

## Choosing a College

### Things to Consider

- Think about who you are and what your interests are. You do not have to go for heavy-duty analysis, but be honest with yourself. Choose a college that caters to your needs.
- Do your homework. Do not base a decision on any ONE source; especially, the materials from a college. Schools spend as much as half a millions dollars to produce slick brochures and videos to entice you.
- Consider geography and size. Location is something students often forget to think about. A rural setting is different from an urban one, just as a large college has a different feel from a small one. Have you included the cost of a car or plane trips home in your budget?
- Visit the campus. Talk to students. Learn about academic programs. Make sure the college offers courses in the area you want to pursue.

### Make College Visits Count

- Dress neatly. To really get a feel for the school, you need to walk around the quad, sit in on a class, and visit the dorms. Call ahead and make arrangements with the campus visit coordinator. Avoid campus visits during holidays or breaks and finals weeks; visit when classes are in session.
- Have someone at the college provide you documentation of your visit on college letterhead.
- Visit general education type classes while on campus. Most colleges will be happy to arrange the visit in advance. If they offer the very large lecture classes, ask to sit in one to see how you feel about being one of 300 in a classroom.
- If you have a particular interest in which you want to pursue your degree, ask to meet with a professor in your field of interest. This gives you a chance to evaluate the quality of education you will be receiving. Don't just walk in cold; ask your admissions representative to set this up in advance of your visit. Have questions written out; be prepared to discuss the curriculum and your possible course options.
- Meet the financial aid counselor. Be sure to get his or her name and send a thank you note.

## **Goals and Activities for a College Campus Visit**

- Meet with an admission officer.
- Verify admission requirements.
- Determine your chances for success.
- Find out how to apply.
- Obtain a school calendar and catalog, if you don't already have them.
- Determine college costs.
- Ask about financial aid opportunities, as well as deadlines, forms required, etc.
- Meet with faculty in the department of your intended major.
- Attend a class to get an idea of typical size, teaching style, academic atmosphere.
- Ask about the placement record for graduates in the field you might study.
- Identify career planning services for undergraduates.
- Tour the campus (Be sure to check out the dorms, dining hall, and computer services, and library)
- Talk to students about the general academic environment and amount and kind of study necessary for success.
- Find out what student activities (clubs, organizations, intramural, etc.) are available and about campus life in terms of dating and social activities.
- Investigate transportation options.

## Applying to College

1. Visit Colleges, finalize SAT/ACT Testing
2. Prepare a resume
3. NCAA (for athletes)
4. Request recommendation letters, transcripts, reports (2 weeks ahead of time)
5. Obtain and complete college applications
6. Write an essay when required
7. Mail applications
8. Follow up with Registrar and Counselor
9. Check with college to confirm receipt of online document
10. FAFSA (financial aid) in January
11. Pursuit of scholarships

### Applying Online

#### Texas Common Application

<http://www.applytexas.org>

(also available in the counseling office)

#### Common Application

<http://www.commonapp.org>

(for specific schools outside of Texas)

### Important Tips

- Neatness definitely counts.
- Print out copy of your application BEFORE you send it.
- Have several people proofread your application before you send it.
- Make sure you include as much information as you can. Details count. For example, if you are in Eagle Scout, don't just list Eagle Scout. Also list all of the community service and leadership activities associated with being an Eagle Scout.

### Resume Tips

- Make it easy to read.
- Always begin with your personal information.
- Use a chronological format beginning with the recent year.
- List school and related activities and leadership positions.

### Checklist for Essays

- Be concise = 500 words or less
- Be honest = no gimmicks
- Be an individual = set yourself apart from peers
- Be coherent = make sense and address the topic
- Be accurate = error free writing

### **Early Decision vs. Early Action**

Early decision is binding, which means you must attend that college or university if it accepts you and gives you a reasonable financial package. It is not a good idea to apply if you're worried about financial aid or if you're curious about other schools.

Early action has no real disadvantages. Admitted students have no obligation and may still apply to other schools. A decision to accept admittance does not have to be made until May 1.

### **Recommendation Letters**

- Give teachers and your counselor at least 2 to 3 weeks to write a recommendation letter and complete their portions of an application.
- Provide complete information including your full legal name and social security number.
- Make sure your part of the application is complete---signatures, etc.
- Request official transcripts if needed with letters.
- Give teachers a stamped, self-addressed envelope.
- Check frequently to make sure the recommendation writer has all the needed info.

### **Application Process...Final Thoughts**

- Apply early-many colleges want applications before Thanksgiving.
- Create a file for each college you apply to. Make copies of everything you send to each college and keep these in your files along with any information they send you.
- Make several contacts with the school of your choice. The more you email admissions, advisors, and student affairs, the more interest you show.
- Visiting the school of your choice can also show interest. Dress to impress and have questions ready. Visit more than once if possible.
- Proofread everything you send to colleges. Paperwork is all the admissions office knows you by at this point.
- If essays or extra opportunities are offered through the application as optional, do them.

### **Military Academies**

If you are considering a service academy or military college, start planning early. Speak to recruiter, your guidance counselor and students at the school. Research the physical, academic, and post-graduate commitments expected of you.

Military Schools combine top-notch education with the opportunity to develop valuable leadership skills. Students who choose to attend a military institution become part of a tradition of national service and principle.

By attending a service academy, you have also committed to fulfilling a service requirement in that branch of the military. Your service time begins after graduation and varies among the armed forces branches.

### **Reserve Officer Training Corps**

ROTC scholarships can be a great way to pay for college. ROTC programs are available at over 1,000 colleges and universities. A service commitment is required upon graduation.

ROTC can offer tuition and fees, monthly stipends, leadership skills, real-world training, and a job after college graduation.

## **Useful Information for After-High School Plans**

The following can be located at a library or book store:

The MacMillan Guide to Correspondence Study  
The “B” or Lower Student’s Complete Scholarship Book  
The Women and Minorities Handbook  
Peterson’s Sports Scholarships and College Athletic Programs  
National Guide to Funding in Higher Education  
Peterson’s College Money Handbook  
Peterson’s Scholarships, Grants & Prizes  
The Scholarship Handbook  
Blum – Free Money for College  
Burgess – The Oryx Guide to Distance Learning  
Fiske & Hammond – Fiske Guide to Getting into the Right College  
Hammond – Discounts and Deals at the Nations 360 Best Colleges  
Hartman – Internet Guide for College-Bound Students  
Jaszczak – Scholarships, Fellowships and Loans  
Kaplan – How to Go to College for Almost Free  
Krefetz – The Parents Guide to Paying for College  
Lesko – Free College and Training for Women  
McKee & McKee, Jr. – Cash for College: The Ultimate Guide to College Scholarships.  
Olson – Dollars for College Disabled  
Schlacter & Weber – How to Find Out About Financial Aid and Funding  
Schlacter – Financial Aid for the Disabled and Their Families  
Thorson – Campus-Free College Degrees

# **Sources of Financial Aid**

Financial aid comes from four major sources:

1. Institutional
2. State
3. Federal
4. Private

## **Types of Aid**

Free Money:

- Grants based on need
- Scholarships based on merit/talent

Loans:

- Subsidized loans (the government pays the interest while the student is in school.)
- Unsubsidized loans (the student pays the interest).

College Work Study:

- Part-time jobs (jobs are provided by college)