



GUIDE TO SELECTIVE COLLEGES

THE COLLEGE SEARCH: FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

As you're getting to know schools, you'll want to explore how each one fits your educational and personal goals. Here are a few questions we think are important to consider as you begin your college search. Use them to build your own list of the most important things you're looking for in a college.

Size & Location: How many undergraduates study at this school? Are undergraduate and graduate students in class together? Is the setting urban, suburban, or rural? Close to a big city?

Type of School: Public university or private school? Major research university? Religiously affiliated? Liberal arts college?

Academic Programs: Does this school offer a major that I'm interested in? Do I apply directly into a major, program, college, or school? How much flexibility will I have to explore and change majors?

Faculty: What percent of classes are taught by professors vs. teaching assistants? Are professors available outside of class? What is the student-to-faculty ratio?

Class Sizes & Formats: What is the average class size? Are most classes conducted in a lecture format? Seminar format?

Research: What opportunities are there to participate in research? How many students conduct research? Do professors work with undergraduate students? How does the school help students find research opportunities?

Student Life: Can I continue to be active in extracurriculars that I enjoyed in high school? What kinds of clubs are available? Are they open to all students? What traditions and activities are most important to the student body?

Housing & Dining: How are the dining halls? Is housing guaranteed for four years? Are students required to live in residence halls? What types of living arrangements are available in the dorms?

Athletics: What is the athletic culture like? How are the athletic facilities? What levels of involvement are available?

Arts, Music, & Drama: What extracurricular opportunities are available in the arts? What facilities are available? Will there be opportunities to perform or showcase my work?

Career Advising: How does this school prepare me to achieve my professional goals? Does the school have an internship program? Do employers recruit on campus?

Other Notes:

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

WAYS TO APPLY

Regular Decision: the standard application process for most schools. This is a non-binding process, and you may apply to as many schools as you wish. Applications are usually due around January 1st, decisions are released on pre-determined dates (often in March), and you decide where you are attending by May 1st. Be sure to double-check the deadline for each school to which you are applying.

Early Action: an early application process that allows you to apply to multiple schools. If you are admitted, you are not required to attend.

Early Action Single Choice: an early application process where you may only apply early to one school. If you are admitted, you are not required to attend.

Early Decision: a binding, early application plan. You may only apply to one school Early Decision, because if you are admitted, you must attend.

Rolling Admission: an application process where you receive your admissions decision based on when your application is submitted.

HOLISTIC REVIEW

Holistic Review: the process selective colleges use to evaluate applications. This means a school will review all parts of your application together in order to get a sense of your fit with that institution, and there are no cutoffs or pre-screening for things like GPA or test scores.

TYPICAL APPLICATION COMPONENTS

Consortium Application: an application platform, like the Common or Coalition Application, that allows you to submit your basic information once, then send it to multiple colleges and universities.

Application Supplement: questions specific to each school tied to a consortium application. Many colleges require a school-specific supplement to the consortium application with multiple questions or essays specific to the institution.

Standardized Testing: most schools will require the ACT or SAT. Some will also require or allow you to submit AP/IB testing, SAT Subject Tests, or an English proficiency test.

High School Transcript: a record of your academic history in high school. Colleges will consider your grades, courses taken, and the overall rigor of your curriculum.

Extracurricular Activities: a list of everything you do outside the classroom, including your role and the total amount of time spent. This could include a club, hobby, family responsibility, or part-time job.

Letters of Recommendation: letters that describe your classroom presence and personality. Usually, two are required from academic teachers.

Essays: your opportunity to share your personality. Be thoughtful about your topic choice (is this something you want the college to know about?) and always proofread!

Supplemental Materials: may include interviews, portfolios, or audition videos.

FUNDING YOUR EDUCATION

Many selective schools are private, meaning they are supported by tuition; these schools can have a higher price tag, yet they often offer more financial aid. Public colleges are meant to benefit their state, so they offer different tuition for in-state and out-of-state residents.

Schools that are "need-blind" will make admissions decisions independent of your finances, while schools that are "need-aware" or "need-sensitive" will take them into account.

TYPES OF FINANCIAL AID

Need-Based Financial Aid: awarded by taking into account your family's need for financial support. In other words, your eligibility for aid is based on your family's financial situation.

Need-based aid is awarded in a variety of forms, including:

- **Grants:** awarded by the U.S. government or a college to be used towards your tuition and fees. Grants do not need to be repaid.
- **Loans:** issued by the government, a private financial institution, or a college to be used towards your tuition and fees. Loans must be repaid; however, student loans have low interest rates and deferred payments that don't begin until after graduation.
- **Work-Study:** a program run through the U.S. government in which students work in paid campus jobs and use their income to pay for a portion of their college expenses and/or tuition.
- **Merit-Based Financial Aid:** a type of aid awarded to students for things like a high GPA, high test scores, athletic ability, leadership, research experience, or other accomplishments without taking into account their need for financial support. This type of aid does not need to be repaid.

APPLYING FOR FINANCIAL AID

If you are applying for financial aid, colleges will request a variety of documents in order to understand your family's unique financial circumstances. They will use these documents to determine your family's Expected Family Contribution, or EFC, which is the amount your family is expected to pay towards your education. Your family's EFC should be similar for every school.

Commonly requested forms include:

The FAFSA: the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, an important part of any financial aid application. This is offered for free by the U.S. Department of Education and can be filled out online at fafsa.ed.gov.

College-Specific Forms or the CSS Profile: forms that are often available online and seek to provide colleges with a more complete view of your family circumstances than can be obtained from the FAFSA alone. Each college will have different requirements, so be sure to check the policies at each of the schools to which you are applying.