



Where Do I Apply? Some Ideas to Consider

- **84% of all colleges accept more than 50% of the students who apply to them, according to the National Association for College Admission Counseling.**
- So does it make sense to limit yourself to the stressful, hardball game of only highly selective college admissions? Only *you* can answer that. Ideally, you will have a range of colleges on your list, based not only upon selectivity, but also upon the important things; environment, programs, great teaching, the opportunity to meet interesting people and the chance to be challenged both personally and academically. We call this finding the right match. There are a number of colleges out there that may be right for you. While it is true that there is undoubtedly a type of college which is more suited to your needs than another type, it is not wise to narrow your sights to only one or two colleges. A better plan is to investigate several possible options and you will discover that each one has its own advantages.
- **Start by making a list of things you want in a college. Some suggestions for consideration:**
- **Size:** Do I want the anonymity of a large school versus the personal attention from professors at a smaller school? Think about the learning environment in a lecture hall of 400, where you might be able to go through four years without being called on more than a few times; as opposed to the smaller class size, even seminar classes at small schools, where your participation is expected. It is much easier to have a big impact on life at a smaller school, since you will be better able to get to know the administration and many of the other campus leaders personally. At large schools, meetings will be announced, but unless you seek them out, clubs and organizations won't come to find you.
- **Weather:** Can I live through wind, snow, rain, and sleet – in a word; weather. We don't really have that in Southern California, so this is an important question if you are considering leaving the area or the state.
- **Location:** Have I visited a school in a suburban or rural area, so that I know what it means to distinguish between urban, suburban, or rural campuses?
- **Programs:** Am I looking for a specialized school? (engineering, music, fashion design)
- **Co-Curricular Activities:** Do I want to attend a school with a strong sense of campus community? Big-time sports can make you feel like you belong the minute football season begins. Do you like the tradition that goes along with big-time sports programs? Or are you trying to find a school with an

orchestra, and award-winning student newspaper, political demonstrations, or important guest speakers?

- **Academic Atmosphere:** What environment suits me? Tense or relaxed, competitive or geared to individual progress, high or low academic expectations, opportunities for recreational and cultural activities to supplement academics, honor systems and academic discipline codes.
- **Graduation in 4 years:** Is it important to you to graduate in four years? You may not know that the norm for colleges to quote graduation statistics is now *six years*. It is possible to graduate in four years. Be sure to find out how many students do that at the school you are considering.
- **Social Structure and Campus Lifestyle:** Is a residential campus important? This is an especially important question for students planning to attend out-of-state colleges. Weekend social life, on and off campus, types of entertainments favored by the students, fraternities and sororities, and system of student rules are all important factors in the daily life of a student.
- **Position in the incoming class:** Do you want to be one of the better students at the school, or do you want the challenge of working extra hard to keep up with the top 25%? Would you consider entering an Honors program at a somewhat less competitive school in order to get the best education possible at a large school in small group experience? Think Arizona State University or U Mass-Amherst.
- **Calendar:** Is the schools' calendar important to you – semester or quarters?
- **Your own Priorities:** Think about dozens of other things that you are as individual might consider; athletics, performing arts, distance from home or relatives, cost, public/private, religious affiliation, specific programs or interdisciplinary majors, ... add your own special considerations.
- **What Not To DO:**
- **Put any faith in the *US News and World Report* or similar rankings**
 - Just because a school is highly ranked doesn't mean that you will like it or that it will suit your needs. The rankings are based on factors that include things like faculty salaries, average spending per student, alumni giving rate, and the number of students who transfer. While these factors are important to the college, they have little or nothing to do with whether or not you will be happy there.
- **Your best friend's boyfriend didn't like the school he attended.**
 - Just because he didn't like the college doesn't mean that you won't. There might be a very specific reason that he was turned off by the school – a weird freshman year roommate or a

professor with whom he didn't click. Those things can happen at any school. Be your own person in researching colleges.

- **“I heard that...”**
 - Much of the information that floats around about particular colleges is at least 10 years old, sometimes older. Many colleges that had fairly lightweight academic reputations in the 70's or 80's have refocused their priorities and are now top institutions. Similarly, some schools were considered party schools, and others were considered easy to get into. Schools have changed, and the way they might have been 10, 20, or 30 years ago is the way they might seem to your parents. Do your research. What are the social and academic realities *now*?

- **I've never heard of it.**
 - Many of the small, liberal arts colleges are actually some of the best colleges in the country, and they might be some of the best-kept secrets, too. The average well-educated person can probably name only a small number of the almost 3,500 colleges and universities in the United States. These tend to be older Eastern schools, the large state universities, those with outstanding athletic teams, or those that happen to be near home. It is important to remember that a college which may be right for you may be one that is unknown to you now, while some of the universities you are most familiar with may not be appropriate choices.