



Tips for Involved Parents and Students

Before you jump into looking at colleges, you must first begin by thinking about yourself and what you want from your college experience. Here are some questions to ask as you develop a college profile for your search:

Take a look at yourself (and be honest).

- What are your **personal strengths and qualities of character**? Are you independent, resourceful, creative, motivated, etc.?
- What kind of **academic record** do you have?
- What are your **work habits**? Do you work to your potential or work to get by?
- Based on your answers, what **level of challenge** is realistic for you?
- Do you have any **particular careers** in mind?

Take a look at your finances.

- Do **financial limitations** affect your choice of college? Keep in mind that scholarships and financial aid may be available. Based on information that you provide about your family's finances, the college will decide if you qualify for financial assistance.
- If you qualify for financial aid, **how much debt** can you reasonably handle after graduation based on your intended career plans?
- Will **your family be able to help financially**? Have a serious discussion with your family about finances and everyone's expectations.
- Will you need to **work to pay for college**? If so, what options will you have and what kind of class load will you be able to handle? If you can only take a part-time load (fewer than 12 hours), be aware that you may not be eligible for some financial aid and scholarships and it will take longer to complete your degree.

Questions to ask during the college search

Take a look at your preferences.

- What about **housing**? Do you want to commute from home, live on campus, or live on your own near campus?
- Do you want to attend college in a **city or a small town**?
- In what **region** of the country would you like to attend college?
- Is it important to you to be **close to home** or will you be coming home just for holidays and breaks?
- What **size** college appeals to you? How big is too big? How small is too small?
- Would you prefer a **single-gender or co-ed** college?
- Do schools you're looking at have any **rules or regulations** of which you need to be aware? Can you handle them for four years?
- Do you want to participate in **extracurricular activities**? What activities are must-haves?
- Do you want an **athletic program**? Will it not feel like college to you if the school doesn't have a winning football or basketball program?
- Do you need **recreational amenities**? How important is a good gym? Swimming pool? Intramurals?
- Do you want a strong **creative arts** program?
- Are you looking for an **academically challenging** program?
- Does the college offer your **desired major**?
- Do **special programs**, internships, work programs, or study abroad options interest you?
- What about **social life**? Do you want a campus that's highly social, one that's pretty focused on academics, or something in between? Do you want to join a sorority or fraternity? If not, does Greek life dominate the social scene?

TIPS: Questions to ask during the college search *(Continued)*



Take a look at factors for each college.

- What will it **cost**?
- Where is it **located**?
- What **scores, GPA**, etc., are required for admissions?
- What **percentage of applicants are admitted**?
- What percentage of **freshmen receive financial aid**?
- What is the school's **reputation for academics**?
- What are the **strongest programs or departments**?
- Does the school have your likely **major**? Is the program well regarded?
- Will the school accept your **AP/IB classes for credit**?
- What is the **average class size** for underclassmen? For upperclassmen?
- Does the school offer **additional programs** (study abroad, internships, etc.) that are important to you?
- What percentage of graduates are in **graduate school or have a job** within six months of graduation?
- What is **campus life** like?
- Is it a **commuter school** where most students live at home or live nearby and go home on weekends?
- What are options for **housing**? (on-campus: single-gender dorms, co-ed dorms, apartment-style dorms; off-campus: apartment, condo, house, co-op)

Finalize your college search and selection

After considering these questions and developing a profile of what's important to you in a college, start assembling a list of colleges to consider. Talk to your counselor, your advisor, and your family to decide which colleges offer you a good shot at admissions, are a good fit academically, and are possible with your family finances/financial aid options. Narrow your list to a handful of colleges you could definitely get into (safety schools), colleges that you'd probably get into (reach schools), and colleges you would like to get into (dream schools). Decide how many colleges from each category you'll apply to and develop a plan, noting deadlines, required materials, and application costs. Budget how much you can afford for application fees. If the cost of applying to 12 or more colleges is too high, apply to a couple of safety schools, a few reach schools and one or two dream schools.

Colleges/universities where you feel you could definitely get in (Safety Schools). *I'm at the high end academically for admitted students at...* _____

Colleges/universities where you probably would be admitted (Reach Schools). *I'm in the middle academically so I feel pretty good about my chances at...* _____

Colleges/universities where you would like to be admitted (Dream Schools). *These schools would be an academic stretch for me, but I'd like to try to go to...* _____

Take a final look at your colleges to make sure they meet your career plans. Make sure you meet the colleges' admissions requirements (GPA, exam scores, etc.). For colleges that make the cut, find an application online or contact the college to request an application. Be aware of deadlines, required fees, etc. Some colleges offer free or discounted fees if you complete your application online. (Students who qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch also may qualify for free or discounted application fees. Talk to your counselor.) Make sure your application is complete before the deadline, including the submission of letters of recommendation, transcripts, and other required materials.

Sources: Counselors Marcia Arnold of Mill Creek High and William Blair of Meadowcreek High

