

Tips for Finding Your College Match

Characteristics You Should Consider

How can you find colleges that match your needs? First, identify your priorities. Next, carefully research the characteristics of a range of schools. Finally, match the two. Here are some characteristics you should consider.

- **Size of Student Body**

Size will affect many of your opportunities and experiences, including:

- range of academic majors offered
- extracurricular possibilities
- amount of personal attention you'll receive
- number of books in the library

When considering size, be very sure to look beyond the raw number of students attending. For example, perhaps you're considering a small department within a large school. Investigate not just the number of faculty, but also how accessible faculty members are to students.

- **Location**

Do you want to visit home frequently, or do you see this as a time to experience a new part of the country? Perhaps you like an urban environment with access to museums, ethnic food, or major league ball games. Or maybe you hope for easy access to the outdoors or the serenity of a small town.

- **Academic Programs**

If you know what you want to study, research reputations of academic departments by talking to people in the fields that interest you. If you're undecided, relax and pick an academically balanced institution that offers a range of majors and programs. Most colleges offer counseling to help you find a focus.

In considering academic programs, look for special opportunities and pick a school that offers many possibilities.

- **Campus Life**

Consider what your college life will be like beyond the classroom. Aim for a balance between academics, activities, and social life. Before choosing a college, learn the answers to these questions:

- What extracurricular activities, athletics, and special interest groups are available?
- Does the community around the college offer interesting outlets for students?
- Are students welcomed by the community?
- How do fraternities and sororities influence the campus life?
- Is housing guaranteed?
- How are dorms assigned?

- **Cost**

Today's college price tag makes cost an important consideration for most students. At the same time, virtually all colleges work to ensure that academically qualified students from every economic circumstance can find financial aid that allows them to attend. When considering cost, look beyond the price tag.

- **Diversity**

Explore what you might gain from a diverse student body. Think about the geographic, ethnic, racial and religious diversity of the students as a means of learning more about the world. Investigate what kinds of student organizations or other groups with ethnic or religious foundations are active and visible on campus.

- **Retention and Graduation Rates**

One of the best ways to measure a school's quality and the satisfaction of its students is to learn the percent of students who return after the first year and the percent of entering students who remain to graduate. Comparatively good retention and graduation are indicators that responsible academic, social, and financial support systems exist for most students.