

# Steps to Choosing the Right College

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One of the most stressful times in a teenager's life is deciding which college to choose. It is possibly the biggest decision they will be making thus far in their lives. Deciding which college to attend will have a very strong impact on their future, and choosing the wrong one will have an even bigger impact.

It is very important to think carefully about which colleges and universities to apply to. When beginning the application process, make sure to consider these things: Cost, location, campus life, academic programs, and athletics.

Think carefully about the financial cost of your school. Calculate what you, your parents, and your financial-aid package will contribute toward the total cost of your education. Don't forget to include fees, books, transportation costs, and spending money. Decide how much you would be willing to pay back in student loans after you have completed your degree. Also, go ahead and apply to that private school as well as some public institutions. Most private schools have larger financial aid packages to offer than public schools do. You may find the same overall tuition cost at a private school and end up with a smaller student-to-faculty ratio.

Many seniors with "senioritis" have the "I want to get out of this place" attitude and decide to apply to schools far away from home. Make sure that if you do choose a school far away that you feel it can be your home away from home. You'll be spending a lot of time there - make sure it suits you.

As far as campus life goes, remember that your college is a place where you should feel comfortable. This will be your home for the next four or more years. Your school should be a place where you belong; it will become a part of you and have a profound affect on the rest of your life. Make sure you feel secure about your decision, and most importantly, *visit the campus*, and try to spend a weekend there if you can.

Always look at the academic programs of the schools where you apply. Pay attention to special programs such as academic honor programs, a semester abroad, internships, and assistance for those with learning

disabilities. Choose a major that interests you and holds promise for employment in the future. Look at the college catalog and the courses you will be required to take within your major. It is a good idea to talk with faculty members in the area that interests you. This is a good way to get a glimpse into what your academic future will look like.

If you are a high school athlete planning to play at the college level, contact the coach of your sport. Set up a time to visit the campus to speak with the coach, meet some athletes, and learn about the practice and game schedules. This can be very demanding. It is important to know all the facts before you make a commitment to a team.

By following these guidelines, you are on your way to a successful, promising, and exciting college experience. Enjoy yourself and good luck in the future.