



# The Future Begins Now!

## Starting Your College Search

*By Debra Rudick, New York University*

Locating the “right” college—and there is almost certainly more than one “right” college—starts and ends with you! Selecting the schools that suit your style and needs may demand that you reject the conventional hierarchy and wisdom of what is a good school or a popular school or a validating school. It may mean putting any value judgments on hold, such as whether or not your parents went there, if it’s an Ivy, if it’s a state school, etc. It also helps if you can set aside

any financial concerns or affordability judgments for a moment. Instead, try to first get a feel for the personality of a college or university and judge how it meshes with your own personality. Instead of asking “Where do I want to go to college?” it might be simpler to start by thinking about your own personal values, your activities and interests, your character and friendships, and your likes and dislikes about school in general. The admission committee cannot gauge your internal character-

istics; only you can really do that by weighing what matters to you, what kind of person you are, and what you want to become. In other words, if you do the work toward self-discovery, you’ll make wise choices about which colleges suit you. In turn, when the match is clearly right on your end, the admission committee may then be better able to see you as their kind of student too—you’ve already proven yourself to be the kind of leadership-oriented student they like to see!



## Self-advocacy in the Admission Process

By Kelly Herrington

As you wade through the application process, don't forget a crucial part: the quality colleges call self-advocacy, or the ability to "sell yourself." Here are a few ways to convince admission counselors that you will be an asset to their college.

→ Plan ahead! Before you interview, make a list of your strengths, what differentiates you from other applicants, and how you have grown both academically and socially in high school.

→ Many students face special challenges, such as financial hardships, a weak academic record, or less-than-stellar test scores. These challenges can actually work in your favor. For example, you might have worked harder than most of your peers to get where you are. Colleges need to hear these things, as they can make you a more attractive candidate.

→ Colleges and universities track the level of interest you've expressed in their school. When your application shows that you've toured the campus, had an interview, or stayed overnight, it demonstrates to admission officials that you want to attend their college.

→ Do your homework. It's a good idea to offer some positive comments about the college or university you're interested in. Admission counselors enjoy talking with students who are well informed about their institution and are more likely to look upon them favorably.

→ Meet with a coach, a professor, or a department chair. Though they are not on the admission staff, interest expressed by members of the campus community on behalf of talented students can have a positive effect on an admission counselor's evaluation.

→ Ask questions. If the answer to your question is readily available on the website, then querying is not going to work in your favor. However, if you have a more unusual question, speak up. Admission counselors remember students who demonstrate a desire to understand their institutions.

### Outline the selection criteria

Your major does not have to be your first criteria. You may change your mind about that later, anyway, and it's really not always the determining factor. Think about the school's personality instead: do you want a research university or a liberal arts and science college; urban or rural; large or small? Outside of your major, what else will be important to you—involvement in athletics or the performing arts or study abroad or eco-advocacy?

If your temperament and academic strengths are suited to a research university with guaranteed access to top scholars, there are opportunities for one-on-one access even at the largest research institutions. In contrast, you may be looking for the community characteristic of a smaller liberal arts and science college with a long and proud tradition of teaching excellence and high standards of scholarship. If you were raised in a city, you may want to study in a setting far from the

urban hustle. Or maybe the access of a city right at your doorstep is appealing.

Similarly, there are large and small institutions. Some students are thrilled by a broad array of academic options, a library large enough to get lost in, and scores of cocurricular activities. Others may prosper in a smaller college environment with guaranteed student-faculty interaction, a priority that may override their having fewer choices in other domains. Private colleges and universities offer a wide variety of specialized schools and great academic track records, as well as access to some of the largest endowments, creating grants and scholarships for their students. Public universities offer the same great professors as private institutions with a more diverse population and a lower sticker cost.

Some of the criteria you can use to make your match include the following:

- Urban, suburban, or rural area

- Large, medium, or small school
- Far away or close to home
- Academic excellence in specific areas of study
- An environment that provides ample research opportunities
- Diversity of the student body
- Opportunity for internships, field work, and part-time jobs
- Opportunity for international global experience
- Extracurricular activities or interests

As you ask these questions, keep in mind that it is very likely you may discover not just one but a number of schools that seem to provide an appropriate environment for your interests and academic needs.

### Be realistic: academic preparation

It will be harder to get into some colleges than others, and it is important to apply to some schools that you are confident will be drawn to you and

your academic record, while also applying to those that are more selective. Review the academic requirements and profiles at each of the schools that you like and determine whether or not your qualifications match. For most colleges, what you have achieved academically in high school will be the primary factor in whether or not you are offered admission.

Your junior year is the last full year of academic work that colleges will see as they make their decisions, so it's a critical year. Of course, the higher degree of difficulty of the classes you take—and the higher your achievement in them—the better. Strong grades in an advanced curriculum demonstrate your ability to excel. Tackle challenging courses, but be careful not to overload and end up with a schedule that is too tough to handle.

### Evaluation time: letters of recommendation

You'll also have to gather the letters of recommendation from teachers, counselors, or principals and perhaps from employers or advisers. It's never too early for you to establish and foster good relationships with these key individuals. Be sure to give your writers at least one month to develop well-planned letters (two months is even better). If it is a teacher that you know will have to write many letters, consider asking them very far in advance, like before summer recess.

The majority of U.S. colleges require two or three evaluations, and most forms ask each respondent to write a short assessment essay and rank the respondent's academic potential, motivation, and leadership skills. You'll want to ask an adult who

knows you well to write the letter, not some high-ranking official who couldn't pick your face out of a lineup. Teachers, coaches, counselors, and church leaders are all great people to ask. Actively participating in class,

asking questions, and engaging in conversations with your teachers after class are all good ways for you to stand out, so when it's time for a reference, hopefully you'll receive glowing recommendations!

### Prepare your finances

When you're choosing schools,

keep an open mind about how you and your family will finance your education. Working out how your family will be able to send you to the school you really want without regard to cost may be a challenge, but it's important that you don't rule out a college simply because it's private or seems too expensive. You may qualify for merit-based scholarships, and your family may qualify for financial aid—you cannot know what you'll get unless you apply.

You can start your college experience by flipping through these pages and noting which schools look interesting to you. Fill out the card in the front of this magazine to have colleges start sending you information. Try not to rush the process. Finding the right school is mostly about finding what's important to you. Leave preconceived notions at the door and take those first steps into the world of college admission. **PC&U**

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**“Where do I want to go to college?” it might be simpler to start by thinking about your own personal values, your activities and interests, your character and friendships, and your likes and dislikes about school in general.**

## DISTINGUISHED PRIVATE COLLEGE ALUMNI

### BUSINESS

- **Steve Jobs**, Reed College; Co-founder and CEO of Apple Inc.
- **Donald Trump**, University of Pennsylvania; Chairman and CEO of the Trump Organization
- **Michael Eisner**, Denison University; Former CEO of The Walt Disney Company

### SCIENCE

- **Thomas Steitz**, Lawrence University; Awarded the 2009 Nobel Prize in Chemistry
- **Judy Resnik**, Carnegie Mellon University; NASA astronaut and second female in space

### ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

- **Donna Karan**, Parsons The New School for Design; American fashion designer
- **John Krasinski**, Brown University; Actor starring in *The Office*
- **Trent Reznor**, Allegheny College; Founder of the band Nine Inch Nails

### GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC POLICY

- **Clarence Thomas**, Yale University; Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court
- **Hillary Rodham Clinton**, Wellesley College; Former First Lady and current U.S. Secretary of State
- **John Thune**, Biola University; United States senator from South Dakota and current Republican Policy Committee Chair

### SPORTS

- **Bill Belichick**, Wesleyan University; Head coach of the New England Patriots
- **Bob Costas**, Syracuse University; Famed sportscaster for NBC
- **Michelle Kwan**, University of Denver; The most decorated figure skater in U.S. history

To find out where more notable people went to college, go to [www.insidecollege.com](http://www.insidecollege.com) or pick up a copy of Steve Antonoff's book *The College Finder*.