

# 10 Items You Should Research Before Ever Committing To A College

High school juniors will begin to look at colleges soon and some of the key factors that these students will look at in their college search is 1) the looks and size of the campus, 2) the quality of campus life, 3) the honors and study-abroad programs, 4) fraternities and sororities, and 5) the sports programs. However, before the student makes a commitment to any college, here are ten other areas to consider:

## 1. The number of course requirements

*Course requirements vary widely from school to school. You don't want to find yourself mired in courses that don't interest you, while you're unable to take electives in the areas that do interest you.*

## 2. The flexibility of course requirements

*Schools that require specific courses can put you in a bind if you'd rather take more advanced courses, or if you need to take more remedial courses, to fulfill that requirement. Be sure to check that the school allows a choice of course levels to satisfy the various requirements. Also, keep in mind that many top professors avoid teaching required courses that route hundreds of students through the course.*

## 3. The availability of your college major

*Never assume that your college of choice offers every possible major, especially if you have a very specialized major in mind. It's critical to check the list of majors at each college. At certain colleges, some majors are not open to all students, especially those majors that require talent or training (music or art), or those majors that are extremely popular (psychology or journalism).*

## 4. The availability of your desired classes

*In the past few years; college enrollments have risen, but the faculty size has not grown commensurately. As a result, there may be very long wait lists for some classes and shortages in first-year classes for students who did not register on the first possible date. Be sure to check the availability of your desired courses before sending in your acceptance letter to the college.*

## 5. The availability of professors teaching the course

*At many state universities, a significant number of instructors are graduate students. It's important to know how much of your instruction, especially in the first years of college, will be designated to graduate student teachers. It's ok if a regular professor gives the lectures and the grad student leads discussion sections; however, the real issue arises at schools where grad students are allowed to teach entire courses on their own.*

## **6. The student/faculty ratio**

*If you attend a school with 10 to 20 students per faculty member, you're likely to get a lot of individual attention from the faculty. Once the number of students per faculty member goes above 20, you may not get much hand-holding from a professor.*

## **7. The percentage of students who graduate**

*A school with a graduation rate over 80 percent is good and a graduation rate of 60 to 80 percent is quite normal; however, a school whose graduation rate is under 60 percent is not good. Also check out the average time a student takes to receive a degree. You may want to avoid schools whose students take an average of six to seven years to graduate.*

## **8. The quality of the career placement department**

*Very few students even think to ask about the career placement department, but this should be a key item on your checklist assuming the student would like to graduate with a job. Students should ask questions such as, what job placement services are provided by the placement office, what percentage of graduates will be employed prior to graduation, and which companies and organizations recruit your graduates?*

## **9. Are you required to take computer-taught or on line classes**

*To save money, some colleges use computer programs for course instruction, or have their lectures posted online, rather than use live instructors. It's the new do-it-yourself method of instruction, which may not be the best learning experience for the student.*

## **10. The total cost of college**

*If you plan to attend college then you should know up front what the total cost of college will be to get a degree. The student should also research any opportunities to receive financial aid to help offset that total cost. You will need to find the answers to questions such as, how does the college*

*financially reward a good student, what forms are used by the college to determine financial aid eligibility, what non-need or merit grants and scholarships are available from the college, and what is the average debt incurred by each student upon graduation?*

How can a student get this much needed information from the various colleges? Check out the college guides and the college websites themselves. Ask admissions officers, students, and recent graduates of the schools. Send e-mails to the appropriate college contacts. Regardless of how you get this information, it is very important in order to make the best possible college choice and get the most out of your college experience.