



## Words to the Wise College-Bound Parent

**Getting into college can be one of life's biggest challenges. Support and guidance can be incredibly helpful, especially from parents.**

Choosing a college is the first step in your child's life beyond high school—a life that must eventually be managed independently. Here are some ideas for giving support, direction, and reassurance.

### Help with Planning for College

**Nurture commitment.** If your child has a serious interest, find a way to support that interest. It could be a sport, a hobby, community service, even a part-time job. Colleges look favorably on students who show a commitment over time to a pursuit that helps them develop as individuals. This commitment shows tenacity, maturity, leadership, and growth—the very qualities that pay off in college.

**Educate yourself about paying for college.** Learn about the financial aid process and the many ways to save and find money for college. CollegeData's [Pay Your Way](#) section thoroughly covers college financing. Our [College Net Price Calculator](#) helps you see what a specific college might actually cost your family. Our [Scholarship Finder](#) lists over 580,000 awards worth more than \$4.3 billion.

**Talk with your child about money.** It is never too soon to talk with your child about how the family is going to pay for college. What is your level of financial support and how will that limit college choices? How much do you expect your child to contribute? How much debt is acceptable to you or your child?

**Keep an eye on your expectations.** If you have opinions about your child's college choices (such as financial or geographic limits) or suggestions (such as specific colleges) let your child know up front. If your expectations include admission to a famous, highly selective school, remember that these schools turn down a great many highly qualified students every year. There are hundreds of other colleges with academics just as rigorous, campuses just as beautiful, and students just as likely to succeed in life. Some of these could be a great fit—or an even better fit—for your child.

**Keep an eye on the college list.** Some students agonize over their lists, not really sure what they are looking for in a college. Other students may not put enough thought into their lists, opting to include only local colleges or schools their friends are applying to. Here are some ideas to help you put together a great list.

- If your child isn't sure what he or she wants in a college, both of you should read [What Is Your Ideal College?](#) It features a comprehensive list of college qualities you can use as a starting point. Campus visits are also helpful (see below).
- [College Match](#) can help you and your child identify good candidates for the college list. You can search for colleges by location, major, size, selectivity, and other key qualities.
- Your child's list should include a range of admission chances. This allows a student to go for a dream school while ensuring that he or she will get in somewhere. CollegeData's [College Chances Calculator](#) can estimate your child's admission chances from "reach" to "maybe" to "good bet."
- [Deciding Which Colleges to Apply to](#) walks you through the process of building a list of colleges with the features you want and a range of admission chances.

**Help your child visit colleges.** No brochure or website can tell you what a campus is really like. Letting your child visit college campuses is one of the biggest gifts you can offer. There are two types of visits:

- *A road trip to see campuses.* This may only be a matter of touring each campus for a few hours, attending an information session, and talking to a few students. This tour can open a student's eyes to what college experiences he or she really likes—or doesn't. If time and money are issues, visiting local colleges can help a student see what college life is all about, even if he or she has no intention of attending those schools.
- *Longer visits (preferably overnight) to schools your child is seriously considering.* These visits let your child hang out with current students, attend classes, talk to professors, and get as close to the real student experience as possible. Most colleges welcome such visits. If time or money is a problem, consider sending your child alone or ask for financial assistance from the college.

For more tips, see [Get the Most from College Visits](#).

## Help During the Application Period

**The essay.** The required essay is often your child's first experience writing something personal and meaningful. While some students savor the challenge, many fear it, dread it, or at least find it frustrating. Most high schools help students get started, but many students welcome a parent's editorial eye to check for coherence, proper grammar, and errors.

**Organization.** Call it prompting, reviewing, reminding, or even nagging—many students need help with the dizzying number of deadlines that accompany college applications. There are deadlines for recommendation letters, financial aid forms, essays, tests, and scholarship applications. Parents are experienced organizers. While you shouldn't run the show, most students will appreciate your help in this area.

**Encouragement.** Be your child's sounding board. Don't interrogate, but ask good questions and let your child talk through their worries. Believe it or not, many students are afraid they won't get into any colleges. Reassurance—and cheerleading—from mom or dad can provide a big boost.

## The Envelope, Please!

**Choosing.** Hopefully, your child will get into a top-choice school. But sometimes deciding which college to attend is not obvious. Help your child weigh the variables, such as financial aid, size, distance from home, etc. Another visit may be in order. Remind your child there is no perfect school.

**Rejection.** Being denied or waitlisted is a common and natural outcome of applying to college. Your child may take it very hard. But schools have many reasons for denial. It should not be taken as a personal judgment. Help your child focus on the acceptances in hand and the ones that may be on the way.

**Letting go.** The writer Bill Bryson had this moment of epiphany on his son's first day at college. "It wasn't until we . . . left him there looking touchingly lost and bewildered amid an assortment of cardboard boxes and suitcases in a spartan room not unlike a prison cell that it really hit home that he was vanishing out of our lives and into his own." Of course your child won't vanish—these days it's easy to stay in touch. But he or she is now an adult, if perhaps an adult taking baby steps.

## What's Next?

- For more perspectives from parents who "let go" after sending their children off to college, visit the Parents section of our [Bookstore](#). See *Letting Go: A Parent's Guide to Understanding the College Years* and *You're On Your Own (But I'm Here if You Need Me)*.
- Take a look at [College Buzz](#), where real students describe how their parents helped (or didn't help) when they applied to college.

## Get Smart About College Rankings - From CollegeData.com

It's easy to assume that a highly ranked college is a good choice. But is a "best" college really the best one for you?

The buzz around college rankings is impossible to miss. Putting some "top" schools on your college list may look like an obvious and easy decision. But rankings should support—not replace—your own research.

### **Who's on First: You or the Rankings?**

It takes time and careful thought to find colleges that will fit you well. It might be tempting to let a college ranking point the way. But before you start adding top-ranked colleges to your list, ask yourself the questions below.

### **How Does the Ranking Define a "Good" College?**

It can be hard to see why some colleges get to the top—or even get on the list in the first place. Look for an explanation of what college qualities are valued—and how they are measured.

- Each ranking assumes that certain college qualities are more important than others. For example, some rankings highly value academic strength. Some highly value the quality of student life.
- Some rankings rely on subjective input, such as opinions of college professionals or students. Others use objective data, such as qualifications of entering freshmen, graduation rates, or sizes of college endowments.

### **Alternatives to College Rankings**

The **National Survey of Student Engagement** conducts an annual survey of college students to measure effective instructional practices at their colleges.

**Colleges That Change Lives** features 40 small colleges where it is easy to forge friendships—and where students and faculty are integrally involved in campus life.

### **What Does It Take to Get to the Top of the List?**

The organization conducting the ranking should provide an explanation of how it collects data and opinions, and how it weights these factors.

- The famous *U.S. News* ranking gives a great deal of weight to a "peer assessment survey," in which college presidents rate other colleges similar to their own. They are not asked how familiar they actually are with those colleges.
- For its "America's Best College Buys," *Forbes* bases 25 percent of the ranking on student ratings of professors. But participation in the student ratings is not monitored. Anyone, including those outside the college, can rate a professor.

## Can the Ranking Help Your College Search?

A ranking might be useful if it reflects what you want in a college. Rankings can also educate you about college qualities you may have overlooked, such as campus safety and rate of admission to graduate schools.

- Look at specialized rankings. Students interested in a college's environmental policies might take a look at the annual Sierra Club college ranking. *U.S. News* ranks national liberal arts colleges and regional universities, which might include schools you may have overlooked.
- Student opinion rankings can give you an insider's take on dorm food, the off-campus atmosphere, what students do for fun, and more. Just be sure the opinions gathered are only from students at that college.

To explore a range of rankings, take a look at the list of undergraduate college rankings from [University of Illinois](#).

## Turn to the Ranking That Counts the Most—Yours!

Do yourself a favor. Don't start with the ranking, start with you. The most meaningful college ranking is based on qualities that make a college a good fit for you. The colleges you put on your list should be ranked highly—by you.

## What's Next?

- Check out [Looking at Colleges Side by Side](#) to find out how to make your own college ranking.
- Visit the [Admissions Tracker](#) to see college lists of students applying to your favorite colleges—and get ideas for your own list.
- Use [College Match](#) to find colleges that meet your needs.

## college 411

### THE ROAD TO COLLEGE

- Why Go to College?
- Six Ways College Is Different from High School
- Steps to Launch Your Journey to College
- Eight Milestones on the Road to College
- Your Get-Into-College Planning Calendar
- Meet Your College Admission Support Team
- Six Best College Planning Jobs for Parents

### COLLEGE FIT IS IMPORTANT

- What Is Your Ideal College?
- What's Your College Fit, Academically Speaking?
- What's Your College Fit, Financially Speaking?

### MAJOR AND DEGREE OPTIONS

- The ABCs of College Majors
- How to Choose a Major
- Your College Degree Options
- Is a Combined Degree Program Right for You?

## prepare & apply

### STRENGTHEN YOUR CHANCES

- Challenge Yourself: Show Colleges You're Ready
- The Benefits of Taking Honors Courses
- Get Credit with Advanced Placement
- Take AP Online
- What's the International Baccalaureate?
- Taking College Classes in High School
- Tips to Improve Your GPA
- Extracurriculars Give You an Edge

### COLLEGE ADMISSIONS TESTS

- Know Your College Admissions Tests
- PSAT: What It Is and Why It Matters
- The SAT: What You Need to Know
- The ACT: What You Need to Know
- Getting SAT and ACT Test Fees Waived
- ACT or SAT? Which is Best for You?
- Tips to Improve Your SAT and ACT Scores
- SAT Subject Tests: What You Need to Know
- What Are Your Test Prep Options?
- What Is a Test Optional College?

### HOW COLLEGES ADMIT STUDENTS

- What Matters Most to Colleges
- How Colleges Make Admissions Decisions
- How to Find Out What a College Wants

### FEATURES THAT SET COLLEGES APART

- What Makes Colleges Different?
- What Makes a College Famous?
- College Size: Small, Medium or Large?
- Who's on Campus?
- College Setting and Location Matter
- Understanding College Selectivity
- Should Your College Be Public or Private?
- Outcomes Matter: Do Students Succeed?
- Is a College Honors Program Right for You?
- Seven Signs Studying Abroad Is Right for You
- Considering U.S. Military Academies

### MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

- How to Choose Your Top College Priorities
- Coping with People's Opinions About College
- Should You Consider a Gap Year?
- Words to the Wise College Bound Parent

### COLLEGE SEARCH STRATEGIES

- Five Steps to Begin Your College Search
- Starting Your College List
- Get Smart About College Rankings
- Finding Colleges with Strength in Your Major

### YOUR PLAN TO GET INTO COLLEGE

- How Likely Are You to Get In?
- Improve Your Admission Chances

### BE AN APPLICATION KNOW-IT-ALL

- Get Started With Your College Applications
- Do Your Best with Apps! Get Organized!
- Create Outstanding Applications
- Tips for Using One Application to Apply to Many Schools
- Get to Know the Common Application
- Colleges That Accept the Common Application
- Get to Know the Universal College Application
- Should You Include Something Extra with Your Application?
- Getting College Application Fees Waived
- Applying to College as a Transfer Student

### THE INS AND OUTS OF APPLYING EARLY

- Should You Apply Early Admission?
- Is Early Decision Right for You?
- When Applying Early Action Makes Sense

### BE AN OUTSTANDING APPLICANT

- Get the Most from Your College Interviews
- Ten Tips for Successful College Interviews
- How to Demonstrate Your Interest to Colleges

### COLLEGE SEARCH STRATEGIES (cont.)

- Finding Colleges If Your Major Is Undecided
- Finding Financially Friendly Colleges
- Colleges That Connect Work and Learning
- If You Want to Play Your Sport in College
- Making Your First (Serious) College List
- How to Tell If a College Has a Strong Study Abroad Program
- Get Help From Your College Counselor

### FIND OUT MORE ABOUT COLLEGES

- Mining for Gold on College Websites
- Get the Most from College Visits
- Why Attend College Fairs?
- Tips for Your College Tours
- Visit a College Without Stepping on Campus
- Ten College Qualities You Shouldn't Ignore

### NARROWING IT DOWN

- Looking at Colleges Side by Side
- Narrowing Down Your College List
- If Highly Selective Colleges Are on Your List
- Deciding Which Colleges to Apply to
- How to Visit a College You Might Attend

### CREATE OUTSTANDING APPLICATIONS

- Make Your College Applications Stand Out
- Application Dos and Don'ts
- How to Shine in Your College Application Essay
- Ten Tips to Improve Your Essay
- How to Write Your Common Application Essay
- How to Write Your College Application Resume
- Getting the Best Letters of Recommendation

### UNTIL ADMISSIONS DECISIONS ARRIVE

- Stressed out About Getting In? How to Cope!
- How to Survive Before Decisions Arrive
- Don't Catch Senioritis!

### YOUR FINAL ANSWER

- How College Visits Can Help You Choose a College
- Worst Reasons to Choose (or Lose) a College
- Accepted! How to Choose Your College
- Wait-Listed! Now What?
- Rejected! How to Cope and What to Do
- You've Decided on a College. What's Next?
- Make the Most of a Spring Admission
- Getting a Good Start as a Transfer Student

## Check Out Our Online Article Library

From choosing colleges to financial aid, COLLEGEdata articles offer accurate, up-to-date information & expert advice. EASY TO PRINT AND SHARE BY EMAIL.

### pay your way

#### UNDERSTANDING COLLEGE COSTS

- What's the Price Tag for a College Education?
- Net Price: The Real Story
- How Colleges Figure "Cost of Attendance"

#### FINANCIALLY FRIENDLY COLLEGES

- What's Your Best College Fit, Financially Speaking?
- Finding Financially Friendly Colleges
- How to Get Merit Aid from Colleges

#### WAYS TO PAY FOR COLLEGE

- Common Ways to Pay for College
- Don't Fall for These Six Myths About Paying for College
- Borrowing Options for College
- PLUS Loans for Parents
- Investigating Private College Loans
- How to Reduce College Costs
- What Transfer Students Need to Know About Paying for College
- Paying for College in Installments

#### FINANCIAL PLANNING FOR COLLEGE

- Planning Ahead to Pay for College
- Options for Saving for College
- Education Savings Accounts
- 529 College Savings Plans
- IRAs for College
- Savings Bonds for College
- Tax Breaks for College

#### UNDERSTANDING FINANCIAL AID

- What is Financial Aid?
- Debunking Myths About Financial Aid
- How Grants Help You Pay for College
- Scholarships and Merit Aid Offered by Colleges
- How Work-Study Works
- Federal Education Loans
- Stafford Loans: The Largest Student Loan Program

#### HOW TO QUALIFY FOR FINANCIAL AID

- How Colleges Calculate Your Financial Aid
- Your Expected Family Contribution (EFC)
- What You Need to Know About Financial Need
- How Student and Parent Assets Affect Your Financial Aid
- How Student and Parent Income Affect Your Financial Aid
- Financial Aid for Independent Students

#### GETTING THE BEST FINANCIAL AID

- What's in a Financial Aid Award?
- How Colleges Award Financial Aid
- Improve Your Financial Aid Eligibility
- Financial Aid Pitfalls to Avoid
- How Outside Scholarships Affect Financial Aid Awards
- How to Compare Your Financial Aid Awards
- I'd Like More Financial Aid, Please

#### APPLYING FOR FINANCIAL AID

- How to Apply for Financial Aid
- Why You need to File the FAFSA
- CSS PROFILE and Other Aid Applications
- Common FAFSA Mistakes
- Tips for Your Financial Aid Forms
- Key Financial Aid Milestones

#### SCHOLARSHIP ESSENTIALS

- Scholarship Basics
- Where the Bucks Are: "Private" Scholarships
- Scholarships Offered by Colleges
- Don't Believe Popular Scholarship Myths

#### FINDING SCHOLARSHIPS

- Finding Scholarships You Qualify For
- It's Not Just About Your GPA...
- Scholarship Application Tips
- Watch Out for Scholarship Scams

#### READ THE SCHOLARSHIP FINE PRINT

- Renewable Scholarships Are Best
- Using Scholarship Money: What's Allowed?
- Scholarships with Strings Attached

#### SCHOLARSHIP ELIGIBILITY

- Unusual Scholarships
- Scholarships Where Your Major Matters
- I'm Eligible If I Live Where?
- The Scoop on National Merit Scholarships
- How to Qualify for Athletic Scholarships
- How to Qualify for ROTC Scholarships

### college buzz

#### MANAGING YOUR MONEY

- Stay Afloat Financially at College
- How to Stretch Your College Dough
- College Money 101
- How to Manage Debt
- Protect Yourself from Identity Theft

#### BANKING 101 FOR STUDENTS

- Banking Options for Students
- Opening Your First Checking Account
- Credit Card Basics
- Using Credit Wisely
- Using a Debit Card
- It's Cool to Save

#### CAMPUS LIFE

- What Will College Life Be Like?
- Go Clubbing on Campus
- Is Greek Life for You?

#### KEEPING IT TOGETHER

- Managing Your Time
- Dealing with Stress
- Avoiding Procrastination

#### LIVING ON CAMPUS

- The Great Roommate Match
- Theme Housing
- Furnishing Your Dorm Room

#### TRANSFER STUDENTS

- Should You Transfer to Another College?
- What You Need to Know Before You Decide to Transfer
- What Transfer Students Need to Know About Paying for College
- Getting a Good Start as a Transfer Student

#### STUDY ABROAD DURING COLLEGE

- How to Tell If a College Has a Strong Study Abroad Program
- Seven Signs That Studying Abroad Might Be Right for You
- Eight Tips for a Great Study Abroad Experience

## UC - How applications are reviewed

As we consider each individual application - and rest assured, we do consider each one - we look beyond grades.

We spend time evaluating your academic achievements in light of the opportunities available to you and your demonstrated capacity to contribute to the intellectual life at UC. Some factors we may consider are:

1. Academic grade point average in all completed A-G courses, including additional points for completed UC-certified honors courses.
2. Number of, content of and performance in academic courses beyond the minimum A-G requirements.
3. Number of and performance in UC-approved honors, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate Higher Level and transferable college courses.
4. Identification by UC as being ranked in the top 9 percent of your high school class at the end of your junior year (Eligible in the Local Context, or ELC).
5. Quality of your senior-year program as measured by the type and number of academic courses in progress or planned.
6. Quality of your academic performance relative to the educational opportunities available in your high school.
7. Outstanding performance in one or more specific subject areas.
8. Outstanding work in one or more special projects in any academic field of study.
9. Recent, marked improvement in academic performance as demonstrated by academic GPA and the quality of coursework completed or in progress.
10. Special talents, achievements and awards in a particular field, such as visual and performing arts, communication or athletic endeavors; special skills, such as demonstrated written and oral proficiency in other languages; special interests, such as intensive study and exploration of other cultures; experiences that demonstrate unusual promise for leadership, such as significant community service or significant participation in student government; or other significant experiences or achievements that demonstrate the student's promise for contributing to the intellectual vitality of a campus.
11. Completion of special projects undertaken in the context of your high school curriculum or in conjunction with special school events, projects or programs.
12. Academic accomplishments in light of your life experiences and special circumstances, including but not limited to: disabilities, low family income, first generation to attend college, need to work, disadvantaged social or educational environment, difficult personal and family situations or circumstances, refugee status or veteran status.
13. Location of your secondary school and residence.