

Choosing a College

Choosing the college that's right for you will probably be one of the most important decisions you have ever had to make. But **RELAX**- with over 3,100 colleges in the United States, there are lots of right colleges for every student. The only wrong college choices are uninformed choices. If you wait until the last minute to begin choosing a college, you may not have time to do a thorough college search and you may be forced to select institutions on the basis of one or two factors alone. For instance, you may choose to apply to a particular institution because a few of your friends plan to attend or because your parents or siblings have attended there. Similarly, you may be tempted to apply to colleges because of their reputation alone. Remember, it's important to be less concerned with gaining admission to a "good school" than to one that would be good for you. To identify five to ten colleges that would be a good match for you, consider the following **Three Steps**:

STEP ONE: Know your personal and academic profile

- ✘ **PERSONAL:** Start by learning about yourself and making some decisions about your career goals. Use the Eureka program in the Career/Transfer Center to assess your interests, abilities and work values and then research careers that might meet those areas. You may also consider taking Guidance 96 (Career and Life Planning) at San José City College which focuses on self-assessment, career development, and/or college success. Interview someone who works in the field that interests you. Volunteer or do an internship in the career field that interests you. Find out how careers link with certain college majors by using the resources available in the Career/Transfer Center. Meet with a counselor to discuss your educational and career goals.
- ✘ **ACADEMIC:** Make a transfer file and keep a copy of your transcripts from all colleges you have attended (and high school, if applicable) and any awards or honors you have received. Take this file with you whenever you meet with a college admission representative.

STEP TWO: Know what you're looking for in a college

- ✘ **ACADEMIC PROGRAMS/MAJORS:** What is your chosen major? Even though many colleges might have your major program, the courses you might take at one college may be completely different than the courses at another because the focus of the department may differ. For example, communication studies at one school may focus on mass media and journalism, where at another school may relate more to language development and interpersonal communications. What do you want to focus on? If you have a particular major in mind, you may want to find an institution that specializes in that field or has outstanding faculty in that area. If you have a career in mind, you may want to pick a college that has internship opportunities or strong recruitment programs targeted for your field of interest.
- ✘ **ADMISSION DIFFICULTY:** How difficult is it to be admitted to this campus and/or major? Are you looking for a highly selective college and/or major that admits only the top few applicants each year? Does your academic record meet the academic and course requirements for admission at a highly selective college?
- ✘ **LOCATION:** Where do you want to go to college? Would attending school at a distance from your family and friends be desirable, or would it make you lonely? Cities can offer a

wide assortment of activities, exposure to new ideas and cultural exchange. They can give you access to more musical, theater, and performing and fine arts events than you could ever hope to attend. Some of the disadvantages of a city campus are the noise, commotion and stress of urban life and the higher cost of living. A campus located in a smaller town or rural area may encourage students to participate in more campus-related or community-oriented activities.

- ✘ **SIZE:** Many large campuses, especially those with graduate schools, offer research facilities and students at these universities can become involved in top-level research. However, you may find yourself in classes of 200 or more students that are taught by graduate students. At a smaller college, you are likely to find smaller classes, more individualized instruction, fewer teaching assistants and a smaller faculty. As one of only a few thousand students, you will usually find more personalized contact.
- ✘ **STUDENT POPULATION:** Do you want to go to an all-women's or an all-men's college or a co-ed school? How about a historically black college? Some colleges are known for their student body's religious heritage, political activity or dedication to the fine arts or research. College publications will begin to reveal these characteristics, but it's important to feel like you "fit", and the best way to determine that is to visit the campus for yourself.
- ✘ **EXTRA-CURRICULAR/SOCIAL LIFE:** Are there any activities that you know you want to participate in? Most colleges have competitive or intramural sports teams. Is it important for you to attend a college that has a particular sports team to play on or to watch? Do you want to participate in a fraternity or sorority? A particular club? Do you want to spend a semester or academic year on an international study-abroad program?
- ✘ **COST:** Colleges can range in cost from publicly funded state colleges and universities to private and independent universities. Don't let this be the biggest factor influencing your college choice. Surprisingly, due to the manner in which financial aid is allocated, attending a more expensive private college might end up being your most affordable option. The majority of college students receive some form of financial aid.

STEP THREE: Know where to find the answers

- ✘ **YOUR COUNSELOR:** SJCC Counselors can help you find answers to your questions about various college options. It is strongly recommended that you meet with your counselor on a regular basis to ensure you are on the right track.
- ✘ **THE CAREER/TRANSFER CENTER:** The CTC has a wealth of resources to assist you in your college search. It is located on the 2nd floor of the Student Center in Rm. SC-216A.
- ✘ **COLLEGE REPRESENTATIVES:** SJCC invites representatives from 4-year colleges to campus to meet with students on a regular basis. These representatives want to help you figure out if their campus is a good fit for you. Sign up to meet with a representative in the Career/Transfer Center.
- ✘ **COLLEGE VISITS:** There is no substitute for a college visit to figure out whether a school is right for you. Most colleges give tours daily, so call ahead to schedule a time. Make sure you visit when school is in session, and talk to current students, if possible. Don't be afraid to ask questions!

Remember, your final college choices should include one or two "long shots," four or five "realistic," and one or two "highly likely" schools. Good luck with your search, especially with your final college choice. Be diligent and it will certainly pay off!