



FIGURING OUT WHAT YOU WANT IN A COLLEGE

by the student editors of ***CHOOSE THE RIGHT COLLEGE & GET ACCEPTED!***,
a Students Helping Students™ book

After you spend some time thinking about your own likes and dislikes, you'll want to consider what it is that you want your ideal college to have. You might have heard your counselors talk about an ideal college profile—think of it as your college shopping list. You probably won't be able to find a college that has everything you want and you'll have to make some compromises. But having your preferences laid out will help you focus and save time. As you begin to research and visit schools, you can consult your ideal college profile and see how the various schools measure up.

- **Know your academic requirements.** Based on your interests, what courses and majors do you want your college to have? If you love theater you'll definitely want to apply to colleges that offer a theater major and have a strong theater department. But remember that your interests might change and evolve, and your college needs to have enough majors and departments that interest you so that you can switch without having to transfer.

In addition to the types of courses you want to take, you should also consider how you want them to be taught. Think about how you learn best, how much individual attention and guidance you need, and how disciplined you are about studying. Some college classes are taught as lectures: They have a large number of students and the professor lectures while you listen and take notes. You're responsible for keeping up with the reading, and there is usually not a lot of interaction with the professor or with other students during class.

Another important academic aspect to consider is this intangible but ever-present thing called academic tone—how much of an emphasis is placed on academics, how challenging the course work is, and how much is expected of you as a student. If you're the type of person who loves talking about ideas, studying, reading tons of dense material, and learning new things all the time, then you'll probably feel right at home in a college with a strong academic bent. If you were to attend a college where you weren't sufficiently challenged, you might end up feeling bored or uninspired. However, if you're the type of person who is more interested in things outside of academics, say sports or other extracurriculars, you might feel out of place in an academically competitive atmosphere.

- **Consider admission difficulty.** There are a lot of people competing for admission at college and you want to apply where you have a chance of getting in. It's okay to have a couple of long shots, and later we'll talk about applying to a few "reach" schools, but they shouldn't all be. We also don't suggest that you apply only to schools that are super-easy for you to get into. You're going to spend a few years and a bunch of money on your education and you want a school that will stretch you and allow you to grow intellectually.
- **Think about special programs and offerings.** There may be special programs or offerings that you're looking for your school to have. Some of these may be necessities and others may be things that would be nice to have but you could live without. For example, if you have any disabilities, finding a college that can accommodate them is a big priority. If you anticipate needing tutoring with a particular subject, make sure that this is an option at the schools you're considering.
- **Don't forget extracurriculars.** Extracurricular activities can really enhance your college experience and they're a great way to meet people with similar interests. This won't be news to you if you've already sampled some in high school. Maybe you've been involved in the drama club, choir, or a particular sport. You may like it so much that you just can't imagine living without it in college. If that's the case, you may be tempted when you're looking at colleges to stick to what you know and love, but keep in mind that there will also be lots of new activities to try out. Look for what's important to you, but be ready to discover new interests.
- **Consider the cost.** Any time you go shopping, you need to know how much you have to spend. The same holds true when shopping for a college. Never ever rule out a school just because it's expensive—each year more than one billion dollars is given out in scholarships, and there are many types of financial aid for which you and your family can qualify. But if your resources are limited, as they are for most of us, you want to make sure to apply to some schools that are not as expensive, just in case.