

17 Things to Consider When Choosing a College

Adapted from CollegeQuest.com

1. Accreditation

Accredited universities have been recognized by official local, state, and national agencies as providing a high-quality education ([US Department of Education](#)). Accreditation is important to applicants who intend to attend graduate school, especially those who will need to obtain advanced degrees in medicine, law, and education, as well as applicants whose financial aid requires that they attend an accredited school. If you intend to transfer credits from one university to another, accreditation can also be a factor. Your new school will only accept your previous coursework if it recognizes your old school's accreditation.

2. Types of Majors and Degrees Available

No matter how good the school, it will not be the right one for you if it does not offer your preferred area of study or desired degree level. A school's admissions office would be able to answer any questions you may have concerning the availability of the type of degree you would like to pursue. Their website or brochure will also have a wealth of information. Be sure to read about the available programs and take note of the curriculum, credit requirements, and typical rate of completion.

3. Types of Extra-Curricular Opportunities and Clubs

If you play the valve trombone and want to jam in a jazz ensemble, then make sure you are looking for schools that have a robust music culture. If you're looking to play sports in college, then reach out to coaches at the schools to see if you'd have a spot on the team for you. These activities help enhance your college experience.

4. Location

A college's location can really matter. If you intend to live at home and commute to college, you will want to attend a campus that is located nearby. For those who would like to go away to college, you must get a feel for the college and

surrounding area. Are you a city dweller or more relaxed in the country? Try to visit the college in order to see what the area has to offer, both on and off-campus. Also, when choosing a campus, consider companies based nearby, as they may be a valuable source of summer internships and future job offers.

5. Cost

Cost is one of the most important things to consider when choosing a college, and you will need to determine how much tuition you can afford to pay prior to selecting a school. The cost between public and private universities has risen considerably in recent years. According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), for the 2011-2012 school year, undergraduate tuition, room, and board cost an estimated \$14,300 at public institutions, \$23,300 at private for-profit institutions, and \$37,800 at private non-profit institutions. Total costs will also vary by the length of program you choose.

6. Financial Aid Opportunities

Although the cost of higher education has risen dramatically, so have financial aid opportunities. Financial aid can be in the form of a federal or state grant (money you do not have to pay back) or a federal student loan (money you must pay back), which can accrue interest starting the day you enroll or a few months after you graduate. Individual college and universities may also award institutional grants and scholarships.

Schools will typically publish information on the percentage of currently enrolled students who have received financial aid, as well as the average amount awarded. This data can be a useful way to estimate your own potential for earning financial aid if you choose to attend that particular institution. While the competition might be fierce, starting early and talking to the financial aid office at your perspective school can help you navigate this process.

7. Admissions Rate

The admissions rate of a college, or percentage of applicants who are admitted, can indicate your odds of getting into the school. Schools with higher acceptance rates will typically enroll students from a wide variety of academic backgrounds, even those who may not have received the best grades in high school, while colleges with lower acceptance rates choose only the strongest candidates. The

competitiveness of a school's admission rate often reflects a school's reputation, and in some instances, may even correlate with the quality of education that students receive.

8. Admissions Criteria

The admissions criteria of most schools will typically involve a minimum GPA, prerequisite course requirements, and standardized test scores. They might also ask you to write a personal statement or interview with an admissions officer. Information about a school's admission criteria can typically be found on the school's website. Schools will often post the average GPA and test scores of previously admitted students, which is a good way to measure your own chances of getting accepted.

9. Graduation Rate

Even though graduation may be the last thing on your mind as you begin your college search, knowing the graduation rate is important when evaluating your potential college. According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), only 59% of students attending college full-time for the first time in the fall of 2005 completed their bachelor's degree within six years. A school's graduation rate provides solid data on the number of students who have successfully finished their education, which can give you an idea of what your own likelihood might be.

10. Flexible Scheduling Options

As many students are enrolling in part-time degree programs and have to balance work, family, and other obligations, flexible scheduling options may play a particularly important role. Many colleges post their course catalogs, as well as their schedules for different types of courses on their websites. Look for evening and weekend classes, online options to augment your classroom experience, and large lectures with multiple discussion sections.

11. Class Size (Student to Teacher Ratio)

Schools will typically publish information regarding their average class size. While colleges vary greatly in size, do not assume that small colleges will have the smallest classes. If you are the type of student who would prefer to have individualized attention, class size can be an important factor in your education.

Students who prefer to learn through discussion and those who want a more intimate learning experience may also benefit from smaller class sizes.

12. Campus Culture

Some colleges have strong political affiliations or social causes they represent. Some colleges are religious schools while others have a secular background. Grab a recent newspaper publication from the school, read a blog online, or ask students to see if this is the type of school fit that's right for you.

13. Internships and Hands-on Opportunities

For many people, the most exciting part of a college education is applying what they learn in the classroom to practical experience. Many programs will incorporate hands-on training into the curriculum through simulated lab work, a practicum or an internship. Although you can find your own internship with a little initiative, it is worthwhile to consider schools that provide you with direct placement into a position.

14. Campus Facilities

Whether it is a state-of-the-art laboratory, expansive computing center or a gym worthy of an Olympic athlete, the campus facilities can make all the difference when it comes to enhancing your educational experience. Determine what matters to you, and find out if those facilities are available.

15. Academic Support Resources

The academic demands of college often catch even the most confident student by surprise, so prepare now by identifying the types of academic support resources offered by your potential schools. Many colleges provide peer tutors for any student, as well as a designated building for academic support staff. Finding out what help is available ahead of time may help you down the line.

16. Career Services

Having an active and supportive career services office is essential. College can open your eyes to careers you never knew existed, and the career services center can be instrumental in preparing you for your professional life after graduation.

Career services include interview preparation, counseling, resume reviews, job placement support, and much more.

17. Job Placement Rates

Knowing the cold, hard facts about how many graduates in a particular field find a job, and how quickly, will help you evaluate a potential college. Many colleges publish data about the percentage of students receiving a job offer within six months of graduation. Some colleges will offer more assistance to graduates seeking employment than others. Finding out the job placement rate will help you make sure that your tuition dollars will be well spent and can influence your decision regarding the institution you choose to attend, as well as your area of study.

While deciding where to apply to college is often a stressful experience, knowing what things to consider when choosing a college can give you the confidence to apply wisely and end up at the school that best meets your needs. Start your college search today!