

Decide on your college or university

Use this list of five factors, which are important in the college decision, and also form the acronym REACH: Region, Estimated costs, Academics, Campus life and Housing.

► **Region**

Figure out what type of college you want — big, little or somewhere in between? Consider how you want to spend your spare time. Does the region offer the beach scene, mountain climbing, hiking or ice-skating?

► **Estimated costs**

First of all, can you afford the school? What does the online price calculator tell you? Also, although you will apply for all

the scholarships you can that will award you for your community service and SAT or ACT scores, look beyond your freshman year award potential. Do the colleges you're considering offer scholarships for your major? What are the requirements? Do you qualify for workstudy? Are there other jobs, such as being a tour guide or resident advisor that can help you offset the cost of college?

► **Academics**

Ask your guidance counselor or admissions counselor if the department you're considering majoring in is accredited. Also ask who teaches the courses, what the student-teacher ratio is and the average class size. Remember, not every college is equal, and it is your job to find out which colleges pass your test.

► **Campus life**

One of the best ways to get the feel of a campus is to attend an event. Most colleges offer a preview day of some type to give prospective students a taste of what they offer. Also, consider taking a campus tour. Don't be afraid to ask questions about your tour guide's experiences, what types of student organizations are present on campus

and the main events the campus hosts each year.

► **Housing**

Some colleges require all freshmen to live on campus; others don't. You may want to ask if the university offers any freshmen-only housing. Living on a freshmen floor helps ease anxiety and is a great way to make friends. You will also want to know when the dorms close, what's included in the room cost and if the halls are co-ed.

Lots of people tell you how important this decision is and they throw tons of information at you, but that really doesn't answer the question for you. So, instead, try this checklist as a starting point to narrow down your search. Happy hunting!

Excerpted from "How to pick a college" by Abby Tennant.



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