



Choosing a college is one of the most significant decisions you will make in your lifetime; finding that perfect “fit” when making your college decision will be the key to your success and happiness over the next four years. To help you find the college that best matches your needs, we’ve designed some helpful hints to help you throughout the college search process.

Visit Every College

Seeing a college in person is a much different experience than looking at pictures on a website and reading facts in brochures and viewbooks. Remember, you are not just choosing where you will go to school, but the place you will call “home” for the next four years and beyond. To make sure you find a college that satisfies your personal and academic needs, you should plan on visiting (and revisiting) every college you are considering, preferably during a week when classes are in session. There are many different visit options available to prospective students; to make sure you experience the most during your visits, we’ve created a short checklist of experiences you should try and achieve during your college search. You should plan to:

- Tour the campus at least once (during an open house and for a private tour)
- Interview with an admissions officer
- Sit in on an information session
- Attend one or two classes
- Meet with faculty in a department that interests you
- Meet with a financial aid officer to discuss aid available to students
- Eat in the dining hall
- Talk with current students
- Schedule an overnight visit (Note: some schools may only allow you to schedule an overnight visit after you’ve been accepted.)

Consider Actual Cost vs. “Sticker Price”

While all colleges understand that cost is an important factor in choosing a college, you shouldn’t make your decision solely on cost. And, you certainly shouldn’t make your decision based on the “sticker price” – the full cost of tuition, fees, room and board – rather than considering the actual cost of attendance. The fact is, colleges and universities offer an array of financial aid options for students and their families, including, non-repayable grants, academic scholarships, on-campus jobs, low interest loans, and payment plans. Not to mention, aid is also available from other sources, like community groups and the state. In Virginia, for example, students attending a private college can receive a state sponsored Tuition Assistance Grant of about \$2,500 each year. When all forms of aid are considered, a college education, whether it be public or private, in-state or out-of-state, can be surprisingly affordable.

Contact an Enrolled Student

Current students are one of the best resources available to prospective students. Try to contact a student from your hometown who is enrolled at each college you are considering. If you don’t know anyone at a particular college, ask the college’s admissions office to provide you

with contact information for a current student. E-mail or call the student to ask the “tough” questions you’re dying to find the answers to, like: How difficult are the courses? What is dorm life like? What’s the student/professor relationship like? And what is student life really like?

Key Questions to Ask of All Colleges

When you visit a college, there are probably a number of questions buzzing around your head and, often times, you may overlook or forget a question during your visit. We’ve created a checklist of some common questions you should consider asking during your visits. Feel free to modify the questions and create a list of your own to take with you when you visit.

- What is the typical class size, and how much individual attention will I receive?
- What is the “atmosphere” on campus? Is it friendly? Relaxed? Competitive? Pressured?
- What are the professors like? How available are they for follow-up conversations? Are they teaching or research focused?
- Will I be taught by a graduate student at all during my time here?
- What resources are available for students who wish to conduct research or an individual internship?
- How will the college help me upon graduation? What types of resources does the college have to assist in job placement and graduate school? And, once I graduate, what services do I have available to me?
- Is there help available if I find myself struggling in a certain subject?

This list is far from comprehensive and your list may, and will probably, differ from those listed above. No matter what questions you come up with, be sure all your questions are fully answered before you make your final decision. The admissions office and other college officials should, in most cases, be happy to provide you with the information you need.

Trust Your Instincts

Choosing your college may be one of the first major decisions you’ve made in your life. It’s important for you to make an informed decision, but you’ll also find that your ultimate choice will be partially emotional as well. Even among colleges which are similar academically, as well as in size and quality, each has their own unique atmosphere, student makeup, and general “feel.” In the end, one college will most likely just “feel” right to you – where you’ll feel the happiest and most comfortable.

Stick to the Deadlines

While most colleges subscribe to the May 1 Candidates’ Reply Date for students to make their final commitments, some colleges (including Randolph-Macon College) make freshman housing assignments in the order reservation deposits are received. If you arrive at your final decision prior to the national deposit deadline, you may want to consider indicating your intention to enroll prior to May 1. Remember though, May 1 is officially the date your decision must be made – no college should pressure you to make a premature decision. Act only when you are comfortable with your decision.

Ask the right questions, learn as much as you can about a college, and trust your instincts – if you follow these steps, you’ll find your perfect fit!



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