

USEFP News

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How to Pick the Right School

BY ANNA MULRINE

Undergraduate counselors lament that students often spend more time shopping for a car than looking for a graduate school. It will take less time to read the advice that follows than to test drive a car, but this primer for picking the right program contains rules of thumb that counselors urge advisees to follow.

Quality

At the graduate level, the reputation of the faculty and the particular department matters most. Advisers recommend asking professors at your college to make a list of the colleagues and departments they admire. Ask junior as well as senior faculty members. Younger faculty are "more current on the up-and-coming programs," notes Cynthia Yasinski, director of Career Services at Colby College. Alan Goodman, director of career services at Catholic University, suggests perusing the *Directory of American Scholars* and *American Men and Women of Science*: "They are helpful because they not only provide biographies but also critiques of faculty."

Don't underestimate the information you can glean from students in grad programs. The home pages of faculty members often list their teaching and research assistants. Try to meet them in person. Graduate students who attended your alma mater can help contrast your experience there with what you will encounter at a school you are considering. "Ask whether faculty is equally effective in the classroom and the research lab," advises Bill Wright-Swadel, direc-

tor of career services at Harvard University. "Find out whether students are enthusiastic about the program and whether they feel like they're treated as colleagues by faculty," says Jane Finkle, graduate and professional school adviser at the University of Pennsylvania. Students

can also give you a sense of a program's culture. "You'd think: 'Wouldn't everyone want to go to a school where there's a nice collegial feeling and everyone works together?'" says Yasinski. "Not necessarily. You may be the sort of person who thrives in a competitive atmosphere and hates group projects."

Services

Visit a school's career center and find out how technologically advanced it is. "It's good to know if they regularly send out job and internship announcements via E-mail distribution lists," says Finkle. Career centers also compile fact sheets that can tell you what percentage of students find work after they graduate, who hires them, and how much they

are paid. Minerva Reed, director of career services at Princeton University, says that one of the complaints she hears most often from alumni enrolled in graduate school at other institutions is that the library is insufficient. She suggests finding out the number

of volumes a library has in your field of study.

Cost

Do not commit to even your top-choice school until you've received all offers of financial aid. "You have a good chance of getting your aid increased if you have an offer in hand proving that another program is willing to give you five or seven grand a semester more," says Don Asher, a San Francisco consultant who advises students. There are programs, particularly at the doctoral level, that won't promise funding until students complete their first year. "Be certain that funding will happen if you meet certain criteria after that year," says Finkle. She

recommends consulting [FinAid!](#): "It's the most substantial page on financial aid on the Web." Assistantships are an important source of support. But teaching assistants should know the size of the class they will be handling, and research assistants should find out how involved they will be in doing analytic work. "I'd want to know whether I'll be able to contribute to the creative process of the research and whether I'll be given credit for articles that get printed," says Adonica DeVault, assistant director of career services at the University of Portland. "You want to go in knowing whether you can use your research as part of your list of published works." She also recommends making sure that a project's funding will be around for as long as you are.

Location

Go to school in the area where you'd like to work. "If you're getting a law degree in California, but your desire is to practice in Alabama, it may not be the smartest move," says Wright-Swadel. The more alumni in a given region, the better your chances of securing a plum position. Also, consider the differences between urban and rural campuses. High rents in urban areas could mean heftier costs, but your studies may require proximity to major business, cultural, or research centers found mostly in or near cities.



Making Extracurricular Activities Stand Out in College Applications

by Gen & Kelly Tanabe

At first glance, college applications seem easy enough. You give the basic facts about your background, education, and achievements. However, one section that stumps many students is the section for extracurricular activities.

Most students simply create chronological lists of their extracurricular accomplishments. Big mistake! This is a section where you can really set yourself apart from other applicants by employing a little strategy. Anyone can be a member of the Key Club, but not anyone can start an adult literacy program or become the assistant manager at Wayne's Weenie World.

The key to making your extracurricular activities stand out within the limited space of the application form is to focus on leadership.

But before you can do this, you first need to make a list of all your extracurricular activities, summer activities, and jobs. List everything big and small. Significant and insignificant. Don't forget that extracurricular activities include experiences like teaching all those hyper kids at Sunday School, whacking the ball around on the ping pong team, playing the triangle in band, leading a sit-in against animal fur, or volunteering as a candy striper at the hospital.

For every activity, job, and sport you should try to list as much of the following as possible:

- Name of the organization, program, or business.
- A short one to two sentence description of the group, program, or

business.

- Any leadership positions you held and your responsibilities.
- Any special projects that you initiated or oversaw. These could be either long-term or one-time pro-

Extra-Curricular

jects.

- Dates you participated or worked.
- Number of hours per week you spent on the activity or job.

If you're having trouble remembering everything, make use of other people's memories. Although you are far from senility, you will still find that it is surprising what other people remember that you have overlooked. Show your list to your parents, teachers, siblings, friends, advisors, or anyone else who may recall something you did.

Once you have your list, you need to prioritize since you won't be able to fit everything on the application form. The single most important criteria in prioritizing is to find activities in which you've demonstrated leadership.

Why Leadership Is Better Than Membership

Let's have some fun and put on the shoes of an admissions officer for the

next few paragraphs. Imagine that you are looking at your 551st and 552nd application for today. Whew, time to call it a day! But, before you go home, you need to make a decision about these last two. Here are some things that each mentioned in their list of activities.

Applicant A

Reporter for school newspaper
Speech team member
Teen Voter Club Member

Applicant B

Editor-in-chief of school newspaper
Organizer of citywide speech contest for 1,000 children
Director of Teen Voter Registration Day for Democrat Club

Who would you admit? Of course Applicant B! The activities in which you have leadership roles or responsibility are the most memorable and impressive. Applicant B demonstrates her leadership and dedication through her accomplishments while Applicant A only catalogs his participation.

When describing your roles, do not be afraid to brag a little. You need to highlight the importance of your contributions and responsibilities. Admissions officers like to see students who are not only members but are also leaders. They want students who are initiators both inside and outside of the classroom.

If you organize and prioritize your activities by the degree of leadership you demonstrated you will create a strong impression on the admissions officers and be well on your way to creating a winning application.

Hidden Costs of a College Education

Unforeseen Expenses Can Boost the Tab

When determining the price of your child's college education, you obviously included big-ticket items, such as tuition and room and board. However, you may be surprised at how many hidden costs can arise during your child's college experience. If you're not careful about taking all the likely expenses into account, even your best-laid plan for college financing may come up short.

The Total Picture

You should keep in mind that your child's college life will include not only classes but also the social experience. While that certainly doesn't mean that you want your child out partying every night, you should recognize that making friends and learning more about adult life and career choices may necessitate that your child become involved in various clubs or activities. Such activities hopefully will make your child's college experience more productive and enjoyable. Becoming involved with these pursuits will probably entail additional expenses that you may not have planned on, such as club dues or activity fees.

Your child's choice of lifestyle will also impact finances. For example, will your child live in a dorm and therefore eat in a cafeteria? Or will your child join a fraternity or sorority or perhaps live off campus in an apartment? If an apartment is the choice, will your child cook or eat out on a regular basis? Other expenses can include entertainment, such as

movies and concerts.

Talk About It in Advance

The key point is that you should discuss



these social, activity, and lifestyle choices with your child and come to an understanding about finding a balance between spending and making college a beneficial and enjoyable experience. While estimating all the details ahead of time is difficult, at least make your child aware of these issues. Encourage your child to discuss these potential expenses with you on an ongoing basis to avoid misunderstandings related to hidden costs.

Class-Related Costs

Once you've looked at the lifestyle and social aspects of college costs, you should

focus on the hidden expenses more directly related to academics. Your child's choice of major can have an impact on the price of college, as certain majors may involve lab or material fees. The cost of books can also mount up, and another potential expense is a computer.

Transportation Expenses

Travel may entail hidden costs in two respects. First, if your child will have a car, you may be responsible for parking fees, in addition to the cost of gas, insurance, and maintenance. Second, the distance between your home and your child's school can also have a big impact on expenses, according to how often your child comes home (or how often you visit the school). If your home is just a three-hour bus ride away from campus, then traveling back and forth will obviously be much cheaper than if the school is thousands of miles away.

Costs Mount Up Early

Even before your child leaves for school, the expenses will start piling up, since he or she will need to take supplies. These range from sheets and pillowcases to a phone and an alarm clock, not to mention school supplies and toiletries. For a more complete list of necessary items, see the [Off-to-College Checklist](#).

Plan Ahead

Providing your child with a well-rounded college experience is expensive. However, with some forethought, you'll be able to plan for and perhaps even lower the bill.

UPCOMING EVENTS AT USEFP, MARCH 2010:

Undergraduate Seminars
Graduate Seminars
College Search
Effective Essay Writing Tips and Statement of Purpose Workshops
School Counselor Training

Pease contact your local office to register for upcoming events and receive additional information:

Islamabad: advising@usefpakistan.org; **Karachi:** advisingkarachi@usefpakistan.org;

Lahore: lahoreadvising@usefpakistan.org

Upcoming Test Dates for TOEFL, GRE, and SAT

SAT:

General and Subject Test

Test Dates:

May 01st, 2010

June 05th, 2010

International Registration:

Please check for early registration options for international candidates.

iBT TOEFL:

Test Dates:

March 13th, 2010

March 27th, 2010

April 10th, 2010

April 24th, 2010

GRE:

The GRE Test is offered four days a week, Monday through Thursday, throughout the year.

Please visit our website or call in order to register for a particular test day.



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