find it.) Ask your high school counselor to help you assess your school record as it relates to various admission options.

YOU CAN AFFORD TO GO TO COLLEGE

If you assume that you cannot afford college based on the “sticker price,” you will miss out. It may be difficult for you to talk about money, but if you investigate all the options and ask for help and advice, you will find affordable choices. Online resources as well as financial aid workshops sponsored by high schools in your community are widely available to get you started. College and university financial aid websites offer useful information and links as well. Investigate early and ask for help.

THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IS FIT

Choosing a college because your friends are going there or because of where it ranks on a list does not take into account who you are and who you will become. College is a match to be made, not a prize to be won. Finding a good fit requires time and introspection. Visiting a college's website, learning about campus events and guest speakers, and getting in touch with current students and faculty are good ways to supplement a campus visit—or to decide if you even want to spend the time and money on a visit. Check college websites to identify the admission officer assigned to your region of the country and email him or her. Ask if you can get in touch with students from your area or students with interests similar to yours. When you do visit, take the time to sit in on classes, eat in the dining hall, and hang around in the student center or other high-traffic areas. Imagine yourself as part of the community. Talk to students. Ask if they would make the same college choice if they were going through the selection process again.

ON THE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

- How well do students get along with each other?
- How many students participate in community-based service projects?
- How easy is it to get involved as a student leader? Is the administration interested in students' input on campus issues?
- How often do students interact with peers of different racial or ethnic backgrounds or social, political, and religious views?
- How many students study abroad?
- What do most students do for fun?
- Are there opportunities for spiritual activities?
- What kinds of activities are students involved in outside the classroom? Can first-year students get involved easily?
- Are activities in music, theatre, and fine arts limited to students majoring in these areas?
- Is athletic participation limited to varsity athletes?
- What percentage of students are involved in athletics or intramural sports?
- Are the students satisfied with their experience? Would they make the same college choice if they had to do it again?

ON CAMPUS RESOURCES

- What types of financial aid and academic scholarships are available? Are they renewable each year?
- Who assists students with course selection and career advising? How often does this happen?
- What safety/security services are available, and how often do students use them?
- What health and personal counseling services are available?
- What career planning services are available on campus? Are there internships and who coordinates that program? When can students meet with career services?
- What data is available about graduate and professional school admission and the types of jobs held by alumni, especially recent graduates?

ON THE ADMISSION PROCESS

- When are your application deadlines?
- Is an interview required for admission?
- How do I apply for financial aid and scholarships? When are the deadlines?

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COLLEGES THAT CHANGE LIVES

Colleges That Change Lives, Inc. (CTCL) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement and support of a student-centered college search process. Our goal is to help each student find a college that cultivates a lifelong love of learning and that provides the foundation for a successful and fulfilling life beyond college. CTCL was founded as a result of a book of the same name, *Colleges That Change Lives*, researched and written by former *New York Times* education editor Loren Pope.

In following Mr. Pope's ideals, we believe that the criteria most college-bound students, their parents and counselors use, such as name and prestige, does not acknowledge the importance of understanding an individual student's needs and how they "fit" with the mission and identity of a college community.

The current record number of college-bound students, coupled with narrowly focused media stories about college admissions, have led the public and even the high school counseling community to believe that college choices are severely limited. CTCL aims to correct this misconception by presenting accurate information about college accessibility at sessions around the country and by providing college counseling information and resources through the CTCL website (**CTCL.org**) and other outreach efforts.

Colleges That Change Lives is recognized by the IRS as a non-profit, charitable 501(c)(3) organization and your donations are tax-deductible. Contact us at **CTCL.org** for information about how to contribute and support our mission.

Carnegie Dartlet is proud to support the mission of Colleges That Change Lives. For over 30 years, Carnegie Dartlet has played a valuable role in the college search process by providing relevant resources for college-bound students and their families. Through its leading college search website *CollegeXpress.com* and respected suite of publications, including *Private* and *Public Colleges & Universities*, Carnegie Dartlet offers extensive college and university profiles, scholarship search tools, and helpful editorial content covering everything from the admission process and test prep to career advice.

Carnegie Dartlet is committed to supporting students' academic dreams and has awarded over a million dollars in scholarship aid to deserving students. For your chance to win one of the many CollegeXpress scholarships, visit www.CollegeXpress.com/ctcl



QUESTIONS TO ASK TO FIND A GOOD COLLEGE FIT

As you travel to campuses or conduct online visits, here are some questions that will help you sort through your college options. Tear this off and keep it with you as a reference—and add some of your own questions to the list.

ON THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

- How much time do students spend on work outside of class?
- What type of evaluations (i.e., exams/papers) do faculty members use most often?
- Are classes interactive and engaging? Is discussion encouraged?
- How do students receive feedback on academic work, and how often do they receive it?
- Do students work together on projects?
- How often are students required to do presentations in class?
- Are faculty members accessible?
- How often and how many students work on research projects with faculty?
- How often do students discuss ideas in class?
- Is there a required first-year program and a culminating senior experience?
- Are students able to easily access courses outside of their major?

Questions continued on the reverse side.

