

Finding colleges that fit

It's about YOU!

Finding the right college means searching for a program that meets your needs academically, socially, and financially. Avoid the trap of applying to a certain college or program just because you've heard the name or because "everyone else is." This is about you; it's *your* search. Keep in mind that there are likely to be a number of colleges that fit your "must haves."

Give some thought to ...

Type of college

Do I want a two-year college, a four-year college or university, or a technical/vocational program? Coed or single gender? Religious affiliation?

One- and two-year schools may offer a general education or specialized job-training program. Four-year programs include general education requirements in addition to major coursework.

Major/academic program

What do I want to learn? What field of study interests me?

A college "major" is a particular subject area — such as education, engineering, or history — in which a student concentrates his or her studies. Other options to consider include internships, study abroad, and opportunities for interdisciplinary and self-designed majors.

Size

What size student body, campus, and classes are right for me?

Smaller colleges may mean you might get to know most of the students; larger schools may have more academic and extracurricular activities. Do you want individualized attention? Regular access to faculty? Check the faculty-student ratio. Can you picture yourself in a large lecture auditorium, or would you prefer small group discussions? Remember that class sizes typically get smaller as you move further along in your major, away from introductory classes.

Selectivity

How do I compare academically to accepted students? What chance do I have of getting in?

A school's selectivity may be based on the average GPA (grade point average), class rank, and SAT/ACT scores of admitted students, as well as the percentage of applicants accepted. Refer to each college's Web site or catalog for its specific admissions requirements.

Cost-saving tip: Applying to schools at which you're near the top of the applicant pool academically may qualify you for more merit-based financial aid from the college.

Not sure?

No problem! Use the interactive **VT Guidance Central** online tool. Go to www.vsac.org and select "VT Guidance Central" in the Quick Links box on the home page. Once you're in VT Guidance Central, use "Choices Explorer" and "Choices Planner" to search for majors and schools that match your interests.

Location

Do I want to stay close to home or go farther away? City, rural, or suburban?

Choose a location and community that appeals to you.

Campus atmosphere, student life, and diversity

What type of “personality” does the campus have? How do students spend their time? How diverse is the student body? What opportunities and activities are available?

Every campus has a different “feel,” which you can best get a sense of by visiting the campus and talking with students. Also look at the school newspaper, talk with faculty and staff, and check out campus activities, housing, and food. Do students stay on campus on the weekends? How much time do they spend on academics each day/week? Are there support services available? Look for campus activities and volunteer opportunities that interest you. Consider the demographic makeup of the students on campus (where they are from, what background they have), too. Go with your gut feeling: Can you imagine yourself as a student there?

Cost and affordability

What is the cost of attending college, and what type of financial aid is available?

Total costs cover tuition, room and board, fees, books, and personal expenses. Affordability is a major concern for most families, so have that discussion early on. Don’t immediately rule out a college because it seems too expensive — what you actually pay may be well below the “sticker price.” Consider applying to several colleges in different price ranges, and check with VSAC and college financial aid offices about your options. For an overview of college financing, go to www.vsaccollegetips.org.

Cost-saving tip: By taking your general education coursework at a community college and then transferring to a four-year program to focus on your major, you may be able to substantially cut your college costs.

See yourself there

Each student’s college “wish list” will look different. Think about the environment that will best help you meet your goals. View “friendly” advice with an eye on what will work for you. Once you’re at college, you’ll be making new friends and heading off on new adventures. So as you embark on this different phase of your life, concentrate on the combination of factors that seem best for you and your family’s situation.

Create a chart to organize and compare potential colleges. You can find a sample chart on page 45 of the *Planning Guide for Grades 7–12* (available under “Publications” at www.vsac.org or by e-mail to publications@vsac.org).

Factors	My “Wish List”	(college name)
Major/academic program	good science program, possible bio major	
Selectivity	my GPA = 3.2 so far??	
Type of college	4-year? (maybe 2-year & transfer)	
Size	some big classes Ok; want lots of options	
Location	near a small city	
Campus atmosphere, student life, and diversity	outdoorsy, eco-club, friendly, ultimate frisbee	
Cost and affordability	need to talk to parents!! find job this summer	

Organize the clutter

One thing’s certain: the paper load will only grow during senior year! Organize application materials, college deadlines, and financial aid forms in 7- to 12-pocket file folders. Use one folder for application info from colleges and a second multiple-pocket folder for keeping track of financial aid deadlines and forms.

Students:

Your parents will want to organize the paper even if you don’t!