The Best College is the Good Fit

Which college is best for you?
Which candidates are best for the college?

With more than 3,000 colleges and universities across the country, you will quickly discover that there are lots of potential options. Some are well known if not quite famous. Others will be new to you. Most will have something of value to offer.

Over the course of your college planning process, you and the group of colleges that interest you most will engage in alternating rituals of selection. You make the first move by choosing to apply. The colleges will in turn make selections from among their applicants. If you are one of the lucky ones with multiple acceptances, the final choice becomes yours.

The quality options that emerge on your radar screen will be the colleges that are most compatible with you and your priorities. Ultimately, you want to find the best “fit.”

Similarly, colleges that are selective want to find the highest degree of compatibility or “fit” in their applicants. After initially courting your application, they will make distinctions between you and other compelling candidates to determine whom they value most as they select their entering classes.

The “best college” is the one that is right for you. It is a quality option because it is the college that will best meet your needs. It fits. Don’t be surprised if you find more than one that seems to fit. That’s great. Not only will you be happier at such colleges, the odds are you’ll have a better chance of getting in.

A good college “fit” is one that will:

1. Offer a program of study to match your interests and needs.
2. Provide a style of instruction to match the way you like to learn.
3. Provide a level of academic rigor to match your aptitude and preparation.
4. Offer a community that feels like home to you.
5. Value you for what you have to offer.

As you consider colleges, how do they measure up against these guidelines for a good fit? You need to be conscious of the inconsistencies because they will likely become sticking points for you later on. Don’t settle for a college that only meets one or two criteria. Go for all five!
The Best College for Me Worksheet

How well do you know yourself? As you respond to each of the questions below, you will develop a guide for college selection that is rooted in your personal values system. A good college fit for you is one that will match your responses. Before you fill in your answers, make a copy of this page and give it to your parents. Ask them to respond on their own. Then, compare your answers. They might be surprised by what they learn about you. And you might be surprised by the insights they have into you!

1. Do you find the college process overwhelming? For that matter, are you sure you want to go to college? Believe it or not, these feelings are natural. For some students, the myth is that “just because you are about to graduate from high school, college is the next step.” Maybe. Maybe not.

While going to college right after high school works for some, it is not the right solution for others. You may have ideas that don’t involve college (work, travel, exploration). Perhaps you have a different timetable for accomplishing your goals. There is no rule that says you must enter college immediately upon graduating from high school. Forcing yourself into the college picture if it’s not your thing—or you’re not ready—will be a big mistake. Be thoughtful and purposeful in your reflection. Your time will come.

In the space below, answer the most important question to ask yourself: “Why do I want to go to college?”

|______________________________________________________________________________________________________________|
|______________________________________________________________________________________________________________|
|______________________________________________________________________________________________________________|
|______________________________________________________________________________________________________________|

2. What are your academic interests and/or program needs?

|______________________________________________________________________________________________________________|

3. Describe the learning environment in which you are most comfortable, i.e., small or large classes, seminars or lectures, internships, independent study or structured courses, etc.?

|______________________________________________________________________________________________________________|

4. Do you want to be challenged in a rigorous academic environment (Did you take a majority of Honors, AP or IB courses in high school?) or a less pressured academic environment? Why?

|______________________________________________________________________________________________________________|

5. What are your priorities? Are you going to college to study or have a good time?

|______________________________________________________________________________________________________________|

6. Are you an adventurer who enjoys a lot of change or do you prefer a predictable, unchanging environment? Do you want to spend the next four years with people like you or do you want to meet people from cultures and backgrounds different from your own?

|______________________________________________________________________________________________________________|

7. What do you do well or care about deeply? What interests, talents or skills do you want to pursue while in college? How do you want the school to support these interests?

|______________________________________________________________________________________________________________|