

## Shopping Around for Colleges

Making a major purchase requires careful consideration, especially when what you buy will affect the rest of your life! In order to select the best school, college-bound students should put a fair amount of time and effort into their research. For families who have already been bombarded with college catalogs, the amount of information may seem overwhelming, but there are certain important factors to consider when choosing a college.

### **Size:**

Does the thought of sitting in a lecture hall with 300 other students, listening to a professor speak into a microphone seem intimidating to you? Or does it sound like an exciting opportunity to meet lots of new people? In addition to the student-teacher ratio, there are many other differences between large and small schools to consider when shopping around.

### **Location:**

Rural colleges offer a pastoral, picturesque campus, while urban schools boast “bright lights, big city!” Which do you prefer? Also consider the distance from your home - if you’re eight hours away at college, it’s hard to jump in the car and drive to visit when you’re feeling homesick.

### **Academics:**

The academic background of the faculty, the percentage of freshmen who remain to graduate, and how class placement and scheduling are handled are all important factors. When you decide on a major, find out as much as you can about the department, the faculty, and the courses offered. Your guidance counselor will be a great help in this area.

### **Social Life:**

You can learn the vital statistics in college brochures - average age of the student body, male-female ratio, percentage of students living on campus, variety of student activities and organizations, fraternities and sororities, and athletic programs. However, the best way to learn about a school’s social life is to visit and talk to the students. Current students who act as “campus reps” often conduct tours of the building and grounds and can answer questions about college life. Students can usually get a better feel for the college experience from someone their own age.

### **Cost and Financial Aid Available:**

Tuition, room and board, and other fees can add up to a hefty sum. Ask the financial aid office about the percentage of students who receive need-based financial aid, the percentage of students who receive scholarships based on academic ability, and typical financial aid packages awarded to freshmen. Also consider that state schools are much less expensive than private colleges and universities, especially for in-state students.

**Admissions Requirements:**

Many schools require a minimum G.P.A. or class rank, certain high-school courses, and SAT or ACT exam scores for admission. School counselors recommend that students take the SAT or ACT in the spring of their junior year. This allows time to retake the exams, if necessary, to try for a higher score. When narrowing down your college choices, consider the likelihood of acceptance and pick one or two “safe schools” where you feel confident of being accepted.

**Additional Services Available:**

These include tutoring, cooperative education and internship programs, career counseling, and job placement.

Use this shopping list to help you pick a school with the right mix of academics and social life for you!