

Selecting a College - Finding the Right Fit

There are nearly 4,000 colleges and universities in this country, with a wide variety of features to serve diverse student interests. With so many choices you may wonder how to find a college that is a “good fit” for you. Although there is no right or wrong way to research colleges, many students find it helpful to visit a few schools that differ in size, location, academic programs, or selectivity so see which characteristics are important to them. Listed below are a number of criteria to consider in selecting a college.



The Four Ps: PROGRAM, PEOPLE, PLACE, PRICE

PROGRAM	PEOPLE
<p><u>Admissions</u>: How selective is the school? Does your coursework match the school's requirements for admission? Is your GPA and ACT score typical of accepted students?</p> <p><u>Curriculum</u>: Does the college offer the major that interests you? Is there a core curriculum required and what does it look like? What research or internship opportunities are available to you in your field of interest?</p>	<p><u>Student body</u>: Do your personality and values mesh well with the other students?</p> <p><u>Fraternities and sororities</u>: Is there a Greek system on campus? Is a high percentage of students in fraternities or sororities?</p> <p><u>Religious orientation</u>: Is the institution affiliated with an organized religion? Does the academic and social life reflect this?</p> <p><u>Sports/Activities</u>: Does the school have the sports or extra-curricular programs you are interested in? How easy is it to join?</p>
PLACE	PRICE
<p><u>Size of the school</u>: Would you like to attend a large, medium, or small school? Visit each type before narrowing your choice.</p> <p><u>Geographical location</u>: Do you want to attend college in the Chicago area, in Illinois, or out of state? What transportation is available?</p> <p><u>Size of the community</u>: Is the campus setting urban, suburban or rural? What are the advantages/disadvantages for you?</p>	<p><u>Cost</u>: What is the total cost of attendance for one year (tuition, room, board, books, travel, etc.)? Can you afford this school?</p> <p>Remember, do <u>not</u> rule out a school based on the listed price. What is important is the cost AFTER scholarships and financial aid that may be available. Families can estimate the true cost of a college by using the net price calculator on the school's website.</p>

College Admissions Selectivity

Many colleges are now using a holistic approach to admissions, looking at factors such as extracurricular activities, letters of recommendation, interviews and essays. At other schools, your grade point average (GPA) and standardized test scores are the primary determinant of admission. As an applicant, these factors can help you see whether the school is a “good fit” academically. You want a school where you are challenged, not overwhelmed.

For many years the standard for measuring college selectivity was the use of the “mid 50%” statistic. This statistic reports the range of GPA and test scores (ACT or SAT) for the middle 50% of incoming freshmen. You should compare your credentials to the “mid 50%” averages for schools on your list. If you have not taken an ACT or SAT yet, it is possible to estimate an anticipated score based on the results of your PLAN, IACT or PSAT test scores. Depending on whether your GPA and scores are above, within or below the mid 50% range determines whether the school is a **safety**, **target**, or **reach** school. You should be sure to include safety schools that you want to attend on your college list.

You can also use Naviance **Scattergrams** (below) to determine how selective a college is. These scattergrams analyze application data from PHS student applications over the past 5 years. This allows you to compare your grades and test scores to past PHS students who applied to a school. You can then assess whether a school is a safety school, a good fit, or a reach school.

