



The College Search Handbook

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Introduction

Of all the decisions you will make during the course of your life, only a handful will be as important as the choice of where to go to college. Only decisions such as whom to marry or what career to pursue will have as much impact on you, for where you choose to attend college will influence you every single day as long as you live.

The choice is important because college is important. The years you spend in college will be perhaps the most memorable and significant in your life. You will meet many of the closest friends you will ever have, be exposed to new ideas and ways of thinking, and grow in ways you never thought possible.

Just how that happens will depend to a large extent on the college or university you attend. There are more than 3,000 colleges and universities in the United States. Every single one of them is right for some people, and every single one of them is wrong for some people. They vary greatly with respect to size, location, facilities, academic program, and student population, and even more so in the intangible qualities that give each institution its own distinctive character. What makes a particular institution right or wrong is how well it meets your needs and expectations.

Selecting a college is not a decision that should be made casually. Statistics suggest that too many students do not make good choices. Of the nearly two million freshmen who will enter college in any given fall, less than half will still be around for graduation four years later.

How you choose is as important as where you choose.

The college selection process is an exciting opportunity to think about who you are, what kind of life you want, and how you are going to get where you want to be. You owe it to yourself to give the decision the kind of time and energy it deserves. The more you invest yourself in the process, the more likely you are to make a good choice.

The college admissions process is ultimately a three-step process. The more work you do at each step, the easier the process becomes. The three steps are:

Self-evaluation: *What do I want?*

Research: *What is available?*

Marketing/Applying: *How do I get in?*