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College decisions

Choosing a college

More than 2.5 million students start college each fall. For most of them, the first day on campus marks the end of a year or more of anxious planning, difficult choices, and plain hard work. If you are just beginning the college selection process, the planning, choices, and hard work are still ahead of you.

Chances are that you are both excited and bewildered by the prospect of choosing one college from the

more than 3,100 accredited colleges in the United States. Maybe you are confused by the amount of information (and misinformation) that is available and by contradictory advice about “good” and “bad” colleges. Or maybe you do not have enough information about colleges and are not sure how to get the facts you need. If you are like many college-bound students, you are worried about grades and test scores, and whether you will be accepted by any of the colleges you think would be right for you.

Relax. Choosing a college is an important and sometimes difficult task, but if you plan now and take it step by step, chances are you will make a decision that is good for you. Before you begin, take a look at some of the myths that complicate the college decision-making process.

Myth	Fact
“There’s one college that’s exactly right for me.”	Chances are that you won’t find a college that is perfect in every way—the one and only choice for you—but you probably will find many colleges that meet some of your most important needs and objectives, and where you would be happy.
“All colleges are alike, so why waste time choosing?”	No two colleges are exactly alike and, in fact, some are very different. To make sure that you make the best possible choice, the selection process should be a careful one.
“The cost of a college education (or <i>that</i> college) is beyond my reach.”	Millions of college students qualify for financial aid to cover the difference between what a college costs and what they can afford to pay. <i>Don’t rule out any college because of its cost until you find out whether you are eligible for financial aid.</i>
“That college is too selective. I’ll probably be rejected, so why apply?”	Don’t second-guess college admissions officers. If you think you qualify for a college you would like to attend, you should apply. You may not be accepted (depending on the number of applicants and the qualifications of the <i>other</i> applicants), but you will never know if you don’t try.
“If I can’t go to my first-choice college (or don’t like it when I get there), I’ll be unhappy for the next four years.”	Believe it or not, most students end up loving their second- or third- or fourth-choice college. The trick is to apply to several colleges where you think you would be happy. If it turns out to be a mistake, your decision is not irreversible. Thousands of students transfer to other colleges every year.

Why college?

If you are like many college-bound students, you probably made the decision to continue your education fairly early, even before you started high school. Looking back, you may find your reasons for making that

decision are no longer clear to you, or the reasons may have changed, just as you have changed in the past few years. Whether you have always known you were going to college, or whether you are considering it now for the first time, take this opportunity to think about your reasons. If you can state your objectives clearly at the start, your college search will be much easier.

"I've always known that I was going to go to college." (High school senior, Ohio)

Make a list of your reasons for going to college, putting your most important reason at the top of your list.

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Discuss your reasons for going to college with your parents, counselors, friends, and anyone else who can help you focus on your long-term goals. Don't worry if your reasons are not the same as those of your friends or advisers; you are an individual and your reasons have to make sense to you.

Ask yourself if the best way to achieve your objectives is by going to college. If you think it is, then you are off to a good start.

"Learning about colleges, selecting the ones I liked, and then deciding where to apply. . . those were the first really adult actions of my life. And it felt good."
(High school senior, California)

What are you like?

The picture you have of yourself — of your abilities, interests, attitudes, and personality — plays an important role in the college decision-making process. What you

know about yourself will help you define what you are looking for in a college. Try to get a clear picture of your strengths and weaknesses, your likes and dislikes.

The following questions may help you begin.

Academic. Are you a good student, average, below average? Does your school record reflect your capabilities? What kinds of courses have you taken in high school? Do you excel, or are you weak, in any area? Do you learn best in a competitive or relaxed academic climate?

Extracurricular. Do you participate in school activities or in community or local affairs? What clubs, sports, cultural groups do you belong to? Have you traveled a lot or not at all? What are your interests and hobbies?

Personal attitudes and values. Do you prefer a familiar environment or are you ready for a change? Do you work best independently or with others? Do you want to go out on your own or stay near family or friends?

Do you think others—your parents or a friend or a counselor—would agree with your self-description? How does your picture of yourself relate to your rea-

sons for going to college? Are your objectives realistic based on what you know about your interests and abilities?

“College is a . . . place in which one hopes to be able to be what one is, a place in which one hopes to be able to become what one is capable of becoming.”

(Donald E. Super, Preparing School Counselors in Educational Guidance)

College characteristics

"My brother's room was wall-to-wall catalogs, but he never got around to reading half of them. I'm going to be more systematic when I start looking at colleges."

(High school junior, Pennsylvania)

After you have explored your reasons for going to college and considered your own interests and abilities, it's time to investigate the kinds of higher education available to you.

More than 3,100 colleges, universities, technical institutes, junior colleges, seminaries, and other institutions of higher education are listed in *The College Handbook, 1988-89*. Almost all of them have programs for students entering college for the first time. You cannot learn about all these colleges in a few short months, so even before you start gathering information about individual colleges, you need to reduce the alternatives to a reasonable number without eliminating desirable choices.

Consider your list of objectives one at a time. Ask yourself what you need to know about a college in order to determine if you will be able to meet each of your objectives there.

Besides those college characteristics that are necessary for your educational objectives, there may be others that interest you for personal reasons. You may want to be sure there is a church or synagogue nearby. A certain climate may be important for your health or for the opportunity to participate in your favorite sport during the school year. If you plan on frequent visits home, you will want to know about available transportation, travel time, and cost. Make a list of your personal requirements and refer to it as you search for colleges that would be appropriate for you.

The following worksheet lists some college characteristics mentioned frequently by students as important in the selection process. Not all of them will matter to you, and some will seem more important than others. You can duplicate this checklist or use it as a model for creating your own characteristics list. Check only those characteristics that are important to *you*. To the right of each characteristic, indicate your specific requirement. Don't put down anything you are not sure about or try to limit your options too early in the college selection

process. At this stage your aim should be to find out about *many* colleges that meet your most important requirements. You can always come back and add to the list as your needs and interests become clearer to you.

To see how quickly your list of characteristics will help you narrow your choice of colleges, consider the sample worksheet completed by Emma Juarez. Emma will graduate from a high school in Washing-

Characteristic	Specific preference
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Location (state, city, region)	D.C., MARYLAND, NEW YORK
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Type (2-year community college, 4-year university, etc.)	4 YEAR COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Enrollment by sex (men, women, coed)	COED
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religious affiliation, if any	NONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Size of college (undergraduate enrollment)	SMALL TO MEDIUM
<input type="checkbox"/> Academic calendar	
<input type="checkbox"/> Campus environment	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Majors or course offerings	COMPUTER SCIENCES
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On-campus housing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Special academic programs	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cost	ABOUT \$7,000
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Financial aid	GRANTS, LOANS
<input type="checkbox"/> Student activities	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Athletics	SWIMMING
<input type="checkbox"/> Academic caliber of students	
<input type="checkbox"/> Student body characteristics	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social life	FRATERNITIES AND SORORITIES
<input type="checkbox"/> Competitive atmosphere of college	
<input type="checkbox"/> CREDIT BY EXAMINATION	AP ENGLISH AND MATH
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	

*Characteristic**Specific preference*

<input type="checkbox"/> Location (state, city, region)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Type (2-year community college, 4-year university, etc.)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Enrollment by sex (men, women, coed)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Religious affiliation, if any	
<input type="checkbox"/> Size of college (undergraduate enrollment)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Academic calendar	
<input type="checkbox"/> Campus environment	
<input type="checkbox"/> Majors or course offerings	
<input type="checkbox"/> On-campus housing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Special academic programs	
* <input type="checkbox"/> Cost	
<input type="checkbox"/> Financial aid	
<input type="checkbox"/> Student activities	
<input type="checkbox"/> Athletics	
<input type="checkbox"/> Academic caliber of students	
<input type="checkbox"/> Student body characteristics	
<input type="checkbox"/> Social life	
<input type="checkbox"/> Competitive atmosphere of college	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	

*Don't eliminate any college because of cost until you find out whether or not you qualify for financial aid.

ton, D.C., next June. She plans to study for a bachelor's degree in computer science and hopes to get a job that will offer her a good salary and the opportunity for career advancement. She is looking forward to living on campus but wants to be able to go home on some weekends to visit her family and friends. She would like to go to a coed college that is small enough that she won't feel "lost" but large enough to attract a diverse student body and offer a wide variety of campus social activities, including fraternities and sororities. She is a good swimmer and would like to compete in swimming at college.

How do Emma's requirements affect her alternatives? The *Handbook* lists 335 undergraduate institutions in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and New York, and 179 of them grant bachelor's degrees. Of these, 116 offer a major in computer and information sciences. By applying some of her requirements in turn, Emma developed a list of 15 colleges.

335 undergraduate colleges in the states selected

179 grant bachelor's degrees

116 offer a major in computer and information sciences

99 have no religious affiliation

93 are coed colleges

77 have college housing for women

50 offer swimming

39 have sororities

15 enroll more than 750 but less than 4,000 undergraduates

Emma used most of her important requirements in finding these 15 colleges. She followed her counselor's advice not to eliminate colleges on the basis of cost until she finds out whether she is eligible for financial aid at the colleges that meet all her other requirements. Emma's list would have looked very different if she had included costs as a factor. Only 3 of the 15 colleges that meet her needs report annual costs under \$7,000, and for 2 of the 3 institutions, that is the student budget for state residents only; out-of-state students pay a higher tuition cost although the total expenses are still less

than \$7,000. Emma could choose to expand her list by considering colleges in other nearby states or colleges with large enrollments.

You may find you want to change or modify your requirements as you search for colleges. By all means, stick to your educational objectives, but don't limit your other options until you are certain that a particular characteristic is essential to your college experience. Even then, it is possible that no college will meet all your needs. If this happens, you may have to decide which characteristics are most important to you.

Narrowing your list of colleges

At this point, your goal is to have a list of some 10 or 20 colleges to explore in more depth. *The College Handbook* and *Index of Majors*, and the *College Explorer*TM microcomputer program have been designed to help you with this task.

If you know the state or states where you want to attend college, turn to these states in *The College Handbook*. The first seven characteristics on the worksheet you completed will be found in the opening paragraph of each college description. If the college meets these basic requirements, read on. If you are looking for specific types of colleges, check the college indexes, where colleges are listed by features such as type, specialized study, size and campus environment, and religious affiliation.

If you know what you want to study, but not *where*, consult the *Index of Majors*. The *Index* lists over 500 major fields of study and the colleges, state by state, that offer them, and also lists colleges with special academic programs.

The microcomputer is a powerful tool to help you in the college selection process. For example, The College Board's *College Explorer* lets you choose the college features most important to you and then searches through the colleges described in the *Handbook* to give you information on those that match your requirements. Check to see if your guidance office or library has a copy of *College Explorer* for your use.

Once you know the names of the colleges that meet one or more of your major requirements, turn to their descriptions in the *Handbook*. (See the section "How to use *The College Handbook*" for detailed information on the full range of facts that may be given about colleges.) When you have completed your initial

"Reading the student newspaper from a college on the West Coast gave me a real feeling for the social and academic life the college could offer. I don't think I would have been interested in that college if I hadn't read the newspaper." (High school senior, New Jersey)

search and identified colleges you want to explore in more depth, you are ready for the next step.

Learning more about colleges

The more information you can gather on the colleges that interest you, the better your chance of making a good decision. Start a file folder for each college you are interested in. Keep in it copies of any correspondence you have with the institution as well as application forms and financial aid information. Make a record of any college interview or conversation you have while your impressions are still fresh. Jot down the names of people you meet while on campus or the names of recent alumni who might serve as sources of additional information.

College information

Your first contact with a college will probably be a letter expressing your interest in the institution and requesting additional information. Be specific about the information you want, and tell the college something about yourself. Check the letter for spelling and grammar. This college may turn out to be your first choice. Whether or not you keep a file on the college, the college will certainly keep a file on you.

College catalogs and descriptive materials. The catalog is a basic source of information about a college. Although catalogs vary widely, most contain detailed information on admissions, student life, academic offerings, degree requirements, costs, and financial aid. Often the catalog will come to you with inserts indicating tuition and fee changes, adjustments to the academic program, or revised deadlines. College catalogs sometimes are available in your school library or guidance office, or may be obtained by writing directly to the college. Keep the catalog on file and refer to it whenever you have questions about the college's procedures or policies.

In addition to the catalog, many colleges provide de-

scriptive materials highlighting important features of the institution. These include pictures of the campus and of student life that can help give you a feel for the college. Don't rely on pictures, however, or on an enthusiastic writer's description of the college in making a final decision. Read the college's materials carefully and critically, keeping your own objectives and needs clearly in mind.

College newspapers. If you are looking for current and candid information about day-to-day student life, try to obtain a copy of the student newspaper. Its news coverage, editorials, and listings of campus events could tell you a lot about college issues, student concerns, and campus activities.

College representatives. To learn more about a college that interests you, meet with a college representative. Someone with firsthand knowledge of the institution, who is qualified to answer your questions, can help you focus on what the college can do for you. Check with your school guidance office to see whether a recruitment or admissions officer from the college is scheduled to visit your high school. If not, write to the college requesting an appointment with a college representative in your area. Find out in advance whether a college you are considering will participate in a nearby college fair. Before you meet with a representative, draw up a list of questions about the college. Be prepared to explain what features of the college interest you most. The impression you make through an early contact with the college might be important if you decide to apply.

College visits. Probably the best way to learn more about a college is to visit the campus. If possible, plan to visit a college during the academic year, when students are in residence and classes are in session. Many colleges schedule regular campus tours conducted by student representatives and will arrange for you to spend the night in student housing if you write in advance.

During your visit, walk around campus until you have a feeling for its size and atmosphere. Find out about the things that are important to you. For example, if getting around campus is a concern, you should note

the distance from the dormitories to classroom buildings and from class to class. Would you walk, or do you need transportation? You might be interested in how old or new the buildings and facilities are, how crowded the classrooms are, how large the dormitory space is, and what the recreational facilities are like.

Plan to visit the student center, the cafeteria, and the library. Talk to students wherever you go. Ask about the social life on campus, student lifestyles, and anything else that might help you decide if you would be comfortable at the college. Check bulletin boards to find out about student activities and cultural events. Try to attend some classes and meet with students and faculty in the area that interests you. Ask about specific course requirements, program flexibility, average study time, and academic pressures.

If you plan to combine your campus visit with an admissions interview, be sure to write to the admissions office and set up an appointment before you arrive.

College students or recent alumni. If you are considering a college far from home, it may be impossible for you to visit the campus. Ask the college for names of *recent* graduates or current students who live in your area. If you plan in advance, you may be able to meet with students who are home on vacation. Often college alumni will be happy to talk to you about their alma mater. Impressions and opinions about current student life and campus activities can be useful to you.

High school guidance counselor and teachers

Your high school guidance counselor and teachers can be invaluable sources of information about colleges. Don't miss out on their expertise. Your guidance counselor is a trained professional who can not only help you make realistic decisions about college applications but also help you predict what the outcome of your decision will be. Consult your adviser as early as possible in the college selection process; discuss your goals and

objectives and get advice on which colleges might best help you accomplish your objectives. If you already have some colleges in mind, your counselor may be able to give you some facts about the number of students in your high school or region who applied and were accepted in previous years and what their college experience has been. Frequently your adviser has the most objective view of your school record and can give you sound advice on your chances of being accepted—or of being comfortable—at one or more of the colleges you are considering.

Parents and friends

According to a group of recent college-bound students, family and friends are among the best sources of information about colleges. Like admissions counselors, your parents and close friends can help not only in giving you information about colleges but also in evaluating the information in terms of your own objectives and needs. Discuss the colleges you are considering with your parents. Can they recommend alternatives? Do they think you should be considering other types of colleges? Why? Do you agree or disagree with their advice? Why? Go over your list of reasons for going to college and review your checklist of college characteristics. Based on your discussions, is there anything you would like to change?

Your friends, too, can be a good source of information and advice. Find out what colleges they are considering and why. If one of the colleges they are considering also meets your major requirements, add it to your list for further exploration. Are any of your friends or classmates considering applying to the same colleges you are? Pool your resources and exchange information. Share the college selection process with them. Talk to recent graduates from your high school and ask them about their experiences at college. Even when the final decision is yours, it often helps to talk it over with people whose opinions you trust and can rely on.

"My parents helped me evaluate all the college information. They listened and sometimes gave advice, but never tried to make up my mind for me."
(High school senior, Texas)

Deciding where to apply

"You can play games with yourself. You can say it's not important or that you don't care. But deep down, you spend half your time worrying." (High school senior, Illinois)

You will probably find that the most difficult part of the college selection process is trying to predict what will happen as a result of your decision. Will you be accepted by a college if you apply? Will you be happy at the "college of your choice?" Unfortunately, even good decisions cannot guarantee successful results. By its nature, decision-making involves risks. You will be in a better position, however, to judge the degree of risk and uncertainty if you do a thorough job of collecting and evaluating information.

College admissions: Predicting your chances

What are your chances of being accepted at the college or colleges you prefer? According to a 1980 report on undergraduate admissions policies published by the College Board, 83 percent of all college applicants can expect to be accepted by their first-choice colleges. Your chances of being admitted to a particular college, however, depend on the type of institution you are considering.

Most colleges fall into one of three categories of accessibility:

Open admissions colleges. These accept virtually all interested students who have a high school degree or its equivalent and even that requirement is sometimes waived for applicants above a certain age. Some open admissions institutions have selective requirements for specific programs such as nursing. These colleges report accepting 96 percent of their applicants.

Selective colleges. These colleges offer admission to all or most applicants who meet their explicit requirements. The requirements may vary widely from college to college and may be extremely rigorous, but you can be fairly sure of admission if you meet their specifications. The vast majority of colleges in this country classify themselves as "selective."

Competitive colleges. Like selective institutions, competitive colleges have explicit admissions require-

ments, but more applicants meet those requirements than they are willing or able to accommodate. You cannot be sure of admission to a competitive college, even though you satisfy its entrance requirements, because you will be competing with other equally qualified applicants. On the average, competitive colleges offer admission to about 56 percent of their applicants. In the face of such odds, you would be wise to apply to more than one college.

To find out whether a college you are considering has a competitive, selective, or open admissions policy, read the College ABCs at the beginning of the description of each college. The capsule ABCs tell you if the college has an open admissions policy. If the college has a selective admissions policy, the percentage of accepted applicants appears, followed by information on the academic background of the college's enrolled freshmen. In addition, most colleges list the numbers of students who applied, were accepted, and enrolled. This information helps you estimate your chances of admission at a particular college.

Read through the admissions section in the college's description carefully. Colleges list their selection criteria in order of importance. Unless you find that you are clearly not qualified, you should probably continue to consider a college rather than assume that you would not be admitted. Leave that decision to the college.

Factors mentioned most frequently by colleges as playing an important role in their admissions decisions are academic performance in high school (as indicated by school grade average or class rank), test scores, pattern of high school subjects completed, recommendations, and personal qualifications, such as motivation, special skills or abilities, leadership capabilities, community or church involvement, and good moral character. Compare your own achievements in these areas with the colleges' stated requirements. Note that the more competitive the college, the more likely it is to consider personal qualifications in admissions decisions. The contact you have with an admissions officer

through your interview, essay, and recommendations can increase your chances of being admitted to an institution.

Number of colleges to apply to

There is no ideal number of applications for every student. A good rule of thumb is to file as many applications as you need—*but not more than you need*—to ensure that you will be accepted by a college you prefer. That may be one application or several, depending on your own requirements and on the admissions and financial aid procedures of the colleges you choose.

You have to make the final decision yourself on how many colleges you apply to, but most educators would advise you to limit the number of applications. Your high school guidance counselor may make a strong recommendation on the total number of applications you should file. Don't apply indiscriminately. Think about your reasons for multiple applications.

If you are applying for financial aid and are not certain of receiving the aid you need, you may want to increase the number of applications you file. If you are considering several competitive colleges and cannot be certain that you will be admitted to any of them, you may want to apply to them all. If you cannot choose between two colleges and believe that extra time will help you make a final decision, then apply to both. You should certainly apply to at least one college that meets all your requirements (including costs) and where you are quite certain of being admitted. Don't apply to colleges that you don't want to attend simply to satisfy someone else or to prove that you can get in.

Early Decision Plan

You can cut down on the number of applications you file without reducing your chances of admission or financial aid at any college by applying under the Early Decision Plan. If you are sure of the college you want to attend and think you are likely to be accepted, consider applying for early decision under a single- or first-

choice plan. (See the Glossary for more information.)

Both plans require that

- you (not the college) initiate the application
- you complete your application for admission (and financial aid, if appropriate) early in the fall of your senior year and no later than November 15
- you take all required tests *before the fall* of your senior year

The college will then notify you of its admissions and financial aid decisions by December 15. If you are *not accepted* under early decision, your application is reconsidered without bias under the college's regular admissions plan.

Applying to college

The procedures for applying for admission vary from one college to another, but usually the first step is to get an application form and instructions from the college. (If you requested an application when you first wrote to the institution, it should be in your college file.) Follow the college's instructions carefully. Make sure you know *what* you must supply and *when* it must reach the college.

What colleges require

Application fee. Most colleges charge an application fee, usually not refundable even if your application is rejected. Many colleges will waive this fee for applicants from low-income families, such as those who are eligible for public assistance. If you think you qualify, ask your counselor about the procedures to follow.

Application form. Almost all colleges require that you submit an official application form providing information about your background, previous education, and college plans. At many institutions the form is brief and uncomplicated and can be completed very quickly. At other colleges, particularly competitive institutions,

"Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not."

(Thomas Huxley, *Technical Education*)

"I was positive that my school record wasn't good enough for certain colleges, but my guidance counselor persuaded me to apply, and I was accepted by two out of three colleges I didn't think I'd get into." (College freshman, Colorado)

you will be asked to provide detailed information about your academic record, extracurricular activities, work experience, interests, talents, and achievements. Be prepared to give the time and thought needed to provide a complete picture of yourself for the college to consider.

If you are applying to more than one college within a system, such as part of a state university system, check to see whether you need to file more than one application. Many systems have standard applications that can be used for more than one college within the system. Some groups of colleges or consortiums may also share application forms. The most widely used standard application form is the Common Application distributed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Colleges that accept the Common Application are listed in the College Indexes section at the end of this introduction. You may be able to reduce the number of individual applications you need to complete if the colleges that interest you accept a standard form like the Common Application.

Secondary school or college transfer record. You may receive a form for an official of your high school or college to complete with a transcript of your courses and final marks, test scores, and teacher and counselor recommendations. If this is included in your admissions materials, take it to your guidance office as soon as you have completed your part of the application. Some colleges send this form directly to the school or college after receiving your application.

Admissions test scores. Many colleges require that you take one or more standardized admissions tests. The most common tests used are the College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and Achievement Tests (ACH) and the American College Testing Program Assessment (ACT). Plan to take the tests at least six weeks before the college's application deadline to allow enough time for the score report to reach the college. Use the Schedule of 1988-89 Test Registration and Administration Dates on the next page for planning purposes. If you have already taken the SAT or ACT and are requesting that your scores be sent to a college not

listed on your original application, allow at least four weeks for the score report to reach the college.

If you take the SAT or the Achievement Tests, your scores will be sent to you along with information that can help you and your parents and counselors in the college planning process. The report you will receive displays your scores in a way that indicates the range of your abilities and helps you estimate what your scores might be if you took the test again. It also reports back to you the information about yourself that you provided on the ATP registration form (educational background, type of college you wish to attend), and lists admissions and financial aid information for those colleges that, as you requested on your registration form, will receive your scores.

Letter of recommendation. Some colleges, especially private institutions, require that you submit one or more letters of recommendation from a teacher, counselor, clergyman, alumnus, or adult member of the community. As a courtesy, you should give people ample time to complete the recommendations and meet the college deadline.

Essay. A personal essay or autobiographical statement is required by some institutions, particularly four-year, private colleges. The essay can be especially important if you are not able to have an interview. Whether the college requests a general autobiographical statement or an essay on a specific theme, you should take the opportunity to express your individuality in a way that will set you apart from other applicants.

Interview. Many colleges require or recommend an interview of all or some of their applicants. Whether required or not, it is to your benefit to set up an interview—this is your chance to express personally your background, your interests and goals, and why you are interested in the college. An interview can be very important at institutions that have many applicants competing for admission. The interview also is your opportunity to assess the college. For this reason, an on-campus interview is best, but most colleges will arrange for you to be interviewed near your home if you

Schedule of 1988-89 test registration and administration dates

1988-89 ACT test dates*

<i>Test date</i>	<i>Registration date</i>	<i>Late registration</i>
October 22, 1988	September 23, 1988	October 11, 1988
December 10, 1988	November 11, 1988	November 29, 1988
February 11, 1989*	January 13, 1989	January 31, 1989
April 15, 1989	March 17, 1989	April 4, 1989
June 10, 1989	May 12, 1989	May 30, 1989

*There is no February test administration in New York State.

1988-89 SAT® test dates*

<i>Test date</i>	<i>Registration date</i>	<i>Late registration</i>
October 8, 1988**	September 16, 1988	No late registration this month
November 5, 1988	September 30, 1988	October 13, 1988
December 3, 1988	October 28, 1988	November 9, 1988
January 28, 1989	December 23, 1988	January 4, 1989
March 11, 1989	February 3, 1989	February 15, 1989
May 6, 1989	March 31, 1989	April 12, 1989
June 3, 1989	April 28, 1989	May 10, 1989

*The current New York Standardized Testing Law does not permit the full testing schedule listed above. Students should consult the New York State *Registration Bulletin* for the most up-to-date information on test dates in New York State.

**Offered only in California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas.

1988-89 Achievement Test dates

<i>Test date</i>	<i>Registration date</i>	<i>Late registration</i>
November 5, 1988	September 30, 1988	October 13, 1988
December 3, 1988	October 28, 1988	November 9, 1988
January 28, 1989	December 23, 1988	January 4, 1989
May 6, 1989	March 31, 1989	April 12, 1989
June 3, 1989	April 28, 1989	May 10, 1989

live far from the college. Be prepared with your own questions. You can use this opportunity to get the information you need about a college to make your decision.

Audition/portfolio. If you are applying for admission to a particular program at the college, such as music, art, or design, you may have to demonstrate or document prior work. Be sure to check each college's requirements in the *Handbook* descriptions.

When to apply

You should begin the application process as soon as you have identified the college or colleges where you wish to apply. This should be as early as possible in your senior year, or at the end of your junior year if you are seeking early admission.

Colleges may state a closing date or deadline for applying, but this is often no more than a guideline. A

college may cut off applications earlier than its final date if it fills its class before then, or it may continue to accept applications beyond that date if it still has room for more students. If you decide you want to apply to a college whose application deadline has passed, telephone or write the admissions office to find out if applications are still being accepted. As a general rule, be aware of college deadlines, but *set your own deadlines for completion of your part of the process*. Make a checklist to help you outline the admissions requirements and deadlines for each college. If you are applying for aid, include financial aid deadlines so that you have a central list of the college's requirements.

When you hear from the colleges

Waiting to hear from the college or colleges of your choice is sometimes the hardest part of the college selection process. Even after you have heard from the colleges, you still may face some difficult decisions.

If you are accepted by more than one college...

If you applied and were admitted to several colleges, you have to decide which to attend. You may already know your order of preference, but if you are still unsure, you may have to go through the decision-making process again, clarifying your objectives, getting additional information, and talking to your parents and counselors. Don't be surprised if all your efforts at deciding still leave you with two or more colleges that seem to offer equal prospects. It probably means that you have done such a good job of selecting that you will be happy with whichever college you attend.

If you hear from your second-choice college first...

Your final decision can be complicated if you have to respond to your second- or third-choice college before having heard from your first-choice college. Often that response includes a substantial first payment of a tuition fee or dormitory charge. If this happens to you, ask your counselor for help in deciding on a course of action. Some students are able to get a preliminary, if unofficial, decision from their first-choice college by calling or writing the admissions office. Others solve the problem by making the required first payment to the second-choice college as a kind of insurance premium to cover the possibility of rejection by the first-choice college.

If you are not accepted at a college you want to attend...or at any college...

Your world won't suddenly end if you are not accepted at the college you dreamed of, or at any of the colleges to which you applied. First, give yourself a day to feel dejected, but only one, since you still have options open to you, and probably not much time in which to pursue them. Next, talk to your parents and guidance counselor to get their advice about colleges you may not have considered seriously during your first round of applications. Your counselor is the best source of information about colleges that may still be accepting applications. Some colleges with closing dates may still accept applications after that date if they have places open in their freshman classes. You may also want to check the index in this book for colleges with no closing dates or late closing dates. And remember, it is possible to enroll in one college for a year or two and then apply and be accepted for transfer to a college that originally did not accept you.

If you are not offered the financial aid you need...

You may have to choose between different aid packages offered by different institutions. Your first-choice college, for example, may offer less aid in relation to costs than your second or third choices. Try to determine if there are other resources that you can tap for additional financial support. Only you can decide if your preference is so strong that it justifies the additional financial burden.

Looking ahead

If you follow the steps described in this section, you will probably find the colleges that offer you the best chance of getting the most from your college experience. There is no guarantee, of course, that things will turn out just as you had hoped. In fact, you can be sure that they won't, because you will change during your college years, the college will change, and most of all the world will change in ways that can't be foreseen. But you will also be developing your ability to adapt to change and to meet new situations, so there is an excellent chance that the differences you will encounter will add up to an even better college experience than you had expected.

Paying for college

Comparing college costs

The *Handbook* descriptions include a section on annual expenses in which the typical expenses for undergraduate students living on campus are shown for a nine-month academic year. Keep in mind that college costs, like most other costs, are rising. All expenses are likely to be somewhat higher by the time you enter college and they will continue to rise while you attend. Be sure to verify current costs with the institution. Use the worksheet below to compare college costs.

The cost of going to college is something that you and your parents should think about early in the college selection process. You must have a clear idea of the costs at an institution in order to know whether you will need financial assistance to pay the bill.

Costs differ from one college to another, so you should make an estimate for each college you are considering. There are two categories of college expenses to think about—direct educational costs and living costs. See the figure on the next page.

Financial aid

Millions of students receive financial aid to help them continue their education. You do not have to be poor to qualify for financial aid, because aid is based on what you and your family are *able to pay*. Even students from families with high incomes are often eligible for aid, especially at higher cost colleges.

Student expense budget	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
(Write in college name)	-----	-----	-----	-----
Tuition and fees	-----	-----	-----	-----
Room/board*	-----	-----	-----	-----
Books and supplies	-----	-----	-----	-----
Other expenses	-----	-----	-----	-----
Transportation†	-----	-----	-----	-----
Other (such as cost of child care, expenses because of handicap)	-----	-----	-----	-----
Total budget	-----	-----	-----	-----

*You should consider these expenses to your family if you live at home.

†You should add your own estimate of the round trips you will make to your home. Students living at home should figure the costs of daily transportation to the college. College estimates of transportation costs are listed in *The College Cost Book, 1988-89*.