

College Basics

There are over 5,000 colleges and universities in the U.S., so how do you narrow down where to apply? It is important to determine the best “fit.” The following factors will help you narrow down your search:

Size: There are colleges with enrollment of a few hundred students upwards to 60,000. A large campus may be overwhelming to some but exciting to others. A small campus might feel supportive and friendly to one but more isolating to someone else. Read more and see what you might prefer.

Location: Do you want to be closer to home or farther away? Will traveling to your college campus require a short drive, a train trip, or even a plane ride? Furthermore, consider the environment; is the campus located within a large city or a rural town? Consider the costs associated with where your potential college is located as well.

Academics: Majors offered, opportunities in select programs

Selectivity: Students should choose at least one safety, one match, and one reach school to apply to. A **MATCH** school is one where your academic grades and test scores matches that of their average freshmen admitted. Acceptance isn’t guaranteed but you can apply knowing you have a chance of being admitted. A **REACH** school is where your academic grades and test scores might be below the average accepted student. A **SAFETY** school is where your grades and test scores may exceed those of the average accepted student and there is a high probability that you are admitted. It also means the school is safe in other regards, such as being affordable.

*Note: Selectivity can also apply to programs within a college. While you may be a match to a particular university, perhaps the major you apply to may be highly selective.

To find out where you might fit academically, search (Name of University) Freshman Class Profile or Admission Requirements. Example: “University of Illinois Freshman Class Profile”

Cost: Consider tuition PLUS fees, such as housing, books, travel costs, etc.

Diversity: Different perspectives and backgrounds allow students to learn from one another and experience different worldviews. A diverse class includes a range in race, ethnicity, affiliation, sexual identity and orientation, exceptionalities, socioeconomic, geographic, first-generation, cultural background, and gender.

Affiliations: Many private colleges may have a religious affiliation whether simply in their founding or more woven into student life and coursework.

Student Life/Activities: This can include athletics (Div 1, Div 2, Div 3, Club), clubs and activities, Greek Life, professional organizations, and more.

Support Services: What services does the college campus offer? This can include: Students with disabilities, career and job placements, mental health services, medical, counseling and advising, or academic support with tutoring or remedial classes.

Recommended College Search Tools:

[College Navigator \(National Center for Education Statistics\)](#)

[Big Future \(College Board\) College Search](#)

[College Data](#)

Naviance (log in through Clever) → Colleges → Find Your Fit → SuperMatch

Community College

Community colleges (also called junior colleges or “2-year colleges”) are an excellent option for many students, whether they plan to complete an Associate’s degree, certification, or complete general education requirements prior to transferring to a 4-year school to eventually earn a Bachelor’s degree, at a significantly lower cost.

Students attending 4-year schools also choose to take classes at their local community college in Summer Session to earn general education credits to stay on track to graduate in 4 years.

All U46 and Bartlett High School students live in boundary to attend [Elgin Community College](#). Some BHS students *also* live in boundary for College of Dupage. Another popular community college students in this area might attend is Harper College. You may attend any community college, however there are difference in tuition fees for out of district students.

Application Process

Finalize the list of colleges to which you want to apply. Choose four to six schools including one Safety, several Matches and one Reach.

Complete college applications online. APPLY EARLY! (Apply to your top colleges by November 1.) Visit the college website to view how they take applications (either through their website or on Common App).

Submit a transcript request through Naviance at least 2 weeks before the application deadline.

Send official test scores to colleges, if applicable. You must log in to your College Board account at www.collegeboard.org to send SAT scores or your ACT account at www.actstudent.org to send ACT scores.

Begin financial aid search

- Visit your college financial aid website
- Visit www.fastweb.com for scholarships
- Check local scholarships list
- File FAFSA after October 1st

Expect to hear from colleges from mid-November through April concerning acceptance and financial aid

- Compare financial aid offers
- Notify your college of choice of your decision to attend and notify others of your decision not to attend. Deadline to accept is May 1.
- Arrange for campus housing, if applicable.

What to Know About Applying Early

If you find a college that you're sure is right for you, consider applying early. Early Decision and Early Action plans allow you to apply early (usually in November) and get an admission decision early (usually by Dec. 15).

Early Decision plans are binding

You agree to attend the college if it accepts you and offers an adequate financial aid package. You can apply to only one college for Early Decision. You may also apply to other colleges through the regular admission process, but if you're accepted by your first-choice college early, you must withdraw all other applications.

Early Action plans are nonbinding

While the college will tell you whether or not you're accepted by early January, you have the right to wait until May 1 before responding. This gives you time to compare colleges, including their financial aid offers, before making a decision. You can also apply Early Action to more than one college.

Single-choice Early Action is another option offered by a few colleges

This plan works the same way as other Early Action plans, but candidates may not apply early (either Early Action or Early Decision) to any other school. You can still apply for regular admission to other schools and are not required to give your final answer of acceptance until the regular decision deadline.

If you need financial aid, Early Decision might not be a good idea

You shouldn't apply under an Early Decision plan if you think you'll be better off weighing financial aid packages from several colleges later in the spring. While you can turn down an early acceptance if the college is unable to meet your need for financial aid, "need" in this context is determined by formulas, not by your family.

Not every college offers an early plan

More than 400 colleges offer an Early Decision plan, an Early Action plan, or both; but that is less than 20 percent of all colleges.

Get it together for College, 2nd Edition. © 2011 The College Board. All rights reserved.

Application Fees

For many college applications you submit, you'll be required to pay a nonrefundable application fee. It's important to keep this in mind as it may affect the number of colleges to which you want to apply. Students from low-income families may also request application-fee waivers which are available through most college admissions offices or you can request a fee waiver from your school counselor.