Choosing a College or University

Choosing a college can seem overwhelming at first. After all, there are several hundred colleges around the country that could be excellent choices for you. Keep in mind that the “perfect” college is one that fits YOU and is right for YOU! It is generally not a good idea to attend a college just because all your friends are going there! The best college for you may not be what people vote as number one—you should know why you want to attend college and consider your goals, needs, interests and budget. It takes thought, effort and time to find options that will lead to a great fit for you.

Listed below are some questions to consider when choosing a college or university:

**Is the College Accredited?**
The college’s regional accreditation status is important because it recognizes that the college has met the guidelines for performance, integrity, and quality to merit the confidence of the educational community and the public. In general, most private and public universities have no problem in transferring credits from regionally accredited schools.

You should not assume a college is accredited! Look for the accreditation information in the college’s catalog or Web site or ask the Admissions Office of the college.

Here is a list of the six regional accrediting bodies that account for the vast majority of colleges and universities in the United States:

- Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges
- North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
- The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Besides institutional accreditation, some academic programs may be further accredited by having successfully met additional quality standards. For example, engineering programs are accredited by ABET, Inc.- Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, Inc.

**Is My Major Offered at the College?**
Not all majors are offered at every college or university. Large research universities generally offer the most majors. However, even within big universities, you might not be able to study what you are interested in. For example, let’s assume that you are interested in a Nutrition major at College X. However, after doing some research, you realize that your major is only offered at the graduate level (Master’s and PhD degrees) and not at the undergraduate degree (Bachelor’s). So what should you do? Find another college that offers your major at the undergraduate level! Always refer to the college’s website for a list of majors or academic programs.
Can I Afford to Go to College?

Do I Want to Attend a Public or Private College?

Since public colleges receive a significant amount of funding from taxes, tuition is generally lower than that of private colleges. If you are applying to an out-of-state public college, keep in mind that higher tuition is usually charged for out-of-state residents until you have established residency in that state. Always check with your college regarding the residency requirements since they may vary from state to state.

Private colleges, on the other hand, are not publicly funded, so tuition and fees are generally higher than for public colleges. Some private colleges are religiously affiliated and therefore, may receive funding from their religious denomination. Financial aid and scholarships are often awarded to a large number of students at private colleges. Be sure to check with your college regarding financial aid and scholarships and apply for aid early!

Do not automatically rule out a college due to the high cost of tuition. Most colleges offer financial aid and scholarships that could make a big difference in affordability. It is important that you meet the deadlines for applying for financial aid. Most colleges have early deadlines and are able to offer you a better package if you apply on time. Be sure to also inquire if a department at your transfer college offers recruitment scholarships such as Athletics, Business School, etc.

There are also a number of advantages in attending a private college. In general, the class size is smaller. Classes are usually taught by the professors and not by teaching assistants.

Are “Specialized” Colleges an Option?

If you are very sure of your major, you may wish to apply to colleges that offer focused programs. Some examples of colleges that offer programs in specific areas of study include Cornish College of the Arts and the Art Institute of Seattle. These colleges offer you the opportunity to become completely immersed in your major. It also gives you plenty of opportunity to interact with peers with the same interests. However, keep in mind that if you are still exploring a major or would like a liberal arts foundation, you should apply to a more comprehensive type institution.

Do I Want to Attend a Historically Ethnic Institution?

Is attending a college where the majority of students share your ethnic background important to you? If so, you might wish to check out historically black colleges, tribal colleges and other institutions that, traditionally, have a higher proportion of students of a specific ethnic student population. Many students who attend these institutions might also find that they are able to benefit from mentoring opportunities provided by the college’s faculty and staff.

What are the Requirements for Admission?

How competitive is the college/program? If you are planning to apply to a highly competitive college or program, keep in mind that there are usually more applicants than spaces available for new students. Find out how you can be competitive: Do you need to improve your grade point average? If you are applying to a health care major, do you need volunteer experience? What about letters or recommendation or a personal statement?

Should I Be Concerned About College Rankings?

Some students like to use college rankings to assess the best schools to apply to. If you do this, keep in mind that the criteria used to rank colleges and programs may be different from your own. Many national rankings use factors such as endowments, national reputation and alumni giving to support their assessment. Use college rankings carefully and be sure to consider your own goals and criteria in selecting the best school for you to attend.

Here’s a site to check out college rankings: www.usnews.com
What is the Size of the College?
Colleges can be small, medium, large or extra large size in population! Colleges can be as small as having several hundred students to over 40,000. On large campuses, it is not uncommon to sit in an auditorium alongside several hundred students for survey courses such as an Introduction to Psychology class.
Tip: Find out if you are able to visit a classroom during your campus visit. Find out what the faculty-student ratio is.

Where is the College Located?
If you enjoy the excitement of city life, consider attending a college in an urban area. If your idea of fun is enjoying the peace and quiet, then consider attending college in a smaller town. If you prefer sunshine, you might want to head to states such as Arizona or California. On the other hand, if you enjoy the snow and cold, you might consider applying to a college in Colorado or Illinois.

What is My Preference for Housing?
Do you prefer living in the residence halls? Or would you like to live off-campus in an apartment? If you live off-campus, be sure to find out how long it will take for you to get on campus since you do not want to miss class! Are you planning to join a fraternity or sorority? Find out the housing costs for on-campus living versus living off-campus. Be sure to apply for housing by the deadline, if any.

How do I Feel about Religious Affiliation?
How comfortable are you in attending a religious based school? How will the college’s code of conduct and philosophy impact you? Many religious based schools offer an excellent educational experience and are welcoming of students from all religious backgrounds. Be sure to visit the campus and ask questions!

Does the College Offer Any Internship Opportunities?
Find out if you would be able to participate in an internship before you graduate. You will obtain valuable experience to include on your resume!

What Extracurricular Activities Are Offered at the College?
If you enjoy playing sports, find out what sports are offered. There are also numerous clubs and organizations offered on most campuses—from the Accounting Club to the Zoology Club, including many social, political and ethnic clubs and organizations. You should be able to view the list on your college’s website.
Some Final Advice & Resources:

- Visit the campus.
  It might be a bit more challenging if the college is located out-of-state. By visiting the campus, you will have a clearer perspective on whether you might wish to apply to that college. To schedule a campus tour, contact the Admissions Office of the college or university. Many colleges offer campus tours on a regular basis. Many also offer “virtual” tours on their websites. However, keep in mind that the internet will not be able to give you the same “feel” as an actual campus tour.

  When you arrange for a campus visit, ask to see if you can do the following:
  - Meet with a few students so you can find out more about their experiences at the college.
  - Attend a class so you can see how classes are taught. This will also give you a chance to observe the professor’s interaction with the students.
  - Hang out at high-traffic areas of the campus (for example, the Student Union Building) so you can get a feel for the college environment. The Student Union or Cafeteria will be a good place for you to mingle with students who can give you a frank assessment of their experiences.

- For help with your transfer planning, be sure to check out Highline’s Transfer website at http://transfercenter.highline.edu. The website will also list when college representatives are on our campus to meet with students.

- Visit Highline’s Transfer Center, Building 6, 1st floor, and browse our library that is stocked with materials related to scholarships, colleges and majors. Feel free to use our computers to search for colleges and universities.

- Attend the transfer fairs at Highline College each quarter and speak with the admissions representatives who are there to give you advice about transferring to their school.

- Refer to your transfer college’s website to find out when they host open houses or information sessions. This is a great way to learn more about the campus.

- If you are interested in attending an out-of-state college, you may be eligible for reduced tuition through the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) program. Check out the WUE Web site: http://wue.wiche.edu/

- **Always have a back-up plan!**
  It is a good idea to not put all your “eggs in one basket” so be sure to apply to several colleges. Do not be afraid to apply to competitive schools, especially if you have an excellent academic portfolio.

Highline College  
Transfer Center  
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