



Finding Your College Match: Characteristics You Should Consider

(adapted from College Board)

There are thousands of colleges to choose from, and they all have unique characteristics that make them right for the students who attend them. Just because a school looks great on paper, doesn't mean it is the right fit for you. Before choosing a college, consider all the factors to make sure it fits with your needs and wants.

How can you find colleges that match your needs? First, identify your priorities. Next, carefully research the characteristics of a range of schools. Finally, match the two. Once you understand the characteristics you should consider, use the *PiCED College Comparison Worksheet* to consider different schools.

Characteristics You Should Consider

Academic Programs

If you know what you want to study, research reputations of academic departments by talking to people in the fields that interest you. Some schools specialize in technical programs. Others are best for people seeking a liberal arts degree. If you're undecided, then relax and pick an academically balanced institution that offers a range of majors and programs. Most colleges offer counseling to help you find a focus. When considering academic programs, look for special opportunities and pick a school that offers many possibilities.

Location

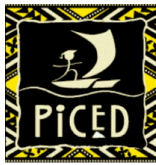
Do you want to visit home frequently, or do you see this as a time to experience a new part of the country? Perhaps you like an urban environment with access to museums, ethnic food, or major league ball games. Or maybe you hope for easy access to the outdoors or the serenity of a small town. Are you from a cold place and want to enjoy the warm weather of somewhere farther south? Or do you want to escape to a school with white winters. Enjoying your college's location, proximity to home, and climate are major factors. Don't underestimate the role your surroundings can play.

Size of the Student Body

Size will affect many of your opportunities and experiences, including:

- Range of academic majors offered
- Extracurricular possibilities
- Amount of personal attention you'll receive
- Number of books in the library

When considering size, be very sure to look beyond the raw number of students attending. For example, perhaps you're considering a small department within a large school. Investigate not just the number of faculty members, but also how accessible they are to the students.



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Diversity

Explore what you might gain from a diverse student body. Think about the geographic, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity of the students as a means of learning more about the world. Investigate what kinds of student organizations, or other groups with ethnic or religious foundations, are active and visible on campus.

Retention and Graduation Rates

One of the best ways to measure a school's quality and the satisfaction of its students is to learn the percent of students who return after the first year and the percent of entering students who remain to graduate. Comparatively good retention and graduation rates are indicators that responsible academic, social, and financial support systems exist for most students.

Campus Life

Consider what your college life will be like beyond the classroom. Aim for a balance between academics, activities, and social life. Before choosing a college, learn the answers to these questions:

- What extracurricular activities, athletics, and special interest groups are available?
- Does the community around the college offer interesting outlets for students?
- Are students welcomed by the community?
- Is there an ethnic or religious group in which to take part?
- How do fraternities and sororities influence campus life?
- Is housing guaranteed?
- How are dorms assigned?

Cost

Today's college price tag makes cost an important consideration for most students. At the same time, virtually all colleges work to ensure that academically qualified students from every economic circumstance can find financial aid that allows them to attend. When considering cost, look beyond the price tag.