

CHOOSING A COLLEGE

Types:

Conservatories and stand-alone art schools typically offer BM or BFA degrees. They tend to be highly competitive environments and all of the students will be artists or musicians. Some larger universities will offer both BA degrees and BFA/BM degrees. In those cases, the art or music school is often somewhat self-contained within the larger university and may require a separate admission process in addition to the admission process to the university itself.

Ability:

Your high school teachers, the admissions representatives at portfolio days and professional musicians/artists can all help you develop an honest assessment of your skill. This will help you find the right fit as you look for colleges.

Other Considerations

- Access to studio space and practice rooms (i.e., having enough of them to go around) is important. Appropriate equipment, exhibit venues and the like should also be looked at.
- Reputation within the artistic community makes a difference in your options when you graduate. In addition, if a particular type of art/drama/dance is emphasized, it will also affect your options.
- Philosophy, emphasis, competitiveness, teaching method and workload all need to fit who you are.
- Your freshman year might vary from school to school depending on the program. Are you required to do a foundation year of basics or can you jump right into your area of interest? How many performance or exhibition opportunities are offered in a typical year and can you participate as a freshman or only as an upperclassman?

ATHLETES

The following pages include a number of resources from the NCAA website (<http://www.ncaa.org>). Providence Christian School's Athletic Directors can also provide good information as well as an assessment of what is a realistic expectation to have based on your skill. Be sure to check the Resources section in this handbook for some helpful websites.

Common Mistakes:

- **Not being proactive**
 - Not contacting coaches because you think they will contact you. After an initial contact, it is appropriate to submit a short recruiting video, clearly marked with your name and contact information, jersey color, number, school or team name. Two to four minutes of highlights, followed by a couple of running quarters or halves (to view extended play) is a typical format.
 - Not starting early.
 - Not making sure your high school curriculum meets NCAA eligibility guidelines.
- **Misjudging ability**
 - *Overestimating*- Thinking you are better than you really are, waiting for a top school to recruit you and ending up with no options for playing in college.

- *Underestimating*- not even trying to get a scholarship because you don't think you are good enough. You don't have to be the best player in your league in order to get some money. However, you do need to be a pretty good athlete and skilled in your sport.
- Not understanding that college scouts evaluate potential, not just current performance. Their perception of whether you have reached the peak of your talent matters.
- **Wrong interpretation of interest level/scholarship money**
 - Thinking that receiving a letter means you are being actively recruited. Form letters go out to thousands of students. If you get one, return the paperwork asked for. Then wait for the coach to contact you, or contact the coach, and see if there is still interest. Unless a coach has contacted you in person or by phone more than once, do not assume that you are being seriously recruited.
 - Not realizing that full scholarships are rare. In the NCAA, only Division I or Division II schools may offer athletic scholarships. These can be dispersed in the form of full, half or partial grants. Scholarships must go toward expenses related to tuition, room, board, fees and books. Not all colleges participating at the same competitive level in the same sport offer the identical number of scholarships. Football and basketball often tend to offer a full complement. Most other sports do not. Students must inquire about scholarship availability from each school recruiting them. Scholarships are renewed on an annual basis. They are not guaranteed for four years.
 - Not realizing that coaches may be telling you one thing and admissions offices/financial aid offices may tell you something else.

Other Things:

- Grades still matter. Remember that the eligibility calculation of your GPA may vary from how Providence Christian School calculates your GPA.
- The college itself still needs to be a good fit. Athletics is one part of choosing a college. It should not be the only part.
- There are strict recruiting rules. See the NCAA website and the "Guide for the College Bound Student Athlete" (http://www.ncaastudent.org/NCAA_Guide.pdf).
- A letter of intent is the "contract" that a student athlete signs with a college or university, formalizing the student's acceptance of that institution's scholarship offer. Once a student signs a Letter of Intent, no further recruiting contact with any other institution is allowed to occur.
- Admissions and graduation rate information can be obtained through the NCAA or from the individual college or university.

COLLEGE SELECTION CHOICES

Most college search programs ask you to make choices on certain criteria. This survey is typical of the kinds of things used to do some initial screening and narrowing. Once you have a pool of preliminary possibilities, you can begin to explore in more detail whether the college is a good fit for you.

1. Type

- State College or University
- Private College or University
- Christian College
- Four-Year Liberal Arts
- Two Year Community College
- Technical School

2. Size

- Large- more than 15,000
- Medium- 5,000 to 15,000
- Small- under 5,000

3. Location

- Home community
- Alabama
- Out of State

4. Setting

- Rural
- Suburban
- Small Town
- Urban

5. Control

- Private
- Public
- Denominational

6. Programs

- Liberal Arts
- Professional
- Technical

7. Geographic Diversity

- Local
- Regional
- National
- International

8. Cost

- Over \$20,000
- \$10,000 to \$20,000
- Under \$10,000

9. Extra-curricular

- Sports (which Division?)
- Intramural sports
- Club sports
- Christian organizations
- Fraternities/Sororities
- Fine Arts opportunities
- Art, Music, Drama-
(for non-majors)

COLLEGE VISIT BASICS

Why Visit

- Two possibilities- for the information it gives to you and for the information it gives the college. The information it gives you is the bigger piece.
- It gives you a feel for the campus that you are not able to get from websites or printed material: what students like, how friendly they are, how you feel the administration and faculty treated you, etc.
- You can ask questions that aren't answered in their literature, or that require more detailed or specialized answers.
- In some cases, it can indicate to the college that you have a higher degree of interest. (However, not all colleges keep track of visits.)
- In a few cases it will be a required part of the application process.

When to Visit

- Spring of junior year or fall of senior year. Keep in mind that fall sports complicate things at the beginning of senior year. Think ahead.
- Preview days/weekends. Colleges often target these toward juniors and/or seniors.
- Summer. It is harder to get a sense of fit or normal atmosphere, but it is a more relaxed time for admissions offices and therefore you may get extra attention.
- During normal times- not exam week, the big football game, etc.
- **Appointments at selective schools generally fill up early.** Making a last minute decision to visit will limit how much you are able to do there.

Things to Consider

- Sitting in on a class is a good idea. Trying to sit in on the same class (i.e., Intro to Psychology) at every college you visit will give you a sense of differing approaches to the same subject.
- Get business cards from the people you meet with, especially from admissions counselors, financial aid officers and any professors you talk to. Student tour guides will often offer their email addresses as well. Having a specific person to contact with future questions can be very helpful.
- Sending appropriate thank you notes after the visit can set you apart from other students.
- Visit different types of campuses to help pinpoint what matters to you. What you discover may surprise you. The urban campus that you thought you would love may not end up appealing to you at all.
- **Pay attention to the role of the parent versus the role of the student.** The parent should not be asking all the questions or answering the questions that are asked by the admissions counselor. The student needs to take the initiative to let the admissions office know you have arrived, to answer questions posed by the admissions office, etc. They should avoid looking at their parents, waiting to see if they are going to answer. Some colleges deliberately separate students and parents for tours and meetings.
- Some schools will give you an initial indication of your chances of getting into the college if you have an unofficial copy of your transcript and test scores, along with a short résumé of your activities, accomplishments and awards. **Do not start your questions with this!** At the end of the visit, ask if they would be willing to look at them and give you an idea of your chances. Some admissions officers will do this. Others will not. If they are willing to look, it is also your chance to ask what you could do to strengthen your application.

How to Set Up a Visit

- Check the college's website to see if they outline a procedure.
- Know the interview policy. Is an interview an optional part of the admissions process? Is it required? If so, do you have to wait until you have submitted an application to do the interview? Is the interview informative or evaluative? Do you have to interview on campus or do they have an area representative?
- Think ahead.
 - Overnight visits typically require at least 3 weeks' notice.

- Appointments at selective schools fill up early.
- Informational interviews or appointments with admissions representatives are more common than formal interviews. Many colleges assign specific geographic regions to each of their admissions representatives. If possible, meet with the representative for your geographic area. They will be the one reading your application once it is submitted. Having a face to go with the application can be helpful.
- As much as possible, know what you want to ask for or set up before calling the admissions office.
 - Ask if they have preview days for prospective students, when they are, and how you register for them. If you already have that information from the website, let them know that you plan to attend.
 - Act informed. Say, "I noticed on your website that you do tours every Tuesday and Thursday. I'd like to schedule a visit on _____ if that is possible." Or, if there are no specifics, tell them you are calling to set up a visit. Have a specific time and day to suggest. Indicate what flexibility, if any, you have.
 - Do you need reservations for the tour? Even if you don't need reservations for the tour, you probably do need appointments for other meetings you would like to set up. Do I need to bring anything?
 - Depending on your interest or need, ask if it is possible to:
 - Spend the night in a dorm
 - Meet with a coach, have portfolio review, talk to a professor in a particular department. Will the admissions office set that up for you, or do you need to contact the person yourself?
 - Sit in on a class. If you have a particular subject in mind, ask if any of those classes are available.
 - Meet with a financial aid officer. While the admissions representative can answer basic questions, for more detailed information they will refer you to financial aid. Having an appointment already set up guarantees you'll be able to talk to them.
 - Can you mail me (or email me) information about the school ahead of time?
 - Can you send me a confirmation, campus map and parking permit?
 - Are there hotels in the area that give discounts to families visiting the school?
(This information is often on the website as well.)

Be Prepared

- Know enough about the school to ask specific questions (as well as any general questions you may be asking all schools).
- Be able to indicate some awareness of information that is already on their website or in their printed material- size of student body, whether or not they offer your major, general sense of cost, etc. You want to convey interest, not complete ignorance.
- Be prepared to answer questions. Do not just answer yes or no.
- Be prepared to explain "why" if it is appropriate.
- Remember that your dress, your demeanor, and your questions will give the college a picture of who you are. Make eye contact. Show interest. Dress appropriately. That

does not necessarily mean to dress up, but it does mean to think through what your appearance will convey. Neatness matters.

After the Visit

- Write a prompt thank you note to any admissions counselors, professors or financial aid people you talked to at any length. Most people believe that an email note is okay.
- Make notes as soon as possible after you visit- your impression, additional questions, specifics about the school that make it distinctive, things you noticed about the dorms, etc. You think you will remember but you won't and you will find yourself wondering which college it was that had the new classroom building with the nice lounges in it, which one offered the interdisciplinary program you thought was interesting, etc.
- Reread any view books, catalogs, web sites- some of the information will probably make more sense after a visit to the college.
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WHAT TO LOOK FOR- WHAT TO ASK

GETTING A FEEL

- **For the campus:**
 - How does the campus itself feel- size, grounds, aesthetics, distance to classes?
 - Are the buildings in good shape? Are old buildings renovated? Are there new buildings under construction?
 - Could I live in one of the dorm rooms I've seen? What are the bathrooms like in the dorms?
 - How current are the computer labs? Computer hookups?
 - How are the science labs? The equipment?
 - What are the athletic facilities like? Are there fitness rooms?
- **For whether it fits you:**
 - Look at the bulletin boards, campus newspapers, newsletters. Do the topics interest you? Are the activities things you would like to participate in?
 - Listen to the campus radio station.
 - Check for some of your favorite books in the library.
 - Does there seem to be a "typical" student? (Dress style, etc.)
 - Can I picture hanging out in the common areas that are there- dorms, student unions, etc.?
- **For the classroom:**
 - Based on terms of address between the professor and the students, does the school seem formal or informal?
 - Do students appear engaged in the class?
 - Is there much discussion?
 - Do the professors and students seem to have a relationship with each other? Good rapport?
 - Is the material challenging enough for me?

THE BIG QUESTION: Can I picture myself here? Why or why not?

QUESTIONS TO ASK STUDENTS OR TOUR GUIDES

The following are possible questions to ask. They are intended to get your own thoughts going. Do not ask all of them. Pick and choose the ones that fit your situation, concerns or interest. Consider asking some of the same questions to students and admissions office staff and see how the answers compare.

- **General:**
 - Why did you pick this college? Why do you think most students pick this college?
 - What do students rave about after they have been here for a while?
 - What do students complain about?
 - What type of student seems happiest here?
 - What are the big issues (campus, regional, national, international) that are important to students this year?
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- **About college life:**
 - What are the most popular extracurricular activities?
 - Are there intramural sports? Club sports? Can anyone play?
 - Are there any student traditions (silly or otherwise)?
 - What happens on the weekends? Do students stay on campus or go away?
 - How safe do you feel on campus (especially at night)?
 - Are athletic facilities, music practice rooms, etc. open to all students or just athletes, music majors, etc.?
 - Can any student audition for the choir, drama, etc., or is it just for majors?
 - What is the policy on cars? Do you need a car here? How do you get things you need? Is there public transportation available?
 - What do you do for fun?
 - Are campus jobs available? Do most students work? If you're going to work, what are the best jobs to get on campus?
 - What is the social life like?
 - Is the fraternity and sorority system big on campus? What percentage of students is in fraternities/sororities? How do non-Greeks fit in?
 - What is the central gathering place for students? Where do they hang out? On campus? In town?
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- **About dorm life:**
 - How are roommates chosen? What happens if you have roommate problems?
 - Are you able to study in your dorm room? Is it quiet enough?
 - How are dorms organized- coed building? Floors? Are there hall bathrooms? Suites?
 - Are there particular visiting hours?
 - How secure are the dorms? How you access them? Can anyone walk in or do you need a form of access?
 - What is the food like here?

- **About academics:**

- What are the most popular majors? What are the strongest majors?
- Do you know your professors outside of class?
- How accessible are your professors? When did you last meet with a professor?
- Do you feel that you know 1 or 2 professors well enough to ask them for a work or grad school recommendation? Would it be more than a generic recommendation?
- What is your impression of the advising system?
- How hard has it been to get the classes you need? The classes you want?
- What is the academic pressure like?
- What do you (the tour guide) plan to do after graduation?

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE ADMISSION ADVISOR

- **About the college in general:**

- What distinguishes this college from _____ (either a specific name or "from other colleges or other art/engineering/liberal arts schools")?
- How has this college changed in the last 5 to 10 years?
- How do you think this college will change in the next 5 to 10 years?
- What are your 4 and 5 year graduation rates?
- What is your attrition rate? Why is it high or low?
- What are some reasons students leave?
- What are the advantages/disadvantages of this school's size?
- What are the advantages/disadvantages of this school's location?
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- **About academics:**

- What are your most distinguished programs? Do you have any programs that are unique in some significant way?
- What departments are considered outstanding, weak, or average? Are any gaining strength? If so, what is making the difference?
- What will my first year of courses be like? Who teaches them? (Professors or grad students?)
- How is advising done? How likely is it that I would be assigned an advisor in my major as a freshman?
- Are there opportunities for independent study, internships or study abroad? Are there any limitations on who can participate?
- Are there any majors within the college/university that require a separate or additional application? What are the acceptance rates to those programs?
- Are there typical course requirements- how many exams, papers, projects?
- I'm not sure what I want to major in. What could the college do to help me in that process?
- How much hands-on research (or field experience) do undergraduates get to do? What year does that typically start?
- How many large classes would I be likely to have? Aside from the large introductory classes, what is the average class size?
- What does a typical course of study look like in my major? How many electives?
- Are you able to make accommodations for particular needs?

- Do you offer tutoring? Academic counseling?
- How are those services accessed? Is there an additional cost?
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- **About campus life:**
 - What kind of clubs and organizations are here? Consider whether they are predominantly intellectually oriented, artistic, or issue oriented.
 - Do many of the students work? What kinds of jobs are available- work studies or other?
 - What are the safety issues? Ask for a crime report. Federal law requires schools to provide safety information to students.
 - What is the housing situation? Is campus housing guaranteed? For all four years? Does the school offer or assist with off-campus housing?
 - What is the food plan like? What options exist? Are students required to use the food plan? Is the meal ticket good at more than one location? What hours can students access food? Are there rules about cooking or having appliances in the dorm rooms?
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- **About admissions:**
 - What academic elements are considered for admission: courses, grades, test scores, class rank, interests, institutional needs, essays, recommendations, and interviews? How important is each one? Is there one that automatically eliminates you?
 - Do you recalculate the GPA when you receive the application? How do you do that? Just academic subjects? Weighted for honors classes?
 - Do you use a specific SAT/ACT/GPA/geographic or other formula to make the first round of eliminations?
 - Is there Honors or Leadership College for students? How do you qualify and/or apply?
 - Are there academic/talent scholarships? Are all applications automatically considered or do I have to apply separately? Are there specific SAT/ACT/GPA levels that would qualify me for certain scholarships?
 - What decision plans do you offer? Early decision? Early Action? Do you have a waiting list?
 - What percentage of the freshman class is typically filled from early decision applications?
 - How many students from last year's waiting list were admitted?
 - Does your ability to pay have an impact on the decision to admit you?

QUESTIONS ABOUT PLACEMENT

- *This is probably the best gauge of the strength of a program.
- What is your grad school placement rate (med school, etc.?)
- What percentage of students goes on to grad school?
- How many graduates are working in their field within 6 months of graduation?
- Who recruits on campus?
- What resources are available to graduating students? An alumni network? Résumé help? Career planning?

QUESTIONS FOR A CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

- Do students have to sign a code of conduct? Does faculty sign one as well?
- Do students have to sign a statement of faith? Do faculty?
- Do you require chapel attendance? Any particular Bible classes?
- How do you handle violations of the rules? Are there hard and fast consequences or is each case considered individually? Who makes the final decision? Does the school have a process for offering help or counsel to students who are struggling with moral issues? What would a student need to do to regain good standing?

QUESTIONS FOR THE FINANCIAL AID OFFICE

- What is the total cost to attend- tuition, fees, housing, meals, books, and miscellaneous?
- What financial aid forms are required? Do you use the FAFSA or CSS PROFILE or do you use a different formula? Do you consider step-parent's income (FAFSA does)? Do you consider an ex-spouse's income (PROFILE asks for that)?
- Are you able to take into account extenuating circumstances that do not show up in the forms?
- What percentage of student receives financial aid? What does the typical package include?
- What was the average freshman aid package? Was it primarily grants, scholarships, loans or work study?
- Is the aid package negotiable once it has been offered?
- What options are there for handling "unmet need"? See financial aid terminology.
- Are there payment plans available for paying the family contribution?
- What is the minimum course load required to maintain financial aid- grants, scholarships, etc.?
- If you receive a grant, is it renewable each year? At the same amount?
- Will an outside scholarship reduce my aid award? (Some schools deduct the amount of outside scholarships from the aid package.) If it does, do you take it out of loans first or scholarships first? It is to your advantage to have them taken out of loans. You want to maximize scholarships.)
- Can a lost scholarship be reinstated? Is there a grace period? (e.g., for GPA requirements)
- Are students expected to work? In terms of grant eligibility, does it make a difference if they work on or off campus? (Federal work-study jobs don't count as income against your financial aid award, but other jobs do.)
- What is the average debt load of your graduates?
- What is the loan default rate of your graduates?

FIT

Fit is the most important thing to keep in mind as you think about colleges. It is more important than "name", more important than ranking, more important than average SAT scores. There are many variables to consider when looking at fit. Keep in mind that there may be several colleges that are all a good fit for you.

Three big things to consider regarding fit:

- **Academic Fit-** Since each college has different requirements, you want to look for a college that "fits" well academically. "Fit" means being challenged and being able to meet the challenge. Academic fit also includes the balance between academics and other activities. Academic fit should be the number one criterion in the selection process.
- **Environmental Fit-** Choosing a college is very much like looking for a new "home." The campus selected will be home for the next four years. Where will you feel comfortable? A city or a suburb? What type of people are you looking to meet? Are these students and professors people that you can easily relate to? Are there extracurricular opportunities available that you are interested in? What about the churches in the area?
- **Affordability Fit-** While the cost of a college education cannot be dismissed as a factor in the selection process, you are encouraged to separate financial issues from academic and social factors. Before dismissing a college or university from consideration, you should gather information about the availability of all forms of financial aid (grants, loans, work study, and scholarship).

Within those broad categories, there are basic things to consider. They include:

- **Admission Requirements-** What tests are required (SAT Reasoning Test, SAT Subject Tests, ACT)? What are the deadlines for applications to be filed? Do they offer Early Decision or Early Action?
- **Academic Programs-** Will your academic needs be met? What courses are offered in the major you are considering? Are programs diverse/specific enough to meet your needs?
- **Degree Requirements-** What courses will be required in order to get a degree? For specialized programs such as engineering or nursing, does acceptance to the university guarantee acceptance into the specific program you want?
- **Financial Aid-** What sources of financial aid are available, including College Work-Study, SEOG (Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants), guaranteed student loans, institutional and departmental scholarships, etc.?
- **Living Facilities-** What counseling services are available? Houses, dormitories, single rooms, doubles and/or triplets? Are dorms available after freshman year?
- **Student Services-** What counseling services are available? What health care is available? Are there career planning services? Does the school have a placement service for graduating students? What support services do they provide for students with special needs?