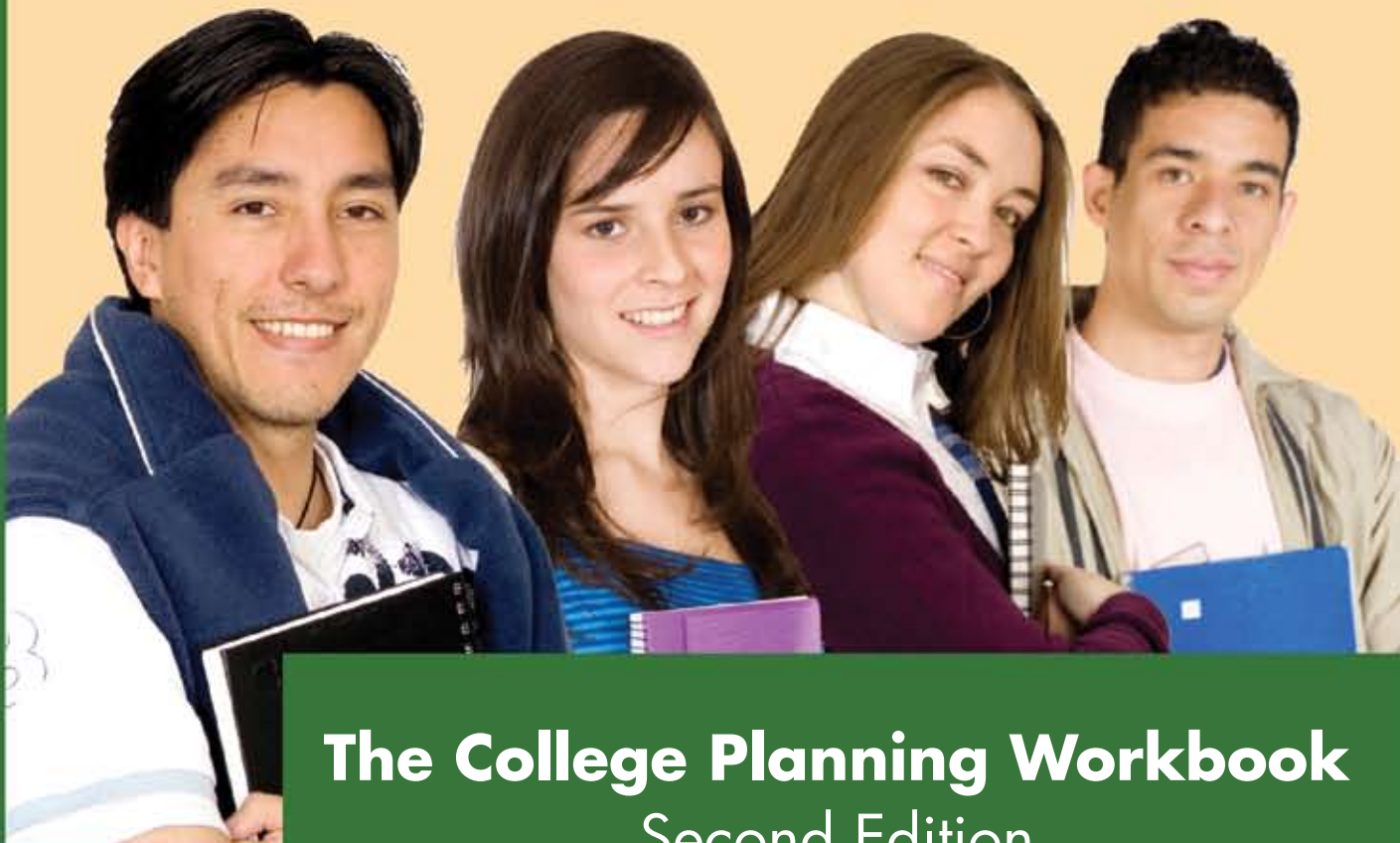


COLLEGE PLANNING 101



The College Planning Workbook Second Edition

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About the Author

I think one of the main reasons I was drawn into the college planning business in my 20's was the recollection of difficulties I had in navigating through the college process. I remember sitting down at the computer in high school and typing in accounting for my choice as a major because I earned an A in Accounting I and Accounting II. I wanted to go to school south of New York State where there was perhaps less snow and more sunshine. I also wanted to wrestle at a Division I school.

With these meager qualifiers in place, I visited one school and immediately decided to go there. One year later, I was transferring out of Slippery Rock State College in Western Pennsylvania and back home to Broome Community College to commute for a year and decide on my next step. Accounting had lasted only one semester as had wrestling, since I was over my head competitively. However, I did start writing for the school newspaper, which I found interesting.

Commuting from home was no picnic for me after being on my own for a year. I received a Liberal Arts degree with an emphasis on English and managed to resurrect my wrestling career. During that year I continued writing for the school newspaper and taking a more active and serious look at what I wanted to do rather than what I should do. An A in Accounting tells you what you should do. In retrospect, I had a knack for crunching numbers, not an interest. Therein lays the difference!

Now full of energy and seeking adventure, I traveled to the University of Central Florida to major in Communications, a good blend of interpersonal skills and writing with studies including advertising and marketing. Once again, wrestling was a major component and helped secure a Division II partial athletic scholarship. I graduated on time with my class in four years, somehow. What I learned along the way has helped me work with students and families in very real and effective ways.

One of the important things I learned was how to plan and how important an aspect in life that can be. Later in this book, I will expose the characteristics I had developed which ultimately led to my decision-making process in regards to a career choice.

In addition to making career choices and trying to choose the right college, I had to find a way to pay for college on my own. As a family we did not have much money but somehow we did not qualify for aid. I found out later that one of the problems was in filling out the forms incorrectly. I received a small 4-year scholarship from my high school in addition to other sources of aid. I was adamant about exhausting resources and it did pay off. It was a lesson I taught to my own children as they have gone through college and been able to acquire funds that few others knew existed.

It is my hope that through my personal experiences, as well as those of hundreds of others I have worked with throughout the years, this book will help each individual who reads this to navigate through the process in a much more effective manner.

Sincerely,

Kirk A. MacBeth

Kirk A MacBeth

The College Planning Guide

Introduction

The purpose of this book is to provide an information center and guidebook for parents and students as they prepare for college. Little else in life will have the impact as the choices students make for the impending college years. Little else will have the economic impact that parents must endure in providing for a college education for their children.

I have focused on the issues that are of importance in this process and my goal is for parents and students to use this as their guide through the college planning process. I want to note that it is especially important for parents and their children to work **together** throughout this process for the express reason of helping each other. There are many books and sources of information available today for just this purpose. I have not found any one source as complete as I would like or as insightful as parents and students need in dealing with this **entire** process. I sincerely hope you will find all the answers to help in your college planning process.

Today, I do not believe the average student could do what I did. To finance a college education today is probably going to be a minimum of \$40,000 and could be over \$200,000 for a 4-year program. In this book, you will find the answers to many questions and helpful suggestions to guide you along the way. In the end, you will be the judge of what is most practical and probable for success.

The process of finding the right college should start with finding yourself. If you know what you would like to become, you are on your way. Remember as you explore different colleges that our theme is to find a direction and also have secondary interests in case things do not go as planned. It is very important to stick to this theme. Success depends in large part on discipline. Stay the course and all should go well. As always, remember that you have an advocate in your corner now and if questions or problems arise, refer to your guide.

Do Not Let Anyone Tell You What You Can't Do!!

- Beethoven's music teacher once said of him, "As a composer, he is hopeless".
- Winston Churchill failed the 6th grade and finished last in his class at Harrow, England.
- Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor because "he had no good ideas".
- Louisa May Alcott was told by an editor that she could never write anything that had a popular appeal.
- Issac Newton did poorly in grade school.
- Bill Cosby was a high school dropout even though he had been assigned to a class for the gifted.
- Lee Iacocca was fired from the Ford Motor Company.
- Billy Joel once considered suicide and was quoted as saying, "the last thing the world needs is another failed artist".
- Babe Ruth struck out 1,330 times.
- Einstein was four years old before he could speak and seven before he could read.
- When Thomas Edison was a boy, his teachers told him he was too stupid to learn anything.
- Leo Tolstoy flunked out of college.
- Abraham Lincoln entered the Black Hawk War as a captain and came out a private.
- Admiral Richard E. Boyd had been retired from the Navy as "unfit for service" until he flew over both poles.

Selecting a Major

I hold the opinion that if you want to be happy in life it begins with being happy with work. Besides sleeping, where else do we spend the majority of our time? Therefore, choose a career that you are interested in, that makes you feel good, that excites you and holds your interest level. If a student looks at the influences that help create a direction in life, look at personal experiences, parents, educational successes and areas of great interest to help develop a direction.

Point: When you go to a mall, there may be 150 different stores. You look at the mall directory to narrow your search into categories such as food, clothing, electronics, etc. From the outside, you see this tremendous complex made up of many stores but inside, you narrow your field quite quickly by knowing what you want BEFORE you go in.

You can make life a lot easier if you have a goal. I say this because if you have something to reach for and aspire to, the in-between time will go faster and seem less arduous. Many motivational speakers get paid a lot of money to speak to people about setting goals and reaching for success. I believe that if you are self-motivated, i.e. have your own goal firmly planted in your mind, you will not need help or inspiration from others. Have you ever seen someone who worked one job, left and went to a secondary job? There is usually an overriding motivation to do so. They may want to put their kids through college with the extra money or be saving it for a vacation. Perhaps an illness in the family has left them no alternative to climb out of debt. Rarely will the reason be that the person just loves to work.

Example:

If you wanted to become an astronaut, the first thing you should do is research NASA and what the various backgrounds have been for former and current astronauts. Secondly, I would look into exactly what the career path entails, the type of sacrifices involved, time required to reach your goal, likelihood of success, etc. This is, unfortunately, not a job where you can easily shadow someone.

Next you would investigate various majors that would lead to a degree in a field that would supply you with some of the characteristics necessary to have a chance at becoming an astronaut. Finally you would research colleges offering the types of programs you would need and also check to see if they have any astronauts as alumni. Now your planning could begin.

As stated above, there may be many influences in the life of a student that directly impact career plans.

- Personal experiences – some students have worked in internships, part-time jobs or know people in various lines of employment
- Parents - many students draw from the experiences or characteristics of their parents
- Educational successes – getting A's in History class may seem irrelevant in high school, but you can translate that success into a direction that sparks an interest in college for use in the job world

Areas of great interest – sometimes what we like isn't in the curriculum in high school. You can't take cartoon illustration, video game design or many other areas of interest simply because the school district has limitations. Great news!!! Colleges offer obscure topics for those who can sift through and find them.

Example:

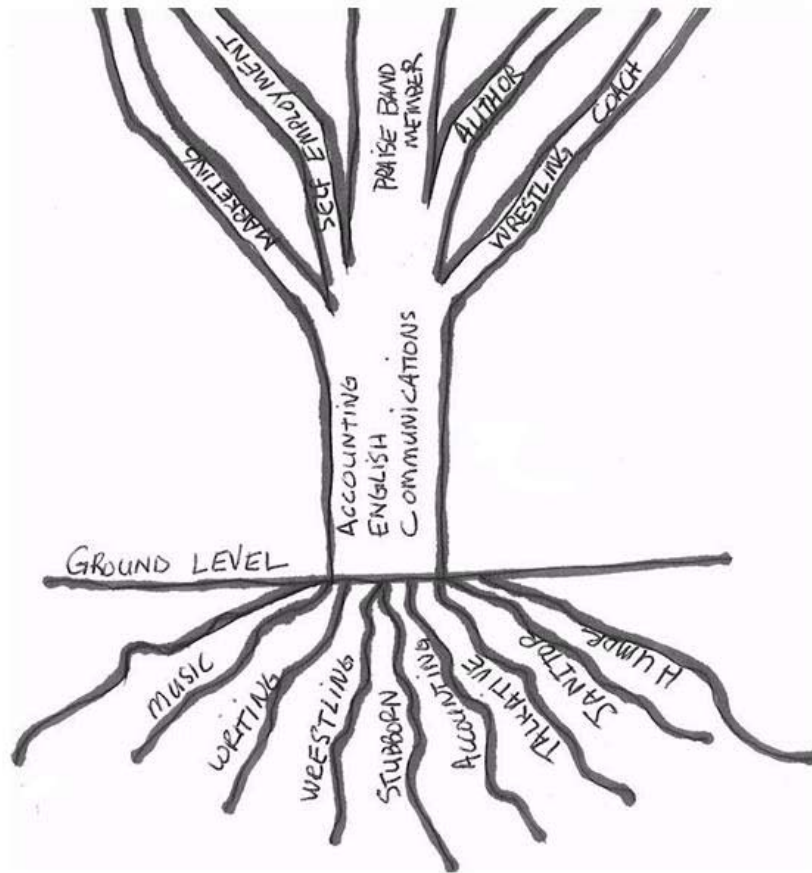
A student has an interest and a talent in art. Many would say find another direction unless you want to become a “starving artist”. I say, look at the various paths that are available within the discipline.

- architecture
- drawing and design
- cartooning
- illustration
- painting
- advertising copy
- interior design
- art education
- curator

Please note that these are just some, not all, of the options available in this instance. It is meant to demonstrate how one interest can grow into a sizable field of study producing many different career opportunities. My suggestion is to find a school that has the basic major you believe you are interested in. Then research what they do with that major. Do they expand upon it or are they fairly limited. Can you get a specialized degree in an area you want or will you receive a generic degree that will have to include an explanation to employers about what else you may have learned.

5 Easy Steps to Success in College

1. Understand why you are going to college – Your goal should be a better, more productive life that can be a contribution to society. We all strive for happiness; some people think that money brings that. The reality is that those who are satisfied with the direction they have chosen in life, will undoubtedly fare well, be better adjusted for the ups and downs that happen and will make a more positive contribution overall.
2. Pick a college for your major - Based upon the strength of the core work that you have chosen, a college should have many avenues within that discipline to both interest you and entice you to discover all you can about yourself and what it is that you want to do.
3. Talk to people in the field – College students will answer questions very frankly about any college topic. Find out all you can about your field of interest, professors, internships, etc.
4. Shadow someone – If you can, find someone who makes a living doing what you might want to do. Especially important is to find out whether or not that is the career they chose for themselves.
5. Placement – A good gauge of a solid program is the placement of graduates. Find out where students are going after graduation and what the likelihood of success is from that particular college.



"The Career Tree"

The above illustration is something I have used effectively in high school classrooms. The roots of the tree represent who we are now. They can include personality traits, strengths, weaknesses, interests, skills or virtually anything else that puts a stamp on who you are.

Understanding that when you go to college, you begin to develop into the person you are to become, we thus emerge from the ground and begin to take shape. The roots of the tree now establish a solid trunk for growth. That growth as well as expansion will come from your course selections and or the major field of study you pursue.

As the trunk expands with knowledge, you grow in different directions. These directions are represented by the branches of the tree. Two people with the same major do not necessarily end up with the same career choice. Also, we know that branches can become entwined with one another, as in the knowledge you may have from your coursework coupled with your personality traits and or various other interests.

The tree illustration represents my teen years and the direction that I took. I loved listening to music and singing but that was where it ended. I started writing briefly in high school and carried it through college, writing for the school newspapers at two colleges. I wrestled through high school and college. I achieved an A in both Accounting I and II in high school. I was a very talkative person, used a lot of humor to both gain attention and cope with things going on in my life. I was a very stubborn individual. Perhaps because of being the youngest in the family, I did things my way, right or wrong. My first job was as a janitor and I continued working in that capacity through college.

It's funny how things change, or stay the same. Accounting, which seemed to be my life's work, lasted one semester. English was a good base to move on to Communications. Then came the janitor...within a year of graduating from college, I owned my own janitorial company. Why not, I had learned good communications skills, marketing and advertising and had a strong accounting background. All of these characteristics fell into place in addition to the stubborn guy who couldn't be happy working for a large company.

I dabbled in coaching wrestling for a year for my oldest sons' team. I sing in the praise band at the church I attend. I also chair the evangelism committee and ironically it was my marketing background that led our pastor to choose me for the role. I wrote a book called **"College Planning 101"** which has been the culmination of years of work in a field that is very close to my heart.

The thing is, what you do now may be the very start of what you will be doing in the future as well as who you are to become. It is a very important lesson to be tuned into yourself and stick to the truth of who you are.

Career Planning & Self Evaluation

What do you want to be doing 10 years from now?

Are you willing to sacrifice for what you want?

Do you have a back-up plan?

Are you ready to get started? (If no, see two-year college plan)

Self-Evaluation

What do I want most out of life?

What kind of job could I get excited about?

What kind of job will keep me motivated, interested and improving?

What skills do I need to get there?

What have I done or seen in this area that has interested me?

Choosing the Right College

Once you have made some headway with your direction, it will be easier to find a college. You can search for schools that closely match what you want and see what options they have available. My view is that the more options you have within a discipline, the better the college choice will be.

There are many factors involved in finding the right college. It is important to understand that there can be a perfect fit for every student and that taking time to evaluate the choices is a step quite necessary.

On the page below and the following page, there are illustrations for use in selecting a college. The criteria you use may be different but these are three examples. The first is more computer-based as you would check off your particular interests. The second, college selection matrix, is a detailed accounting per college to narrow the field. The third, college choice selection, is a more general usage of information you might tally.

While there are many resources on the Internet that can be helpful, one in particular caught my eye many years ago:

Cynthia Good's Home Page

Categories include: Testing, College Search, Career Planning and Financial Aid

Also:

Peterson's Education Center

US News College Search – a pay site that is well worth the investment

College Net

College View

Finding the Right college

Career Goal _____

Major#1 _____ Major#2 _____ Major#3 _____

Grade Average (0-100 scale) _____ PSAT _____ SAT _____

Geographic Location

Northeast _____ West _____ Southwest _____ Southeast _____ Midwest _____ Other _____

Enrollment Size:

less than 1000 students _ 1000-5000 students _ 5000-10000 students _

10000-20000 students _ over 20000 students _

Campus Setting:

Major Metropolitan Area _____

Large City _____

Suburban _____

Small Town _____

Rural Town _____

2 Year College Yes _____ No _____

Sports _____ / _____ / _____

Study Abroad Yes _____ No _____

Learning Disability _____ ROTC _____ Drama _____ Theater _____ Choir _____ Band _____ Co-op _____

College Selection Matrix

Characteristics					
Quality	College A	College B	College C	College D	College E
% Returning Freshman	0	0	0	0	0
% Teaching Assistants	0	0	0	0	0
Student/Faculty Ration	0	0	0	0	0
Graduation Rate - 4 Years	0	0	0	0	0
Alumni Give Rate	0	0	0	0	0
Quantity	College A	College B	College C	College D	College E
Population Under 5,000	0	0	0	0	0
Over 5,000/Under 20,000	0	0	0	0	0
Over 20,000	0	0	0	0	0
Affordability	College A	College B	College C	College D	College E
Cost	0	0	0	0	0
% of Yearly Increase	0	0	0	0	0
Merit Awards Available	0	0	0	0	0
Aid	College A	College B	College C	College D	College E
% Need Met	0	0	0	0	0
% of Grants Awarded	0	0	0	0	0
Acceptance	College A	College B	College C	College D	College E
Grade Point Average	0	0	0	0	0
SAT	0	0	0	0	0
ACT	0	0	0	0	0
Acceptance Rate	0	0	0	0	0

The graph on the previous page is an illustration to the type of detail that can be used to differentiate one college from another. Remember in all of this that we have taken emotion out of play and are simply looking at schools for their overall value.

Some values can be hard to recognize at first. Let's start with **Quality**:

% of returning freshman – see next page for details

% of teaching assistants – some schools have to rely on graduate students to teach classes because the professors are writing, doing research or other activities which take them away from the classroom. You need to decide if this is a good or bad deal for you.

Student faculty ratio - see next page for details

Graduation rate (4 years) – if it is a 4 year program, I would like to pay for 4 and be out in 4

Alumni giving rate – graduates who really feel they benefited from their education tend to donate money back

Quantity has to do with the student population of the college and your comfort level.

Affordability – it is easy to find out the cost but what is the cost to you? How much does it go up each year, are they generous with scholarships.

Aid – when you apply for aid, do you get what you need or do they give what they can? What is the percentage in terms of grants versus loans and work study program funds?

Acceptance – what is the average gpa that will likely get you accepted? What kind of SAT and ACT scores are they looking for? What is the overall acceptance rate?

With both of my sons, I used this graph to basically come up with a number. I assigned points based on most important factor to least important factor and not surprisingly, the colleges they attended were first on the list. This gave both of them a feeling that they had made wise choices.

Note: Under acceptance there can be another factor that is not well documented. **STUDENT DIVERSITY** is a point of interest to many colleges. It can mean where you come from, race, gender in a specific major or many other sort of categories but it can also mean acceptance at a school where you did not expect that result. I always recommend that students look for a college outside of the comforts of their home state and lifestyle if for no other reason than for the experience of travel to different areas and meeting a more diverse group of people.

College Choice Selection (sample results worksheet)

College	College #1	College #2	College #3
Cost	28,000	32,000	23,000
% of Need Met	89%	76%	94%
Enrollment	16,845	11,888	6,400
Returning Freshman (%)	91%	96%	87%
S/F ratio	11-1	8-1	14-1
Academic Quality	B	A	C
Division	I	I	I

Cost = Tuition, room & board, fees. It can also include transportation, books and supplies and personal expenses depending on the college

% of Need Met = the average amount of financial aid given v.s. the aid that was needed
 If a family contribution is \$4,000 and the cost of the school is \$24,000, the need is \$20,000.
 If the school awards \$18,000 in financial aid, they would have met 90% of need.

Enrollment = either the number of undergraduates the proceeding year who are enrolled or the total number of students enrolled. I prefer to use the undergraduate number comparing apples to apples.

Returning Freshman (%) = the % of freshman enrolled the previous year who came back for their sophomore year. This number aids in giving you a glimpse of how well students like the school and also how well they are taken care of once they enroll. A low number usually means a school with low admission standards and a high dropout rate for a variety of reasons, none of which may be appealing to you.

S/F ratio = the number of students on campus for every professor. Usually the more research intensive the school, the lower the student/faculty ratio. This is not one of my favorite measuring sticks in deciding what is or isn't a good school.

Academic Quality = A school, B school, C school, D school, NC non-competitive school
 see chart under "Admission Standards"

Division = sports-related, refers to the competitive level of play for varsity sports. The divisions include: I, II, III, NAIA, NJCAA.

College Location Considerations

Many students tell me they want to travel as far away from home as possible during our early meetings. However, later in the year they decide to stay close to home. Homesickness is the biggest fear when choosing a college. Remember what it took to make friends in school. Use the same personality to enjoy NEW friends in college. Generally speaking you will all be in the same situation.

Remember how much you enjoyed traveling. My opinion is that you should get out there and see as much as you can, because the freedom you have in college may be the last time you have such an opportunity. I know many successful people who did nothing more than commute through four years of college. I know others who not only went away, but decided to stay in that area after college. An honest self-evaluation will tell you where to go.

My strength in counseling students in this area comes from the experience of being a day's drive away (6 hours) in year one, commuting in year two, and being 20 hours away and getting home twice a year in my last two years of college.

Example:

Robert comes from a small school in South Dakota and decides that the University of Colorado offers him the best educational experience. However, growing up in a very small town has decidedly turned Robert against the big city setting and he soon escapes to the comforts of home and to the local college where he can feel comfortable again.

Perhaps if Robert had taken the time to think about the social ramifications of his decision, he may have chosen Chadron State College in Northwestern Nebraska, which offered a solid degree program in the same area as the University of Colorado and was only 3 hours from home instead of 8 hours away.

I think that out of all of the issues I have had to discuss with clients through the years, deciding on a location was the most difficult. I really believe you, as a student, need the help of your parents here, not to coddle you, but to guide you, knowing how you have developed. So many times, what seems like the right situation turns into a mistake because the student did not carefully weigh the choice of location. I know that I was terribly bored in Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania but my roommate, who grew up in the same town with me, not only graduated from there, but stayed 10 more years to work for the college.

You should consider that job opportunities may be greater near the college you choose because many schools cater what they offer academically to the surrounding industries. You may make contacts in the vicinity while you are in college and want to capitalize on them after graduation.

I had a student who wanted to major in political science and insisted on being in the D.C. area. Within a year of enrollment, he was interning for a Congressman and his second, third and fourth years of college were spent working for the State Department, the Pentagon and on a presidential campaign. Knowing what he wanted and where to go to get it, paid huge dividends for this student.

Location Assessment

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. How have I felt when I have been away from home for extended periods of time?
2. Am I mature enough to develop study skills and homemaking skills on my own?
3. Can I succeed in a new environment with virtually no encouragement from others?
4. Do I want to live in this area after I graduate from college?
5. Would I be more comfortable taking on a new challenge from the comforts of home?
6. Do I seek out adventure or look for familiarity in my surroundings?

Remember, you will now be solely responsible for your own growth and development as an adult. Independence is a great concept to a 17 year-old, HOWEVER, abusing your freedom can lead to disaster if you are not ready to make mature decisions about friends, drugs and alcohol and schoolwork. Your parents should be your rock and if they have done a good job in developing your confidence and decision-making ability, no matter what choice you make, it should be successful.

Example:

A 17-year old female from Pasadena, California has relatives in the mid-west. Deciding that “getting away” could be very beneficial to her growth as a person, she decides to make the trek. Upon enrolling at the University of Kansas, she finds that her upbringing is vastly different than the majority of students at that college. She is used to a faster pace and is resentful of her choice initially. However, given time, she adjusts and finds out that there is a benefit to experiencing a different way of life.

It does take time to adjust to any new surroundings. Patience is a virtue and when you have made a decision through careful planning and forethought, you must then be patient that the decision has been the correct one.

I remember the drive from New York to Orlando, Florida as an incoming junior. Upon arrival, I found out the wrestling coach had quit and I had no place to stay, as he was supposed to make arrangements for me. I tried calling home to say that I would be back after a week’s vacation in Florida. Fortunately for me, I was blessed by a constant busy signal and never placed that call. Within three hours, I had met the new coach who gave me lodging for the night and a roommate the very next day. I then enjoyed two wonderful years at the University of Central Florida!

Two Year vs. Four Year College

Many employers believe the best education usually comes from the most education. Therefore, a four-year college would be most suitable. There are, however, reasons for entering a two-year college first:

1. Keep costs down for the first two years.
2. Experience college first, independence later.
3. Student can work while going to college to pay for later years.
4. Experiment with different subjects if you are unsure of a major.

These factors can make going to a two-year college seem quite reasonable. Now let's discuss some reasons why they may not be so attractive:

1. Lack of competitiveness in classroom...you don't find many top 10% students at the local community college.
2. Admission standards are lower, and many less serious students can be admitted with no intention of staying.
3. Cost may be equivalent to a four-year college for some families.
4. "Just like high school syndrome"...same kids, same fun time, same trouble, same poor results.

There are cases where I will recommend a two-year college especially if the student wants specialized training and has no interest in the overall education a four-year college can offer. The decision can also be financial but only after all the facts are in from other schools.

It seems rather obvious, at first glance, to send your child to a community college for the first two years of a four or five year program. I have a difficult time arguing the economics of that decision. Some considerations that need to be made are that there are students who lose focus in a two-year school without a clearly defined career path.

An argument that is made is that you have to take all the same courses the first two years so why pay the extra money? I say, if you look at what is being taught the first two years at a community college and it mirrors the four-year schools you were looking at, you need to find some different schools. One of the advantages of going to a four-year school is the early introduction into your major. If that is not available then you should look into other options.

Comparing Costs

When comparing schools for cost basis, know the numbers:

Local Community College

Tuition/Fees	\$3,000
Room/Board	\$1,200 (at home - \$30/week for 40 weeks)
Books/Supplies	\$600
Transportation	\$1,000 (\$25/week for gas when commuting)
	\$5,800 per year

With financial aid, it is possible to find a four-year school for the same cost.

Another aspect regarding college costs are the “hidden costs”.

College A		College B	
Tuition/Fees	\$15,250	Tuition/Fees	\$14,937
Room/Board	\$6,594	Room/Board	<u>\$5,898</u>
Books/Supplies	\$600	Total Cost	\$20,835
Personal Exp.	<u>\$1,056</u>		
Total Cost	\$23,500		

Although **College A** appears at a higher total cost, they report all expenses when determining financial aid. **College B** will (in fine print) acknowledge that other expenses of approximately \$1,500 may be incurred for books, supplies and personal expenses. Now the total cost rises to \$22,335. Let's say that your family contribution is **\$5,000**.

At **College A** you are awarded \$18,500 in aid and at **College B** you receive \$15,835. Your total cost at **College A** is \$5,000. At **College B** you will pay \$5,000 **plus** the incidental costs of \$1,500. In addition, since your family contribution is only \$5,000 and the cost to you at the community college is \$5,800, you now have a better option.

Community College = \$5,800

College A Net Cost
 $\$23,500 - \$18,500 = \$5,000$

College B Net Cost
 $\$22,335 - \$15,835 = \$6,500$

Many publications will list schools as a “best buy”. The fact is that only applies if the family is not receiving financial assistance. If you are wealthy and definitely will not receive any financial aid, then yes, a school that costs \$20,000 could be a better buy than another school that costs \$30,000.

For students who do well academically, let the bidding begin!! Academic awards can range in value from less than one thousand dollars to a full scholarship. Usually a student is offered an academic scholarship before all other aid is awarded. You should use the time wisely to weigh all options.

Consider Potential Scholarships

Another important area in examining the cost is academic or talent scholarships. A student with a high grade average may qualify for a reduction in cost and thus make a school affordable that otherwise may have been out of reach. Knowing that you can negotiate will help in the process as well.

Example:

My junior year in college I was offered an out-of state tuition scholarship to wrestle for the University of Central Florida. I told the coach at the time I would need more money than that. I was told I would receive more money if I made the starting team. When I accomplished that goal I met with the financial aid director and he wrote out a grant on the spot for \$1,500. I had proven myself an asset to the school and was rewarded for that. Isn't it amazing that financial aid still existed for me after the semester had already started?

Consider All Involved Costs

Example:

You need a new car. You have a trade-in with a book value of \$5,000. The new car is listed at \$15,000. You visit three different dealerships. At the first, you are offered \$2,800 for your trade-in for a net cost of \$12,200. At the second you are offered \$5,500 for your trade for a net cost of \$9,500. At the third dealership you are offered \$4,200 for your car for a net of \$10,800. You find out that the second dealership is in need of a car like yours to complete another transaction. They found the ultimate value in your car and gave you the best deal. Now try to look at the financial aid process through the same type of scenario. You will find the right college, if you have the patience and fortitude to look.

Example:

College #1 is 1400 miles away. It will cost approximately \$250 each time you fly home. If Mom and Dad come to visit, double that, plus hotel room and car. You might spend \$2,000 per year for that choice. College #2 is 180 miles away but you like to come home every weekend. You will need a car, fill the tank every weekend, and eat Mom and Dad's food while they are also paying for a meal plan. This choice could cost you over \$2,000 extra per year depending upon the car purchased.

College Search process can cost money, too!

College Costs: A perspective on the "other indirect costs"

College visits (5) average \$100.00 each	\$500.00
College applications (5) average \$40.00 each	\$200.00
Financial Aid applications (private schools)-2	<u>\$50.00</u>
Total up-front cost of college selection	\$750.00

Admission Standards

Many college publications will rate colleges according to their entrance difficulty. The average grades necessary to gain admittance are usually the factor. I have found 5 distinctive levels for use by the student to gauge their chances at a particular school. One caveat, however, is that some schools have much higher standards for particular programs of study. An example would be Ithaca College where admission is generally granted to students with average grades. In the physical therapy program, it is as difficult as any Ivy League college.

- You can translate the admissions standards into a numerical category by researching the college admission standards or simply by asking the college admissions office.

A School	> 94-100 Grade Average > 3.6 GPA/1350 SAT score, ACT score 32 = Most Selective
B School	> 86-93 Grade Average > 3.0 GPA/1200 SAT score, ACT score 27 = Very Selective
C School	> 78-85 Grade Average > 2.5 GPA/1000 SAT score, ACT score 22= Moderate
D School	> 72-77 Grade Average > 2.0 GPA/870 SAT score, ACT score 18 = Minimal
NC School	> 65+ Grade Average = Non Competitive

Some examples:

A= Harvard, Yale, University of Chicago, MIT, Princeton, Brown, Stanford, Duke, Rice

B= Washington U-Missouri, Northwestern, Boston College, Florida State, Colorado School of Mines

C= Baylor University, Auburn University, Ithaca College, University of Vermont, Cal State-Long Beach

D= Johnson & Wales, Tennessee State, Portland State, Trinity Lutheran College

NC= Cleveland State, Texas Southern, U of Akron, U of Phoenix

Sometimes a student's desire to enroll in a particularly difficult college clouds the consequences of that decision. Higher SAT scores, a great essay, an impressive interview and tons of extracurricular activities may sway an admission's director. The problem is that for some reason, this student's grades were not enough. I think if you evaluate why you received the grades you did in high school you may better accept your lot in college. Go to a school where you fit in comfortably and then strive to achieve rather than fighting and scratching to get into a school where the fight to stay in has only begun.

Example:

A good friend of mine had a 78 average in high school although he scored exceptionally well on the SAT exam. He enrolled at the local community college and did not really improve his first year. After finding a course in business to his liking, he achieved straight A's his next two years, started his own business, was accepted at Cornell and graduated with a 3.6 GPA.

A lot of our success depends upon our level of interest. Once you find something you have a passion for, YOU WILL SUCCEED!!!

Also to be noted!!!! Admission standards at state schools may be very different for in-state students as opposed to out-of-state students. I had a client in New York State rejected at the University of North Carolina and accepted at Cornell University. The standards for accepting out-of-state students at UNC were far greater than the standards for in-state students

Correlations between Admission Standards and Financial Aid

Now, combining the knowledge of college costs with academic standards and financial aid, let's see what correlations there may be.

- If you are an A student going to a B college, you probably will receive a favorable financial aid award including an academic scholarship. Admission should not be a problem.
- If you are a reasonably qualified minority student going to a school where the minority population is low, you will probably receive a more favorable financial package. Admission should not be a problem.
- If you are an athlete recruited by a school chances are very good that you will receive a favorable package. Admission should not be a problem.

What do all three of these examples have in common? Each student brings something special to the school for which the school is willing to pay.

The *unwritten rule* - if you are a C student trying to get into a B college and you do not require financial assistance, your probability of acceptance goes up. That is purely economics on the part of the college. Your money helps to subsidize a student who needs help.

Some schools have a confused notion of their own value. I had a student apply for admission to a school that cost \$42,000. His family contribution was \$7,000. Thus he qualified for \$35,000 in aid. The school offered \$18,000 total and stated that if he had a family contribution of \$0, they still would only offer \$18,000 because that was their cap limit on financial aid. My suggestion would be to find another college.

I do not believe there is any college worth over-paying for in terms of an undergraduate degree in a reasonably popular major. There can sometimes be unique majors that may cause a student to make a decision based upon a limited pool of colleges.

Example:

You have looked at five colleges within 6 hours of your home in Denton, Texas. The colleges include Rice University, Baylor University, University of Houston, LSU and the University of Tulsa. Rice is very tempting because you know the regional as well as national reputation academically is great. However, at Rice, you are considered a "stretch" and may have to pony up some extra money to make it work. You also may find yourself not fitting in as well with very high achievers. The other schools could very well fit the bill for you if you would consider all factors and not the bragging rights of the school from which you graduated. Yes, the reputation can open doors but getting a great education can be just as easy as working hard, giving your best effort and making your plan work at the school that is the best fit academically, socially and financially.

School Reputation

Many times the reputation of a college is derived from the school itself. There are public relations gimmicks going on at colleges all over the country. Trying to sort out which college is good at which subject can be very difficult. First of all, you can find a school based on what it has to offer in all the various areas that you are concerned. Then, try to find the best program within the list of schools you have available. Many schools will be strong in certain types of areas, such as: health sciences, engineering, business, education, etc.

Once you know *what* you are looking for it is so much easier to find *where* to go.

College reputations can also be regional. If I were to name the best engineering schools in the Northeast, my list may include MIT, Clarkson, RPI, WPI. Now, what if I lived in Western Pennsylvania? My list may change to MIT, U of Pennsylvania, Lehigh and Penn State.

My son is considering schools on the West Coast for graduate work in Chinese Relations. Reputation has played a role in his search to forgo the D.C. area for what he believes to be a more inclusive program in a specific field for continued studies. At the graduate level, I would agree especially since you are dramatically narrowing your scope to find the program that is just the right fit.

Consider where you might be 5 years from now when considering the reputation of a school.

Example:

A woman I talked with from New York told me her son was going to the University of Montana for engineering. I asked why and she replied that they had one of the top programs in the country. I jokingly asked, "what country"! Then I asked where her son planned on living when he graduated from college. Now it may be that the University of Montana has an excellent engineering program, but the respect in the business community may be regional.

People constantly talk to me about what a school is rated or what kind of reputation it has. My answer is that the reputation of the school comes from the students who attend there. If you like the school and feel well-prepared, that was a great school. If you go to a school solely based on its' reputation, you may be disappointed if it just doesn't meet all of your expectations.

A good measuring stick may be in alumni giving. If a school has a large endowment fund, chances are very good that the money came from former students who felt so good about the education they received there, that they gave some of their acquired wealth back to the school.

Have you heard about the endowment funds at some of the Ivy League colleges? They are enormous, but usually graduates give back from the millions they make. There really is a correlation. I have seen some small schools with some really large numbers and have also seen some large schools with some really small numbers. It definitely is a factor worth looking into.

Athletics and College

No one knows you but you. No one knows what you are capable of but you. No one knows what burns inside, what you have left or have yet to show, i.e. your potential. You will find the level at which you feel comfortable. You will determine how much you are willing to sacrifice of your body, your mind, your time and energy. You will decide how hard you want to work and the rewards you expect to reap.

I had not even come close to reaching my potential in high school and I knew it! I was not going to settle for someone else's assessment of my talent. The same things we talk about academically hold true for athletics. Find your level of comfort and then strive for more. If you do this, at the end of your career you will have no regrets. That is all any athlete should want.

The same advice should hold true no matter what area you have a talent in. Strive to be your best and know that there may be some colleges out there willing to pay for your abilities. It is also important to know that once you accept money from a college in exchange for your talents, they have every right to expect great things from you and will make demands on your time. It is likely that you will be told how long to practice, what to eat, when to sleep and so on. You must remember that you are receiving an education in return and its' value is what you can derive.

I would like to stress one important point here. **Athletics are a means to an end at best for most students.** Don't get me wrong because I truly love sports, but I am over 40 years old with a great career in life and fond memories of sports, not the reverse. Use your abilities on the field to get what you want off the field. If you have your priorities straight then all will go smoothly.

I'm not an athlete. Why do I care in what division the sports teams play?

College athletics is big business. The athletes, whether they recognize it or not, are paid to perform. While the average student gets through college with loans and grants and work-study and Mom and Dad, the athletes go for free. (At least the good ones do). These athletes have a responsibility to put fannies in the seats. The people, who sit in those seats, pay for those seats. They eat food; buy programs, tee-shirts, mugs, etc. They buy advertising and sponsorships.

In other words, those people, whom the athletes have attracted, create a revenue base for the college. Most, if not all colleges, are required to share their revenues with the university as a whole. That means better chemistry labs, and more varieties of food in the cafeteria. That means more financial aid, a new theatre and day-care center. All this because a guy can dunk one-handed while doing a 180-degree spin or run the hundred-yard dash in 9.5 seconds.

There is another reason why you should care about sports. It can create a positive atmosphere on campus. When the team is winning, there is excitement in the air. While living in Syracuse, New York, I was caught up in the Orange Crush. Syracuse University football and Basketball were big-time programs regularly ranked in the top twenty of the country. I would go to the bank and the tellers wore orange on game day. You would see posters all around town. Local establishments carried games and the excitement was in the air. Pep-rallies on campus, trips to NCAA tournament or bowl games for the enthusiasts were quite common. So walking around town, whether you cared about sports or not, you became a part of the excitement.

Another reason that sports can be important is publicity. Did you ever watch a college game on a network? Somewhere during that game there is going to be a free advertisement for both colleges playing in that contest. There is a chance to show off facilities, programs, location, student life, etc. Notoriety can bring its' own rewards.

How about graduating from Syracuse University in upstate New York and then looking for a job in Boulder, Colorado? Do you think that the person interviewing you ever watched SportsCenter on ESPN? Maybe they did, and because of that, you now have some legitimacy to your resume instead of "where's Syracuse University"?

There are plenty of colleges that are doing just fine based on academics alone. For my money, I want the excitement, too.

Understanding Financial Aid

Financial aid or student aid is intended to meet three primary goals. The first is to provide the student with access to some form of postsecondary education. The second permits the student to choose between types of postsecondary educational institutions. Choice may involve dormitory or apartment costs, travel costs, as well as university or private college tuition rates.

Although the first two goals are important, a third goal is often overlooked. Persistence is the ability to stay and complete a particular program or course of study. This goal may involve from one to eight years in which financial aid plays a crucial role in the future of the student reaching his or her potential career goals. Thus the underlying mission of all three of these goals is that financial aid permits attendance at a postsecondary institution, which may not be possible without such aid.

In 1992, the federal government introduced the FAFSA, Free Application Form for Student Aid. Out went the uniform methodology as the sole source for determining financial need. Another form, the CSS Financial Aid Report, seeks to gain information for private schools who use its' services. The old formula used before 1992 is in essence, still employed by these schools and by many others who will send out their own financial aid forms.

The federal aid formula does not include the value of the home, does not ask about other indebtedness and does not go into a lot of detail. However, many of the schools using only the FAFSA, can have difficulty in meeting the EFC or Estimated Family Contribution for those who apply for aid.

The single most important element of financial aid is to be EARLY!

When you look into the resources like The Financial aid page, for example, you will be asked a series of financial questions regarding the year of student enrollment. You can use this worksheet as a base to work from which to derive your information. Most of the information pertains to the FAFSA form but some questions would likely be asked on the CSS Profile or institutional form.

Financial Aid Questionnaire

Income (parents)

Father _____

Mother _____

Untaxed _____

Soc.Sec. _____

Child Supp. _____

Interest Inc. _____

Dividend Inc. _____

Other Inc. _____

Total Income _____

Assets	Savings	Checking	Stocks	Bonds	CD's
	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Home Value _____

Mortgage _____

Year Bought _____

Amount _____

Other Real Estate _____

Income (student) _____

Assets _____

Family Medical Expenses _____

of exemptions claimed _____

of family members at home _____

of children in private school _____

tuition for above _____ Age of older parent _____ # of family members in college _____

Why are they asking for this information? The FAFSA form will ask general questions such as income, assets, family members in college. However, a college has the right to probe much deeper and ask about home value, retirement accounts, other real estate, etc. Be prepared a year in advance for what might be asked, then you can get through the process in the best possible light.

Great Source:

Financial Aid Page – Get to a financial aid calculator and plug in the numbers to see where you stand!

Great Source: FAST WEB - searches for non-need outside scholarships at no cost.

Types of Financial Aid

Pell Grant – This is a federal grant and is the largest Federal Student Aid Program. Application for the Pell Grant is through the FAFSA.

Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant – This program is also administered through the federal government and is awarded at the discretion of the individual college financial aid officer.

Institutional Grants – These are *need-based* awards given out by the college financial aid officer.

State Funded Scholarship Programs – Most, if not all states, have some method of awarding money to residents based on similar criteria used in determining federal aid. The amount of the award, however, can vary greatly from federal standards and is not dependent upon a student receiving federal aid.

All of the above programs will leave you with NO money to pay back, NO strings attached and NO future obligations. These are the BEST sources of financial aid available.

Scholarships – Academic scholarships have a wide variety of ranges. They can be based on grades, class rank, SAT scores, ACT scores, extracurricular activities, etc. Usually the student receiving an academic scholarship is required to maintain a certain G.P.A. to continue the award. Always know the guidelines before accepting such an award. Athletic scholarships are given to gifted athletes with the understanding that they will contribute to the reputation of the giving institution. “Pay for Play” is a common terminology in this case and the student should be advised that although the glamour of receiving an athletic scholarship can be potent, the fall from grace can be devastating. Division I sports are allowed to give full scholarships.

Division II schools may give scholarships covering tuition or room and board. Division III schools are not permitted to give out scholarships.

Non-Need scholarships – have a tremendous appeal to those who cannot qualify for traditional financial aid awards. Usually there is a competition for awards whether local, regional or national. The allure for someone who is also receiving financial aid is far less because most outside awards will be blended into the existing financial aid package, thus reducing their effectiveness.

Work on Campus – As a veteran of three years of college work-study, it is an option I highly recommend. Some jobs offer the student an opportunity to study while making money. Others offer a refreshing insight into the real world without a degree. Students are paid for the work they do consisting of usually no more than 10-12 hours per week while earning at least minimum wage. The concept is for the student to use the money for books, supplies and personal expenses. Most awards will be in the \$1,000 to \$2,000 a year range.

Loans – Federal Guaranteed Student Loan (Stafford Loan) Program is a long-term, low interest loan available to students who qualify. Amounts that can be borrowed are \$2,625 freshman year, \$3,500 sophomore year and \$5,500 junior and senior years. Total cannot exceed \$23,000. Interest rates for these loans are variable. Interest on GSL loans, is paid by the federal government, up until the student has completed or left college. Repayment on the loan begins 6 months after graduation.

The Unsubsidized Stafford Loan allows students to borrow the same amounts while paying interest only during the college attendance years unless deferred.

The Federal Perkins Loan Program is awarded to students with significant need. It has a ceiling on the amount you can borrow and repayment starts 6 months after graduation or termination from college.

The Federal PLUS Loan is available to parents with children in college. The amount can be up to the total cost of attendance. Interest rates are dependent upon current economic indexes. Repayment begins 60 days after disbursement.

Many colleges have additional loan programs as well as payment plans and special deferments available.

A typical financial aid package will consist of the following:

Grants and or scholarships
Federal Guaranteed Student Loan or Subsidized Stafford Loan
College Work Study
Parent Loan or Federal Plus Loan

***The Financial Aid Award on Page 27 shows
the representation of all of these different awards***

The student is expected to contribute as much as possible to his/her own education. That is why student loans are offered as part of the aid package. It is assumed that the student will receive an education adequate enough to pay back student loans starting shortly after graduation.

A student is expected to work, earn and save a certain amount during their college years to help pay for college. Although it is not present in the equation shown, a student with some monies available upon high school graduation can cut into either the student loan amount or work-study amount instead of accepting the entire financial aid award.

It is imperative to note that the award on Page 27 was not the original award sent by the college. Some negotiating took place and adjustments were also made regarding the family medical expenses. If you feel that an award is not right, you should contact the financial aid office to ask for a review. Also note that the student did not pay less for college than the EFC had anticipated, the package was merely reshaped to be more favorable to the student.

Student Aid Report (SAR) Example

The key to the student aid report is your EFC.

When you file a FAFSA, you will generate a student aid report. This report verifies your information and allows for corrections to be made to the original filing. Since corrections can be made and time is of the essence it is very wise to ESTIMATE your financial answers to get the process started instead of waiting until you have completed an income tax return.

FAFSA on the Web Submission Confirmation

Congratulations on completing your application! Your FAFSA Corrections on the Web form has been submitted to the U.S. Department of Education.

Your confirmation number is: 02/05/2Q05 15:18:25

If you have access to a printer, we recommend you print this page out and keep it for your records. If you do not have access to a printer, write down the COMPLETE confirmation number and keep it for your records. This confirmation number is proof that your FAFSA Corrections on the Web form was received.

Your estimated Expected Family Contribution (EFC) is: 7051

Your estimated EFC is a preliminary estimate based on the information you provided on this FAFSA Corrections on the Web form, it is subject to change based upon your school's verification of information you provided. The EFC is used to determine your (and your spouses, if applicable) eligibility for federal student aid. Note that many schools have their own methodology to determine your family contribution and financial need. You will receive an official EFC on your Student Aid Report (SAR) based on the processing results of your FAFSA Corrections on the Web form. For more information about the EFC see www.studentaid.ed.gov, select "Funding" then "Student Aid Eligibility" and scroll down to "How will I know what I'm eligible for?"

What Happens Now?

Submitting your FAFSA Corrections on the Web form is only one step in completing the FAFSA application process. In order to complete this process, please review and complete the following instructions,

A. Provide required signatures.

Your FAFSA Corrections on the Web form will be sent to the Central Processing System within three days, and it will be processed immediately. You should receive a Student Aid Report (SAR).

B. Check the status of your submitted FAFSA Corrections on the Web form.

We recommend you check the status of your FAFSA Corrections on the Web form:

- You can check the status of your submitted FAFSA Corrections on the Web form by selecting this check my submitted FAFSA Corrections on the Web form link, or selecting the Check status of a submitted FAFSA or Print a Signature Page option under the FAFSA Follow-up section of the FAFSA on the Web home page at www.fafsa.ed.gov.
- If you have signed electronically using a PIN, you can check in 3-4 days to see if we have processed your FAFSA Corrections on the Web form with an official EFC.
- If your signature(s) are missing, and you have printed, signed and mailed a signature page, you can check in one to two weeks to see if we've received the necessary signature(s) and processed your FAFSA Corrections on the Web form with an official EFC.

C. Receive and review your Student Aid Report (SAR).

Understanding the Aid Package and Components



MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF FINANCIAL AID
2807 North Glebe Road ❖ Arlington, VA 22207-4299

Financial Aid Award

Academic Year 2005-2006

Date 09 May 2005

Spencerport, NY 14559-9746

ID# :

This letter is our offer of financial aid to assist you with attending classes at Marymount University. If you wish to decline an award, draw one line through it and return this form to the Financial Aid Office. An asterisk (*) indicates the award amount is estimated and is unofficial unless you have been notified otherwise. All awards are dependent upon funding from federal, state and private sources. The Financial Aid Office reserves the right to request documentation to verify any information used to determine eligibility for financial assistance.

AWARD

Program	Fall	Spring	Summer	Total
MU PRESIDENT'S ACADEMIC SCHOL.	6000	6000		12000
SUBSIDIZED STAFFORD LOAN	1313	1312		2625
MU TUITION GRANT	2500	2500		5000
COLLEGE WORK-STUDY (FEDERAL)	900	900		1800
FEDERAL PLUS LOAN	3522	3521		7043

This award is based on the following expected information:

1. You will enroll in and maintain the following minimum number of credit hours for each academic session as indicated:
For Fall (at least) 12.00 For Spring (at least) 12.00 For Summer (at least)
2. Your Residence Status will be: For Fall DORMITORY For Spring DORMITORY For Summer
3. You will read and agree to all the conditions printed on the back of this form
4. You will observe the special conditions indicated below.
If your award includes College Work-Study, note that awards cannot be applied directly to University charges
If your award includes a Stafford and/or PLUS loan, see the enclosed brochure for application instructions

After adjusting for your medical expenses you now
qualify for \$5000 in Marymount Grant.

- Notice that the EFC and Federal Plus Loan numbers are virtually the same. The grant was increased to reflect higher medical expenses and the student was rewarded for good academics as well. In addition, the student received a work-study allowance and a Stafford Loan at the maximum level for a freshman. The total package of \$21,425 was represented by \$17,000 in gift aid which accounted for 79% of the award. The total costs for year 1 were \$28,468.

Tips for College Financial Planning:

- The best time to start planning is before January of the student's junior year. All information required on the financial aid form reflects that following year.
- Check out sources before doing planning: Peterson's Guides, the internet (the Financial Aid Page) and get a good idea of what your family contribution is and how changes will be reflected.
- On joint accounts held by parents and children, parents should claim the interest for the appropriate FAFSA filing years.
- Never assume that a school is too expensive! Financial aid and academic scholarships can make a **HUGE** difference.
- Make sure before accepting an award package that you ask the administrator if the package is guaranteed based on the current numbers and will increase or decrease only according to those numbers.
- Financial aid awards are usually presented between late February and late April. Do not cave in from demands for a decision from one school if you are still waiting to hear from others. You should have until May 1st to reach a decision.
- **DO** expect that you can appeal any financial aid award and that there is a good possibility it can be changed.
- **When you are using the financial aid calculators, try to experiment with the numbers based upon your family situation. So many times people would ask me questions like:**
 1. Should my spouse quit his/her job so we can get more aid? No.
 2. Should I put my kids money into my account? The answer to that one is easy because you will be figured to contribute at about a 5.5% rate and your son/daughter at a 35% rate.
 3. What if I take out a home equity loan? Check with your financial advisor.
 4. Does it matter how much my son/daughter makes from their employment? Check with your financial advisor.
 5. I don't claim my son/daughter, can I still file? The answer is no you **MUST** claim the child for whom you are filing for financial aid.
 6. What if I (the parent) go to college part-time? You will need at least 6 credit hours per semester and it will be up to the discretion of each college as to how much credit they will give you for that.
 7. We have unusually high expenses, does that matter? It does if they fit the right categories like medical expenses (see award letter above), higher taxes, family grievances, etc.

Check into non-need scholarships through the high school guidance office, library, the Internet or your local weekly newspaper. Do not pay for this service because it is merely an information service, not a guarantee of assistance.

The Timeline

Freshman Year – Wherever possible, take classes that will enrich and challenge the best in you. This is the beginning of high school, all these grades count on your college resume, so be studious in what you do.

Sophomore Year – Begin the search for what it is that you want to do. Start exploring your options and recognize your interests.

Junior Year – Begin the college planning process, college search process and parents should be doing some financial planning if necessary before the first of the year.

Senior Year – essays, narrowing the college choice, scholarship searches (both local and national).

Regardless of what time of year it is you should use the following guide:

- 1) Find someone in the field(s) of study in which you are interested. Take an interest in what they do, how they do it, how they like it and what it took to get to that position. If you feel you have made a wrong choice, then start over rather than forcing a bad choice. I like to think that your instincts will prevail.
- 2) Assuming you are on the right path, make a list of colleges that offer what you want. Be as thorough and detailed as possible. Try not to compromise what you want, investigate a school down to the smallest detail.
- 3) Investigate the schools in more detail through catalogues found in the guidance office, on the Internet, in the library or order them from the college. Go through the program(s) of study to compare one school to another.
- 4) Map out a strategy for visitations. (See “the visit”). If you can’t visit in person, try looking for sites on the Internet that will offer “virtual tours”. Though you can’t touch the real thing, at least you get a better idea of the school.
- 5) Narrow your selections to 3 - 5 schools.
- 6) Start your applications in the fall of your senior year. Collect recommendations, write essays (see following page) and do well on your standardized testing.
- 7) Complete financial aid applications in the earliest part of January of your senior year.

The School Visit

You will receive all kinds of letters informing you of and inviting you to open houses. As a refresher, I went on an open house visit this past year and I can tell you this, I would have seen everything I wanted by doing it myself. The visit should include the campus drive around, the community search, the academic buildings of interest, the sports complex or other types of interest, the dorms, the cafeteria(s) and the social atmosphere. Do the campus visit, ask questions **and do your own visit.**

Campus Drive - You have a class at 8a.m. and it is on the other side of the campus. Look around and see how that will work for you. The school I visited was very accessible. No building was more than a 15 minute walk away.

Community Search - this is more for the parents to give you a better feeling of the safety issues, outside influences and problems the student may face at this college. It is strictly a judgment call for all of you. Stick to your instincts as to what your comfort level may be.

Academic buildings - try to find out where you will spend most of your academic life. Are the buildings old and dilapidated? Is there any new construction? If necessary, check out labs, research facilities, etc. There can be a huge difference in this area from one college to another.

The sports complex - Do you like to work out? Are you an athlete? Are the facilities up-to-date? Are the facilities easily accessible?

The dorms - check out where you are going to live. Is it clean, roomy enough, can you pick a roommate and how many will you have?

The Social Atmosphere - get a feel for fun, you won't be studying all the time! Is it in a small town that would not exist except for the college or is it in a thriving area where you may settle down after graduating?

Lastly, talk to students, they are your best source for honest answers. You can probably see and experience all you need just by talking to a few undergraduates who have been there and done that. You can talk about the cafeteria food but I would rather try it for myself.

Writing Your College Essay

If you are like most students, you see the college essay as another hurdle that you must jump on the way to being accepted at the college of your choice. In fact, the essay is not a hurdle but a rare opportunity. It is a chance for you to help the college admissions people see you as a thinking and feeling person, rather than simply a set of impersonal statistics. Except for the interview, it is your only chance to share your thoughts, insights, and opinions; to highlight your accomplishments; and to convey your maturity and outlook on life. If you see the college essay in this way - as an opportunity, then it is clearly worth the effort to put some extra time, thought and energy into writing it.

Choosing A Topic - Narrow your topic and try to be as specific and illustrative as possible. Realistically, the easiest topic to write about is you. No one knows more about you than you. Since one important purpose of the essay is self-revelation, it is no place to be shy or modest, although you should not exaggerate. If you choose to write about yourself, remember that little incidents and facts are often the most revealing of character and outlook. Do not be afraid to write about something you think is a little different. A unique topic or approach is often refreshing to a college admissions officer who has been reading applications all day. Further, an unusual or off-beat essay is an excellent way to show your creativity.

If an essay topic is chosen for you, put as much of your own stamp on it as possible.

Do:

Do think “small” and write about something that you know about.

Do reveal yourself in your writing.

Do show rather than tell. By giving examples and illustrating your topic, you help bring it to life.

Do write in your own “voice” and style.

Don’t:

Don’t write what you think others want to read.

Don’t exaggerate or write to impress.

Don’t use flowery, inflated, or pretentious style.

Don’t neglect the technical part of your essay (grammar, spelling, sentence structure).

Don’t ramble - say what you have to say and conclude.

Well, now you have it! This is a comprehensive guide to use when going through the college planning process. Keep this handy and refer to it often because you will be using different parts at different times during the course of your college planning years. The best advice I can give you is to be honest with yourself and others, challenge yourself to become the best you can and discover richness in life not on what it can buy.

Budgeting for College

You may be like I was, trying to figure out a way to pay for college on your own. Or, you may have an eye on the future and recognize that saving money will help pay down debts when you graduate. Whatever the reason, budgeting makes good sense.

A few tips

- Write down expenditures when they happen – it is a good way of keeping track of how and where you spend your money
- Set up a separate account for spending money aside from your expenses (cell phone bill, utilities, laundry, etc.)
- Stay committed to your budget or learn to penalize your mistakes – it is easier to say to your friends “can’t we do something that doesn’t cost money” than it is to say “can you lend me some money”
- Be honest with yourself about the differences between NEEDS and WANTS

My Budget					
		1st Semester	Actual	2nd Semester	Actual
Fixed Expenses					
	Tuition	\$8,000		\$8,000	
	Room/Board	\$6,500		\$6,500	
	Fees	\$560		\$560	
	Cell Phone	\$240		\$240	
		\$15,300		\$15,300	
Other Expenses					
	Travel	\$250		\$250	
	Books	\$500		\$500	
	Supplies	\$150		\$150	
	Personal	\$1,500		\$1,500	
	Allowance	\$1,000		\$1,000	
		\$3,400		\$3,400	
Total Expenses		\$18,700		\$18,700	
Income					
Academic Scholarship	Scholarship	\$5,000		\$5,000	
	Grant	\$2,500		\$2,500	
	Student Loan	\$1,250		\$1,250	
	Work Study	\$1,000		\$1,000	
Total Student Income		\$9,750		\$9,750	
	Parent Loan	\$8,400		\$8,400	
Student Savings		\$550		\$550	
Total Income		\$18,700		\$18,700	
Summer					
Summer Job Income	\$3,000				
Less Taxes		\$300			
Less Gas		\$400			
Less Spending Money		\$1,000			
Total Summer Expenses		\$1,700			
Total Summer Savings	\$1,300				
Need (see student savings)		\$1,100			
Balance	\$200				