

Chapter 4: Creating a College List

As the timeline stated, students should start finalizing their college list by the beginning of their senior year. The ‘fit’ of what a student wants from college and what the college provides is a huge part of a fulfilling college experience. College rankings can be helpful in finding colleges to which you may want to apply, but there is no ‘fit’ element to them. Thus, it would be unwise to simply rely on college rankings to apply to schools. The first step in creating a college list is to reflect on what you want out of the college experience. Make a list and write this down. Go back to Chapter 2 for some of the important questions surrounding your ideal college experience.

Now it’s time to match your ideal college experience to what different colleges have to offer. Think about what you want, and then use the following resources to find out where you’ll find the best college fit. Dive deeply into learning what each college is like, and figure out whether it matches what you want from your college experience. In addition to the hyperlinked resources below, the Additional Tools section of this guide includes a brief questionnaire created by Roy Gamse and published by *The Washington Post* to help you think about what type of schools interest you.

1. [College Board College Search](https://bit.ly/TheCollegeSearch) (bit.ly/TheCollegeSearch) - A search engine in which you can apply filters to a list of colleges to find ones that best match your preferences.
2. [Fiske Guide](https://bit.ly/FiskeGuideCollege) (bit.ly/FiskeGuideCollege) - A guide of over 300 colleges that provides a straightforward, insider look into colleges. If purchasing the book is difficult, we’d recommend skimming or reading the book at a bookstore over several days.
3. [Edmit](https://bit.ly/EdmitMe) (bit.ly/EdmitMe) - A resource for personalized, easy-to-understand pricing of colleges plus data on average post-grad earnings of students and other outcomes. Tuition estimates are a lot more accurate than other tools because Edmit uses your financial/academic profile for estimates and recommendations. Heads up: there is a premium (read: paid) version, but we recommend the 100% free account that provides data/estimates for 2,000+ colleges.
4. [CampusReel](https://bit.ly/CampusReel) (bit.ly/CampusReel) - A video and VR platform that gives a sense of a college’s vibe through authentic videos shot by real students on different college campuses. It’s also great to get a sense of the look and feel of a campus, and to see what a day-in-the-life is like for some students at a particular college.
5. [Niche](https://bit.ly/NicheBestColleges) (bit.ly/NicheBestColleges) - Allows you to get ratings on dorm quality, food, and social life through students submitting their own feedback. As students submit the scores, you will get imperfect information since students will likely be biased. With that in mind, you might still get some useful insight.

When you’re making a college list, make sure to have a balance between **safety**, **match**, and **reach** schools. Safety schools are schools where you’re likely to get accepted. A reach school is a school that is a stretch to get accepted, meaning it might be hard to get into or has admission standards (GPA, test scores, etc.) that are a bit above yours. A match school has standards between the safety schools and reach schools. Use the average SAT/ACT scores and GPAs of admitted students for each college as a guide for whether the school is a safety, match, or reach. Importantly, the schools that interest you will have varying acceptance rates. Viewing schools as difficulty levels, you should strive to get a variety of acceptance rates so that if your more difficult schools don’t work out, you still have options that excite you. By diversifying, you won’t have all your eggs in one basket. We recommend having one or two schools on your college list where you know you can gain acceptance, some match schools, and a couple of reach schools. It is important not to count yourself out from any school because you think the difficulty level might be too high. We can’t stress this enough. You’re guaranteed to not be accepted to the colleges you don’t apply to. Even if you get a rejection letter—we all got our fair share—you can know you challenged yourself, and you won’t regret not applying.

Resources:

[College Visit Checklist Worksheet](https://bit.ly/CollegeProsCons) (bit.ly/CollegeProsCons)

[College Comparison Chart](https://bit.ly/CollegeComparisonChart) (bit.ly/CollegeComparisonChart)