

## Choosing Your Colleges

Choosing a campus can be overwhelming, but if you take the time to answer the questions that follow, the resulting list of college campuses will reflect your goals, needs, and interests, instead of being reduced to a search for based on “name” or even a campus that is convenient but may not have the offerings and environment that will be a *good match and fit for YOU*.

There are many resources available, including websites, reference books in the College/Career Center, college rep visits, college fairs, opportunities to visit campuses, and advice from counselors, family, and friends to help discover the right match. To keep track of the colleges you are researching you should carefully compare colleges based on a variety of factors.

### What to Look for in a College Program

What do you think you might want to study in college? What are some possible college majors? You are not being asked to choose an exact college major at this point in your life, but it's good to know what choices are available and have a general idea of types of subjects and programs that interest you. In addition, with the help of your guidance counselor can discover a great deal of information about yourself by taking a few surveys about possible career interest, your personality, skills, and strengths.

### The College Campus

Where is the campus located? Is the location of your college important to you? What is the climate? What is the setting: rural, suburban, or urban? Consider the cost of travel, proximity to airports, campus safety, and availability of local transportation and cultural events. You should visit campuses whenever possible and take advantage of virtual tours on the college website and other sites that include virtual tours. See the *Visiting Colleges* section of this website.

### **What is the enrollment size of the campus/program? What class environment is best for the way you learn? What is most important to you about the size of the campus?**

Colleges can range in size from fewer than 1000 to over 60,000 students! Small campuses can be more cohesive and personal and students usually have smaller class sizes and easier access to professors. Large campuses can have more choices majors and diversity, and are often less expensive. They may have more research opportunities, and activities/ athletic programs. College Honors Programs can provide small learning communities on large campuses (for example Burnett Honors College at UCF).

### **What other features and activities are important to you personally? What else, besides academics, does your college need to have in order for you to be interested in applying?**

Clubs, sports, fine arts, jobs, types of dorms, religious affiliations, study-abroad programs, dietary requirements, facilities for special needs, local transportation, sororities and fraternities, foreign language immersion programs, internships, job placement programs, are just some features to consider.

## **What are the Costs of Attendance (Tuition, Room and Board, Books and Fees)? How can I pay for College?**

Depending on your family's circumstances college costs can range from very little per year to over \$60,000 per year at the most expensive private college campuses. There are many questions that you and your family must answer: Are you eligible for financial aid? What kinds of merit aid are available? Are you or your family willing to consider loans to help pay for college? Are you willing to set aside the time to search and apply for scholarships? For more information please visit with your guidance counselor and consult the *Paying for College* section of this website.

## **Getting in: How easy or difficult will it be to be admitted?**

For most Florida public universities the application process is usually fairly straight-forward, including filling out an application, sending test scores and transcripts. Most do not require letters of recommendation. Some colleges have guaranteed admission for certain combinations of grades and test scores.

Many public and private 4-year universities have become very competitive and the sheer number of students applying means that each student needs to invest more time and energy into their application to help the admission committee have a fuller picture of the student's academics, activities, passions, goals, and interest in the campus.

To determine how competitive the admissions process will be, you will need to look at the grade point averages and SAT/ACT scores, as well as the percentage of students admitted. One particularly useful site is [CollegeNavigator](#).

## **What are Colleges looking for as they select students?**

On a general basis, colleges admit students who care about academics, will succeed in their degree programs, and go on to become responsible and contributing citizens. They also desire students who will be able to handle the sudden independence that college requires. They are not just looking for good grades, they also look for maturity, the ability to make good decisions, and students who will invest in the overall life of the campus.

## **How will they find out if YOU will be this kind of student on their campus?**

They will make the best decision they can based on the information you provide them in your application. When colleges receive your application they are trying to get an overall picture of who you are. Your academic transcript is the most important part of your application, so it is critical that you maintain a strong course load based on your interests, and always put forth your best effort in all of your classes.

You will be taking SAT and ACT tests and ordering the scores to be sent from those testing organizations directly to the colleges to which you are applying. Some colleges may admit you just based on your grade point average and SAT or ACT scores alone. Some colleges will

want more information about what you do. In addition to the general questions on the application itself, they may want to see a description of your interests and activities on a resume. They may also want to know what teachers/counselors write about you in letters of recommendation, and what you say about yourself in your application essay.

If you are applying to a special program, you may be admitted based on your athletic ability, your performance audition, or your art portfolio (under *Special Circumstances* tab).

Requirements for admission will vary with each college and program. Admissions officers will ask for some or all of this information, so it is important to know the exact requirements of each. College websites will list these requirements on their Admissions page.

### **Resources to help with research about colleges**

- All colleges and universities have websites with information on course offerings, professor credentials and achievements, research grants and programs.
- There are many useful websites for looking up summary information on colleges, including College Board, other site and various college search sites.
- Virtual Tours on each campus website and sites designed to offer these tours.
- Your College Resource Room and bookstores have many college guides available. Each guide has a different perspective.
- College Fairs occur in the fall and spring in Sarasota and Tampa. Students can meet reps, ask questions, and fill out contact information.

### **The Final List: Variety and Number**

Compose a list of colleges that have as many of your priorities as possible from the questions you have answered about majors, cost, location, size, and features. You should include a variety of colleges in terms of how competitive they are to be accepted.

Final Note: Throughout the process of deciding where you want to apply to college, remember that your counselor and the resources of the College Resource Office are available to you. Share your questions and concerns with us as you discover more about yourself and are narrowing your choices for your post-high school destination!