



Developing a College List

Building your college list is an exciting adventure, but it's easy to fall into some common traps. Let's avoid them!

- **Sticking to Familiar Names:** There's a whole world of amazing colleges out there! Don't limit yourself to schools you've already heard of. Cast a wider net and explore hidden gems.
- **Chasing Prestige Over Fit:** A college's ranking or selectivity doesn't guarantee a good fit for YOU. Focus on finding schools that align with your academic interests, learning style, and desired campus environment.

Remember: Your college list should be a reflection of YOUR unique needs and aspirations. Broaden your search and prioritize fit over prestige.

FINDING FIT

Forget the "good college" label - what's perfect for YOU? It's easy to chase after the idea of a prestigious school, but a "good" college is much more personal. **It's about fit.** What makes a college amazing for one student might not be ideal for you. **Think about your experience.** Imagine yourself walking across campus, attending classes, living in the dorms, being a part of the community. **Does it feel right?** Do you see yourself getting involved? What factors will help you feel happy and motivated? Focus on finding a college that aligns with your interests, learning style, and future goals.

Don't just focus on familiar names – dig deeper! Building your college list is all about exploring possibilities. Instead of just listing colleges you've heard of, focus on the **CHARACTERISTICS** that are important to YOU. This could be things like size, location, academic programs, campus life, or anything else that matters to your future. **Cast a wide net** and consider options outside your comfort zone. This will help you discover colleges that could be a great fit. Use your SCOIR account to keep a running list of colleges that catch your eye. Remember, this is a **working list** to guide your research throughout junior year. You'll finalize your applications in senior year.



When developing a college list, consider...

LOCATION

Choosing Your College Home

For many, college is the first chance to spread your wings and explore a new place. Where will you call home for the next four years? Here are some exciting factors to consider as you map your college adventure:

- Location, Location, Location! Do you crave sunshine and beaches, or a vibrant city experience? Think about the overall vibe and cultural aspects of different regions. (Remember, the US is vast and diverse!)
- Distance Matters: Consider how far you want to be from home. Frequent visits? More independence? Think about travel logistics – car, train, plane?
- Home Away from Home: Do you have relatives in other areas that could be your college "homebase" for occasional visits?
- Weather or Not? Sun worshiper or snow enthusiast? Research the typical weather patterns throughout the year, not just when visits typically happen.

Remember: College is a chance to experience new things and grow as a person. Embrace the opportunity to explore different locations and choose a place that feels exciting and like a good fit for YOU!

SIZE

Exploring the Impact of College Size

The number of students at a college can significantly impact your experience. Here's a breakdown to help you decide what might feel right for YOU:

- **Very Small** (<1000 students): Colleges like Cooper Union and Scripps offer an incredibly close-knit community. Expect personalized attention from professors and strong bonds with classmates.
- **Small** (1000-3000 students): Middlebury and Connecticut College provide a balance between community and opportunity. You'll still have access to professors and likely know many classmates, but with a wider range of programs and activities.
- **Medium** (3000-8000 students): Villanova, Quinnipiac, and Fairfield offer a vibrant campus life with diverse clubs and activities. There's still a good chance of getting to know professors and feeling connected, but with a larger student body.
- **Large** (8000-20000 students): Universities like Syracuse and U Vermont provide a vast array of academic programs and resources. You can find your niche among a multitude of clubs and activities, but class sizes might be larger, and getting to know professors may require more effort.
- **Very Large** (>20000 students): U Michigan, U Maryland, and UMass Amherst offer all the benefits of a large university, amplified. There's an incredible breadth of programs, research opportunities, and events. However, navigating such a large environment might require more initiative on your part.

Remember: The ideal college size depends on your preferences. Think about whether you're looking for a close-knit community or a more expansive environment.

SETTING

City Lights, Suburban Charm, or the Deep Woods?

Choosing a college is about more than just academics! The surrounding environment can also play a big role in your overall experience. Consider which setting best suits your lifestyle:

- **Thriving City:** Do you crave the energy and excitement of an urban environment? Imagine cafes, museums, and cultural events right outside your dorm. (Examples: BU, Northeastern, Suffolk, Emerson)
- **Suburban Oasis:** Prefer a mix of city access and a quieter atmosphere? Suburban campuses offer a taste of both worlds, often with convenient transportation to nearby cities. (Examples: BC, Bentley, Stonehill)
- **Nature's Embrace:** Does the peace and beauty of nature call to you? Rural campuses offer a chance to connect with the outdoors and enjoy a slower pace of life. (Examples: UMass Amherst, Colby)

Remember: There's no right or wrong answer! Think about where you feel most comfortable and inspired to learn.

ACTIVITIES

Beyond the Books: Find Your Fun!

College isn't just about academics. A vibrant campus life with a variety of **extracurricular activities** can make all the difference. **What are YOU passionate about?** Do you love music, drama, sports, or volunteering? Here's how to discover your perfect fit:

- **Explore student life websites:** These websites typically list all the clubs, organizations, and activities offered on campus.
- **Look for your interests:** See if there are existing groups that align with your hobbies or passions.
- **Discover something new:** College is a great time to try new things! Step outside your comfort zone and explore unfamiliar activities.

Remember: A rich extracurricular life can enhance your college experience and help you connect with like-minded people. Find your niche and have fun!

MAJORS OFFERED

Undecided on a major? Don't worry!

Many students are in your shoes. Focus on colleges with a **broad range of programs**, giving you the flexibility to explore your interests. **Review the majors offered** to see if any spark your curiosity. If something catches your eye, dig deeper! Research the required courses and potential career paths. **Look for colleges with dedicated support** for undecided students, whether through specific programs or strong advising. This will help you discover your academic passions. Here are [some tips](#) on exploring majors.

STUDENT BODY CHARACTERISTICS

Finding Your Vibe: Campus Culture Matters!

Beyond academics, a college's **culture** should feel like a good fit. Campus visits can be a goldmine for understanding this unseen aspect. Pay attention to the student body – is it diverse (race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background)? What kind of activities and clubs exist? Is there a strong sense of community? Consider these factors:

- **Diversity:** Does the student body reflect a variety of backgrounds and viewpoints? This can enrich your learning experience.
- **Social scene:** Does the campus vibe match your preferences (lively vs. studious)?
- **Political leanings:** Is the overall environment politically active and aligned with your views?
- **Gender composition:** Do you prefer a coeducational or single-sex environment?
- **Academic intensity:** Is the focus on rigorous academics or a more balanced approach?

Remember: This is just a starting point. Think about what matters most to YOU in a college environment.

COST

Invest in Yourself Wisely!

As you research colleges, don't let sticker price scare you away. Many schools offer generous financial aid packages, making them more affordable than you might think. Talk to your family about college costs early on.

Here are some tips for navigating the financial side of things:

- Explore financial aid: Learn about grants, scholarships, and work-study programs.
- Use net price calculators: Every college website has a calculator that estimates your potential financial aid award. This will give you a more realistic picture of the actual cost you'll pay.
- Cast a wide net: Don't rule out schools solely based on initial price tags. With financial aid, even seemingly expensive options may become very affordable.

Remember, a college education is an investment in your future. By planning ahead and exploring all your financial options, you can find the perfect school that fits both your academic and budgetary needs.

SELECTIVITY

Don't get caught up in how "selective" a college is.

Selectivity is just a number and doesn't guarantee a good education. The best colleges are the ones that match your needs and interests so work hard at focusing on your best fit versus the selectivity level of a school. Don't overlook colleges with lower acceptance rates - they might offer a fantastic education and a perfect fit for you (as well as the possibility of more generous merit funding).

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

LGBTQIA+:

- [College Choice](#) can help you identify an environment where you can feel supported. “All colleges and universities claim to have campus pride. But when it comes to LGBTQIA+-pride, some schools are *clearly* more “loud and proud” than others. Find an actively supportive college home with one of the 50 best LGBTQ schools in the nation.”

- [Campus Pride Index](#) is another helpful resource that allows you to search a database of LGBTQ-friendly colleges and campuses.

Learning Disabilities Support Programs: Every college has general academic support for students. For students who are looking for additional support, especially for students who've had a 504 Plan/IEP accommodations and want to learn more, a conversation with the Disability Support Office will help you understand the process at that specific college. Some students may look for additional programming to support them in college. Here's a [list of schools](#) that offer separate learning support programs (note that these typically carry an additional cost).

Mission Statement: Decoding a College's Core Values

Every college has a mission statement, a few sentences that define their core values and educational philosophy. Don't underestimate its power! Take a minute to find the mission statement (often on the "About Us" section of the college website). Reading it can give you a sense of:

- What they value: The mission statement tells you what the college prioritizes in teaching and learning.
- Their ideal student: Does the statement resonate with your own values and educational goals?
- A sense of fit: Can you see yourself thriving in an environment that aligns with this mission?

Mission statements are a treasure trove of information. By understanding a college's core purpose, you can gain valuable insights into whether it's the right fit for YOU.

Internship Support/Career Outcomes: Beyond the Books:

College is an investment in your future, and a smart investment considers both academics and career preparation.

Don't overlook career services! Strong career support can give you a significant advantage in the job market.

Here's how to evaluate a college's career resources:

- **Explore the Career Services Office:** Investigate their website or schedule an appointment to learn about:
 - **Internship opportunities:** Do they offer internship programs or connect students with external placements?
 - **Support services:** What kind of guidance is provided on resume writing, interview skills, and job searching?
 - **Student engagement:** What percentage of students utilize career services? When do they recommend getting involved?
- **Employment outcomes:** Ask about the college's graduate placement rate. This can give you an idea of how successful their career services are in helping students land jobs or pursue graduate education.
- Check out [Georgetown's annual ROI report](#) to further assess a college's outcomes.

By asking these questions, you can gain valuable insights into how the college can support your future career goals.

Remember: A strong career development program is an investment worth making!

Next Up: [Research!](#)