

Considering College Types

Colleges aren't all the same. Different colleges and universities have different missions (or functions, or goals). While no two are exactly alike, most fit into one or more of the following categories:

Liberal Arts Colleges focus on the education of undergraduate students. Classes are generally taught by professors who see teaching as their primary responsibility. Because most liberal arts colleges are smaller than universities, classes tend to be smaller and more personal attention is available. As opposed to preparation for a specific career path, students who attend liberal arts colleges are exposed to a broad base of courses in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. In addition, they select at least one area of in-depth study that is their college major. Many employers look for graduates of liberal arts programs and value their well-rounded preparation.

Universities are generally larger and include a liberal arts college, as well as some professionally oriented colleges, and graduate programs. Universities offer a greater range of academic choices than liberal arts colleges. They will likely provide more extensive resources in terms of library, laboratory, fine arts and athletic facilities. At many large universities, class size will reflect institutional size and most introductory classes are taught in a lecture format.

Technical Institutes and Professional Schools enroll students who have made clear decisions about what they want to study and emphasize preparation for specific careers, for example in music or fine arts, engineering, or technical sciences. You will want to be quite sure of your future direction before selecting one of these options.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) find their origins in the time when African American students were systematically denied access to most other colleges and universities. Students at HBCUs have a unique opportunity to experience an educational community in which they are a part of the majority. They find committed faculty mentors who encourage their expectations of success.

Tribal Colleges are similar to HBCU's, focusing on the needs and education of American Indian students.

Hispanic-serving Institutions are colleges, universities or systems/districts where total Hispanic enrollment constitutes a minimum of 25 percent at either the undergraduate or graduate level

Women's Colleges, with their larger numbers of female faculty and administrators, offer college women confidence-building role models, greater opportunities to serve in a full range of student leadership positions, and a heightened awareness of career possibilities for women.

Community or junior colleges generally offer the first two years of a liberal arts education, in addition to specialized occupational preparation. An associate degree is awarded at the end of a two-year program of studies, following which many students continue their education at a four-year institution. Student can also earn certificates for specific careers in under two years.

Proprietary institutions are considered for-profit companies that operate under the demands of investors and stockholders. They attract adult learners and part-time students in search of narrowly focused professional training opportunities. These programs usually offer a non-traditional format; many for-profits also have classes solely available online.