



Find Your Right-Fit College

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Questions and Answers

Q: I grew up in a part of the country where the state schools were good quality. However, most people considered state schools backup schools because they were so big and easy to get lost in. I've noticed folks in California think of the state schools as the starting place. Any thoughts?

A: We do have a really good state school system – both the UCs and the Cal States – and it's the best deal going in terms of cost. But many of these schools are highly competitive, so you can't necessarily count on admission to a UC or some of the more impacted Cal State campuses or programs; you have to have a Plan B.

Q: How do we find colleges that have great programs for the major our student wants?

A: Start early and do the research! Google the type of program you're interested in, and get a list of schools. Keep in mind that "great program" can mean different things for different students. Don't just go for the most competitive program that's a reach for your student; look at multiple schools that offer what your student is interested in, and investigate what specifically the programs have to offer.

Q: How should we guide students in their school research if they aren't sure exactly what they want to study? If they don't have a career path in mind, how do I inspire my student to start looking at college options?

A: Go visit a college campus – there are a lot of different colleges nearby, so it doesn't have to be a big trip, and you don't necessarily have to take a formal tour. Also, the conversation doesn't have to be all about what career your child wants, but simply what they're interested in – what do you see yourself doing after high school? There are a lot of schools that require students to declare a major or a program as an applicant, but a lot of schools encourage students to come in undeclared, ready to explore. And even the schools that want students to "declare" may have an "undecided" category. And a lot of students come in with one major and then make a change. If your student isn't sure what they want to study, pick schools that offer a range of subjects and encourage that exploration.

Q: What are your thoughts about students attending a junior (community) college prior to the UC system? Is it worth it? Do students who go to a community college for 2 years have a harder chance at getting admitted to 4-year schools than students who apply directly to 4-year colleges?

A: It's a case-by-case situation. Going to a community college and then transferring to a 4-year school can be a good plan for a student who is really focused – who knows where they want to transfer and what they want to study. They can work with their counselor

to make sure they are meeting the requirements for a transfer to a specific school or program, and save a lot of money that way. If a student It's not necessarily a good plan for someone who doesn't really know what they want to do, because they take 2 years of coursework without setting themselves up to transfer. But it definitely can be a strategy and a lot of students do transfer in to 4-year schools (including UCs) from a community college.

- Q: If a student gets accepted to a college and then decides to take a gap year, do they forfeit their admission?
- A: It depends! The UCs and CalStates will not allow an admitted student to take a gap year, but Harvard will, and a lot of the smaller liberal arts colleges will. If your student wants the option of taking a gap year, make that a column on your spreadsheet: does this school allow admitted students to defer/take a gap year before starting?
- Q: My family is not religious. If a college has a religious affiliation, should we still consider looking at them? How can we determine how religious a school is? A family friend said to consider LMU.
- A: Again, it depends; there are a lot of colleges and universities that were founded by Jesuit and Catholic institutions. But that affiliation doesn't necessarily mean that there is a requirement to attend chapel or take courses tied to that religion (or any religion). As with anything else, that's something you need to research by looking at the school's website, or asking about if you visit.
- Q: How are you seeing HS dual enrollment/concurrent enrollment compare to AP classes for admissions?
- A: Keep in mind that students are considered in terms of their high school context. Colleges want to see that the students are challenging themselves in the context of what their high school has to offer. If that looks like dual enrollment, or AP, or IB courses, or some combination – as long as your student is able to do well in a challenging set of courses, that's what colleges are looking for.
- Q: Are the prerequisites for private schools (examples: Claremont Colleges, Stanford, etc.) different than the UC schools?
- A: The A-G and as much rigor as the student can manage are still the basic requirements. Beyond that, it's hard to say what a given private school will be looking for in a give year. The student who challenges him or herself is going to learn something, both about the subject matter and about what they're capable of. Present yourself in the best and most authentic light you can – and beyond that you have to trust the process, because the admissions officers are trying to build a class of students that will be a good fit. As long as you have a robust and realistic list, your student will likely wind up with a good fit.
- Q: What are some next items we should ask our school counselors to assist with for next steps? Beyond the School Profile.

A: You should get your high school's School Profile, and an updated unofficial copy of your transcript. Check out *College Match, A Blueprint for Choosing the Best School for You* by Steven R. Antonoff and complete some of his surveys to identify the specific criteria or factors you're looking for. (Set up your spreadsheet based on that, as well as any other data points you have.) See about getting support with essay writing. It's a big process, but break it down. Grades! Juniors, who will you be asking to write your letters of recommendations.

Q: For test optional schools, what scores do you recommend submitting vs not

A: Look at the college website, their school profile should include the range of test scores of admitted students. If your scores are at or above the median score, then submit those test scores. Otherwise don't. With test optional schools, there will be some inflation of admitted student test scores, but that's fine. If test scores are a strong point for your student, then go ahead and submit.

Link to short program evaluation survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2VFSVKW>

Enlace a la encuesta de evaluación del programa: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/QJG3L2B>

PEN and College Access Plan will offer a program in May that focuses on what your student can be doing year by year through high school to come out with strong college options.

Register for "Your Student's Roadmap to College" program on May 1st:

<https://tinyurl.com/PEN-CAP-RM24>