

How To Select the Right College

By Mike Dunn

When choosing the college that is right for you, there are a lot of factors to consider. Everything from location to curriculum to cost, among other things, should be weighed and play a role in the final decision.

Perhaps the first thing to consider is location. Do you want to commute each day? Is it feasible for you to commute from home? If it is, then your choices are limited to the schools that are within a reasonable driving distance. And that may not be a bad thing. A lot of young people go to a local college for two years before going off to a major four-year university. They're a little older by then, a little more mature, a little more responsible, and a little more able to deal with being away from home for weeks or months at a time.

Even if you are not going to commute, location is still a factor. Do you want to stay in your home state? If you do, how much distance do you want between yourself and home? The distance could determine how often you can come home for weekends or sneak away for a day to visit friends and family. Other factors to weigh that fall under the realm of location is whether you want to go to a school in a smaller city or to a school in a big city. Once you decide location, you can limit your choices accordingly.

Size is another key factor. Are you ready to attend a major university with thousands and thousands of others? Think about it before you answer. If you are from a small town, going to a major university will be a big adjustment.

If you did well in high school and you were known for your accomplishments in the classroom and/or on the athletic field, you will have to adjust to being just a small fish in a large pond at a large learning institution. If it seems overwhelming, it might be wise to consider going to a smaller, local college for a few years before taking on the challenge of the larger college. On the other hand, if you are focused on academics and have a clear career goal in mind, or if you hail from a big city and are accustomed to being surrounded by large numbers of people, then a big school may be just right for you.

If you have a career goal in mind, then choice of a major is very important. Obviously, you want to choose a college that offers a course of study in the field you aspire to enter. Look for colleges that offer the right kind of curriculum. Many young people go to college without a clear idea of what they want to do in life. That's OK. Enter a college with a strong liberal arts program and get

a year or two of classes under your belt. Then, you'll be able to choose a career path based upon what you've experienced in the college classroom and what you seem to be drawn to. If you know that you want to get into some area of business, then check out the business school of a potential college. If you think you might want to be a teacher, then check out the school of education. There is lots of information available online at the college Web site.

Depending on what scholarships or grants might be available to you, cost will be another big factor in your decision. Determine the total cost of tuition with room and board, books, and other fees included. Compare colleges you may want to attend based upon location, size and curriculum and see what the difference is in yearly cost. Find out what kind of financial aid is available to you. If the colleges are all about equal in your estimation in terms of location, size and field of study, then the one that is the least expensive may be the one you want.

Other factors you may want to consider before making your decision include religious affiliation, academic standards, social life, and the feel of the campus itself. These factors may be more important to some than others, but should not be overlooked. Schools with a religious affiliation usually have stricter standards, especially in social settings, and provide a spiritual emphasis that is lacking at other places. Schools with high academic standards will inspire some students to study harder and avoid social pitfalls, but for some students the high standards may be a bit overwhelming.

All of these factors should be taken into account in the process of choosing the right college. With easy access to information that is available online, it is much easier to gather the data that is necessary to make an informed decision.