

RESEARCHING YOUR COLLEGE LIST

There are over 4000 two and four-year colleges in the U.S. and it is important to keep in mind that there can be a number of “right” or “good” colleges for you. The process of selecting a group of colleges, which you feel is right for you, can be difficult and anxiety producing. It requires time, thought, organization, and a sense of self. The research of possible college options should begin immediately. Important information can be obtained by visiting the college campus, exploring the institution’s Web site and taking a virtual tour, talking with current students home on vacation, and by corresponding with recent graduates. You should narrow your list of prospective colleges down to no more than 7 or 8 by September 1 of your senior year. I strongly recommend that your short list include at least two safeties (colleges where you are almost assured admission), two 50/50’s (colleges where you have an equal chance of being accepted or rejected) and two long shots (colleges where the probability of your acceptance is low). Applications should always be sent off no later than November 24 of your senior year if at all possible.

How to learn more

Read what the various college guides have to say about the colleges.

- A. For fairly objective information, explore *Peterson’s Four and Two-Year College Guides 2006*, *Profiles of American Colleges* by Barron’s, and College Board’s *2006 College Handbook*; all four of these publications are phone book size and pretty factual. Be sure to make notes of application deadlines, required tests, (i.e. ACT, SAT Reasoning Test, SAT Subject Tests, etc.), comprehensive fees, application fees, special features, and drawbacks, etc.
- B. For more subjective reading material try *The Fiske Guide to Colleges* by Edward B. Fiske, The Princeton Review’s *The Best 361 Colleges 2007*, *The College Finder* by Steve Antonoff, *Colleges That Change Lives* by Loren Pope, the *College Prowler* series, *Choosing the Right College* (The ISI Guide). Ruggs, *The Insider’s Guide to Colleges 2006* (edited by the staff of The Yale Daily News); many of these publications are written in complete sentences and give the scoop on ambiance, strong and weak programs, etc.
- C. Write, e-mail, or phone the colleges that interest you the most. Request an application and any other information pertinent to your interests (e.g. financial aid information, viewbook, catalog, major, scholarships, etc.). Start a folder for each college you are contacting and label it with the college’s name. File all your notes, literature and applications in each folder.

- D. Ask your friends, returning students, recently graduated alumni, parents, teachers, and employers about colleges of particular interest to you. Find out what they can add to what you have read already. Again, jot down your comments and impressions and place them in your college folders and indicate your source.
- E. Visit several college campuses and ask questions. Try to visit during the fall or spring. Call at least two weeks in advance of your visit and schedule a tour and an interview with an admission representative. Also, try to talk with someone in your department of interest and request to sit in on a real class, if possible; for additional information survey at least 5 students at random.

In the fall, you will have an additional source of information about the colleges—the admission representatives who visit George and the surrounding area. Even though it might mean missing class time, you should probably attend these 30 to 45 minute presentations anyway. The following points reflect some pretty good reasons for attending these information sessions:

- A. It will give you a chance to size up the admission representative, who after all, is supposed to represent the college and its student body. Please keep in mind, however, that you should never completely write off a college based only on your opinion of the admission representative, especially since they may not even be a graduate of that institution.
- B. It will give you a chance to ask questions and see who else in your class is thinking about applying to a specific college.
- C. It demonstrates to the college that you are interested enough to take the time to attend. At such meetings, you will have a chance to talk informally with the admission representatives. Sharp admission people sometimes remember the students they meet “on the road,” so hopefully they will have you in mind when they read your application. If you make a positive impression, it may very well improve your chances for admission. For this reason, be sure to ask each college representative for a business card and then send him or her a thank you note or e-mail.

Frequently, college admission representatives participate in college information programs in the evening, usually at an accessible hotel or church. Sometimes these programs may be more convenient for students than the daytime sessions at George. Most of these programs occur between September 15 and December 1. Usually the colleges you have contacted will send you an invitation if they are going to be in your area; remember to examine the bulletin boards outside the counseling office at school for notices of such opportunities.

A few recommended college guidebooks:

The Insider's Guide to Colleges from the Yale Daily News

The Insider's Guide is the oldest student opinion guide in print. Students from several hundred colleges across the country share their insights on academics, campus life, and their fellow students. It is written in a down-to-earth, informative tone.

Profiles of American Colleges from Barron's Guides

The Barron's guide is perhaps the best of the "phonebook" college guides, referred to as such because they are huge collections of data on all accredited four-year colleges. There are two particularly useful tools within the pages of this jumbo guidebook. One is a chart that categorizes colleges within several grades of selectivity from open admission to most competitive, making it easy for students to find colleges where they will be solid candidates or outright admits. The other tool takes the selectivity ratings one step further and puts them alongside their listings of colleges that offer specific academic majors.

The K&W Guide to Colleges for the Learning Disabled by Marybeth Kravets and Imy Wax

This is a terrific book from two true experts on the subject. If you're a student with special support needs for college, there's no better source for comprehensive information on availability of programs and resources.

The College Finder by Steve Antonoff

College Finder is a truly unique book written by a local author. Dr. Antonoff's book compiles loads of information on colleges in a wide-ranging series of lists, drawn from countless sources. Included among the dozens upon dozens of lists of colleges are compilations that address nearly every aspect of college life, academics, environment, overall quality, beauty, diversity, and countless other considerations. It's kind of like a computer search engine on paper. It is a great resource for those looking to explore and expand their horizons.

College Representatives

Every year about many college representatives visit George. Even more college representatives will visit during the fall and spring college fairs.

Local College Fairs

Local college fairs are certainly worth attending include the one at Cherry Creek High School.

Excellent Speakers

When Peter van Buskirk comes to town, he is certainly worth seeing.

RMACAC College Fair

The University of Denver is the host for the Rocky Mountain Association of College Admission Counseling or RMACAC College Fair, a spring program that features over 200 colleges.