FINDING THE BEST COLLEGE FIT FOR YOUR CHILD

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Goals

- Tips for selecting the “best fit” college/university
- General tips on getting into a college/university
Choosing a College: The High-Ability Student

• Because a high-achieving student is likely to have many talents and interests, selecting one college is a challenge.

• How can a high-achieving student select one college without feeling as though another possible location is left behind/ undiscovered?
Selecting a College

- Students should select a college or university setting based upon:
  - personal attributes
  - personal values
  - personal goals
  - personal needs
  - interests
How to Choose a College

Look for the best fit based on personal priorities:

- Location
- Campus life, housing, facilities
- Size
- Academic environment
- College expenses/financial aid
- Extracurricular activities/clubs
How *Not* to Choose a College

Choose a college based on:

- Prestige
- Reputation

...then try to fit in.
Getting to College

• There are approximately 4,100 colleges and universities in the United States.

• There are approximately 1,700 community colleges in the United States.

• There are approximately 3,600 vocational and technical colleges in the United States.

Sources:

http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0908742.html
http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=84
http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/cclo/ccfacts.html
There is no “magic” number about how many schools a student should apply to. How many applications completed, depends upon the student.

Selectivity should not be confused with quality.

Every school should be a real possibility.

“Best fit” should be top priority.
The List

• A college list should include schools that are:
  – A “reach” – where competition is fierce
  – A “challenge” – where a student’s credentials are similar to most other applicants
  – A “strong shot” – where a student’s credentials exceed or are stronger than most applicants
## The Reality of Selective Schools

**US News, 2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Acceptance Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harvard University (private)</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yale University (private)</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princeton University (private)</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The College of William and Mary (public)</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Virginia (public)</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## The Reality of Non-Selective Schools

*US News, 2013*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Acceptance Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Tech (public)</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Wisconsin–Madison (public)</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania State University– University Park (public)</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Maryland–College Park (public)</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Reality of Community Colleges

- Cost = approximately $3,000/year
- Prepare students for transfer to a 4-year college or university by:
  - completing basic subject requirements
  - allowing time to define your major
  - smaller class sizes
  - additional year of practical training/mentoring
  - programs in today’s top fields
  - flexible class schedules
How Colleges Choose a Freshman Class

- Students who are the best fit based on the goals of the institution for that year
- Students from particular areas (geographically)
- Students with particular interests, talents, or skills (academic or otherwise)
- Students whose applications excite a reader and show a connection to the college

Seth Allen, Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, Grinnell College
http://www.today.com/id/41622747/ns/today-parenting#.VL00yCinDKM
What are Colleges and Universities Looking For?

• Academic program— the coursework completed, rigor of the program, grades earned, and pattern of grades achieved

• Personal qualities and extra-curricular activities— as discussed in your application, recommendations, and possible interview

• Teacher reports/letters of recommendation

• School recommendation/profile

• Standardized test scores (SAT, ACT, Subject tests, AP/IB tests)
Steps for Choosing a College

• Determine interests and priorities
  – Courses in high school, summer activities, standardized test results
  – Career inventories – check high school guidance office
    – Virginia Education Wizard: https://www.vawizard.org/vccs/Main.action
    – MyRoad – free after completing the PSAT (CollegeBoard): https://myroad.collegeboard.com/myroad/navigator.jsp
    – Naviance/Family Connection – available at high schools: www.naviance.com
Checklist

- Complete all necessary high school coursework requirements (or exceed them)

- Know what courses are required for collegiate-level work (prerequisites, basic level courses, etc.)

- Create a resume of activities, interests, clubs, awards, presentations, etc.

- Keep to a calendar

- Set some goals

- Talk to people (teachers, guidance counselors, peers, college students, mentors, trusted adults, etc.)

- Visit campuses

- Stay organized

- Stay balanced

- Be flexible

- Plan smart
What’s Important to You?

• **Location**
  – Urban, suburban, rural
  – Distance from home
  – US region/state/international location

• **Campus life**
  – Housing
  – Facilities – dining, classrooms, technology, etc.
  – Greek life
  – Co-ed/single sex
  – Religious services
  – Services for students with disabilities
What’s Important to You?

• **Size/setting**
  – Large university
  – Medium size university/college
  – Small college
  – Private
  – Public

• **Academic environment**
  – Class size
  – Honors program
  – Research opportunities
  – Access to professors
  – Professors who teach classes/teaching assistants
Tips for Students

- Know that you are in the driver’s seat.
- Keep an open mind and be an informed consumer.
- Do your research.
- Don’t let the college process affect your self-esteem.
- Focus on your needs— not the needs of others.
- Visit college campuses and pay attention to your “gut feeling.”
- Initiate conversations about the process with your parents/guardians.
- Avoid the rumors!
- When in doubt, ask!
Tips for Parents/Guardians

• Be realistic about your child’s college process.

• Look for the “right/best fit.” Schools have changed since you were in college!

• Listen to what your child is/is not saying.

• Let your child take ownership of the process.

• Check many different sources for information.

• Set limits that are important to you (cost, location, etc.).

• Seek answers from admission and financial aid officers—avoid surprises!

• Help your child think about who he/she is.

• Communicate.

• Be honest with your child about your aims and aspirations.

• Avoid rumors!
## Paying for College

Financial need = (What it costs to attend) – (What your family can pay)
Aid is based on two factors: need and no-need.

Plan ahead for the financial aid process.

Everyone should complete the FAFSA every year.

No one should ever pay to acquire financial aid.
What the Research Says

- University undergraduate honors programs provide gifted students an intellectual and social network, intellectual stimulation, and facilitate mentor relationships (Hébert & McBee, 2007; Gully, 2009)

- Gifted students in an undergraduate honors program have higher academic achievement and higher academic self-concepts (Rinn, 2007)
Resources

- MyRoad by CollegeBoard
  https://myroad.collegeboard.com/myroad/navigator.jsp
- Naviance http://www.naviance.com/
- CollegeBoard (SAT) http://collegeboard.org
- American College Testing (ACT) http://www.actstudent.org/
- Virginia Education Wizard https://www.vawizard.org/vccs/Main.action
- CollegeView http://www.collegeview.com/collegesearch/index.jsp
- CollegeData
  http://www.collegedata.com/cs/main/main_choose_tmpl.jhtml
- US News and World Report– Best Colleges
  http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges
- Seth Allen, Grinnell College video from WSJ On Campus at
  http://www.today.com/id/41622747/ns/today-parenting#.VL00yCinDKM
Books
- The Fiske Guide to College
- The Insider’s Guide to Colleges
- College Planning for Gifted Students– Sandra L. Berger

Websites
- Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) [https://fafsa.ed.gov/](https://fafsa.ed.gov/)
- The Common Application [https://www.commonapp.org/Login](https://www.commonapp.org/Login)
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