

Life After Sending College Applications: What Now?

Enrollment Choices *by Stephen Borkowski*

Families face tough choices when acceptance and rejection letters arrive. "Any parent who's shopped for a prom dress can tell you, window shopping is easy. It's the actual decision that's difficult," says Sally Rubenstone, co-author of *Panicked Parents Guide to College Admissions*. Rejection letters, expensive tuition, wait lists, reluctance to attend and an absence of acceptance letters are some of the toughest situations for parents.

The Rejection

"It's the mother lode of disappointment," Rubenstone says. But it's probably not the first time your child has dealt with defeat. Parents should draw on their experience and use a strategy that eases the pain but keeps their child excited about their education. Give your child some space, talk up the schools they did get into and try not to take it personally. Appealing rejections to admissions counselors has become more common, but Rubenstone advises parents to respect the decision of the school. Unless circumstances have changed tremendously since the original application, reversals are rare.

Too Expensive

It's discouraging to have the grades but not the money. Ideally, families discuss affordability before applications are sent so that the child has realistic expectations. But sometimes no amount of planning can prepare a family for the complexities of college financing. Should your child attend their fourth choice because they got a free ride? What if a divorced parent will only help fund one particular college? A little creativity can remove some financial barriers. A financial aid package can be appealed. Families should approach school officials with a cooperative attitude. Beyond appeals, part-time jobs, selling a home or other property, reaching out to extended family, and applying for scholarships are just some ways families have come up with money.

The Wait List

After months of waiting the last thing anyone wants is more waiting. If your child decides the only school for them is the one that put them on a wait list, then "it's time to go for broke," Rubenstone says. Return any paperwork required by the college to keep your name on the wait list. Rubenstone tells students to attach a supplementary letter telling the school how much they want to attend and why, citing specific reasons. Now is the time for your child to creatively draw positive attention to their application and show why they're a good fit for the school. Parents should probably budget for two deposits. "Don't expect an extension from the school that admitted your child," Rubenstone says. You'll lose the deposit on the safety school in the event a student is accepted from the wait list.

The Reluctant Student

Suddenly your child treats the chance to enroll at their dream school like a prison sentence. What gives? "The student has changed, evolved or rethought [his or her] priorities," Rubenstone says. Find out if the reluctance is college specific, or part of a broader anxiety. Sometimes a follow-up visit to a campus is all it takes to rekindle the excitement. A gap year between high school and college may smooth the transition. "I've never heard a school say no to a deferral," Rubenstone says. Most schools will still ask for a deposit and families should get answers about the impact to financial aid. Parents and children should approach the gap year with concrete goals and realistic expectations in mind.

No Acceptance

Whether mediocre grades clouded your child's transcripts or the safety schools weren't safe enough, each spring some students wind up without an acceptance letter. This doesn't mean your child can't pursue higher education. Every spring the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) posts a space-available survey [<http://www.nacac.com/survey/results.cfm>] which lists schools that still have room for students. Another option is to take a gap year and apply to a fresh list of schools next fall. Rubenstone advises students with spotty academic histories to take classes at a community college in the interim.

Keep it in Perspective

Though highly emotional and stressful, chances are that your child will have a fulfilling college experience no matter where they attend. "Never suggest that their future happiness or success is tied to a college decision," Rubenstone says.

College Choice Questions *by Roxana Hadad*

You found it! The college of your dreams looks perfect ... in the catalog. But you can't find all the answers about your school in brochures. Contacting the school and asking the right questions will give you a better idea if this is the college for you.

Academics and Life After College

Your college should help you reach your goals in class and in a career. Make sure your school is going to take you where you want to go.

- Does this college offer the major that interests you? How strong is this school's program?
- If you are interested in a career that requires professional certification, does your school offer the appropriate training? Is the program accredited? How many students enrolled in the program pass the certification exam?
- How easy is it to change majors?
- Will your AP/previous college credits transfer?
- What is the average number of students in each class? Will you get enough contact/attention from your teachers?
- What is the retention rate (how many students come back after their freshman year)?
- What percentage of the students graduate in four years?
- How easy is it to get the courses you want at the times that are convenient for you?
- What kinds of career planning services are available?
- What does the school do to help graduates find jobs?
- Does the school provide free job placement services?
- What percentages of graduates find jobs? What percentages of graduates find jobs in the field they studied for?
- What percentages of students successfully apply to graduate school?

Housing and Resources

The classroom isn't the only important part of college. Find out if the campus offers you the lifestyle you want.

- Where do freshmen/sophomores/juniors/seniors live?
- How much does housing cost? Is it easy to get on-campus housing? How hard is it to find housing off-campus?
- What kind of meal plan is offered in the dorms? Do they provide menus for special diets (vegetarian, kosher, ethnic)?
- How accessible are laundry facilities?
- How many computers/computer labs are there? Are they up-to-date?
- What is the quality of the library and research facilities?
- What kind of health facilities and services does the college offer?

Finances

Paying for college can be tough. Find out what the school can offer you financially.

- How much does the program cost? What does that include?
- Are payment plans available?
- What kind of financial aid does the school offer?
- How easy is it to find a job on campus? Are there work-study programs?
- What kind of refund can you get if you have to drop out?

Student Life

Your campus will be your social world for the next four years. Make sure this is a place where you enjoy hanging out.

- What percentage of the students are male/female?
- How diverse is the campus?
- What percentage of the students are commuters?
- What do students do for fun?
- What student organizations are active on campus?
- What percentages of the students are in fraternities or sororities?

- What kind of recreational facilities are there?
- What varsity and intramural sports are on campus?
- What kind of transportation is available on campus?
- What kind of transportation is available to go home or to other cities?
- How safe is the campus? What are the crime statistics of the campus and the surrounding neighborhoods?

Don't be shy about asking questions - and look for answers in more than one place. University staff and administration can answer your questions about policies and resources, while students and alumni will let you know what college life is like on a day-to-day basis. So ask away and make the right college choice.

Do Your Homework Before You Enroll *by Stephen Borkowski*

You don't expect to have homework until after you enroll in school. But if you're looking to learn a new trade and boost your standard of living you've got an important assignment to tackle before you step foot in class. There are many vocational and technical schools that train new chefs, automotive technicians, medical assistants, hair stylists, interior designers, electronics technicians, paralegals and truck drivers every year. They can teach you the skills you need to embark on a new career. They may even connect you with potential employers after graduation. This education will require a significant investment of money and time. You don't want to enroll in a program only to find the education of little value. Or to graduate and find the promised salary in your field was grossly overstated. So before you enroll, you've got some homework to do. Follow these tips to make sure the school you're interested in attending will help your career.

- **Research your career goal.** Identify the type of position you want and look into it. Call employers and ask them what sort of education or certification they require for workers in that position. Speak with people who currently hold this type of job and find out about their educational background.
- **Compare programs.** Locate multiple programs and compare every aspect of them. At graduation are you awarded a certificate, a license, a degree? How long is the program and what's the cost? Are internships or apprenticeships offered?
- **Alternatives.** Find out if the whole education must be completed at this institution or if you can transfer in credits from a lower cost alternative such as a community college.
- **Other Costs.** Will the training require you to purchase your own supplies and materials? What will the cost of your tools, equipment, supplies and books be?
- **Facilities and instructors.** Make sure you setup a time to tour the campus before enrolling. Meet some of the instructors and find out about their qualifications.
- **Success rate and alumni.** Ask what percentage of students who enroll go on to graduate and find jobs. What's the dropout rate? Request to be put in touch with some alumni to get their perspective on the training they received.
- **Financial Aid.** Is financial assistance available from the school? Can federal financial aid dollars be applied?
- **Licensed and accredited.** Find out if the school is licensed, this is usually done by a state agency. Also look for accreditation, which is usually done through a private agency or association.
- **Background check.** You'll want to know if the institution has had any consumer complaints against it. Check with the Better Business Bureau and your state's Attorney General's office. Verify that the school has a good reputation when you speak with potential employers or those already working in the field.

Ten Questions for Parents to Ask Before Accepting a College Offer *by Melissa Bearnis*

"If there's one mistake my students make [when choosing a college], it's not listening to their parents," says Bruce Hammond, director of college counseling at Sandia Preparatory School in Albuquerque, N.M., contributing editor to the *The Fiske Guide to Colleges 2001* and author of *Discounts and Deals at the Nation's 360 Best Colleges*. Parents can often balance the excitement students feel about leaving home

with the knowledge that building a life in a new environment is difficult. They see the personal and extracurricular connections a student will need to be happy and successful in their college environment. When considering a college for their student, parents should take into consideration these questions that are frequently overlooked in the decision-making process.

#1: Are they your student's kind of people? Will your student find a place he or she fits in?

That was a key question for Catherine, a third-year student at the University of Dallas. "I wanted a tight community," she says. "I wanted somewhere I could build a strong foundation for myself." Does your child require a close-knit student community, or are they most excited by the possibilities of a very large student body? Are they looking to connect with peers from a similar background, or do they desire a diverse group of students from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds? You know your child best; assess their needs, personality and comfort level.

#2: Is the office of residential life accessible to the students? Can students switch if they get a terrible roommate, and how long does that process take?

Students eat, hang out and study in their rooms, and it needs to be a place where they feel comfortable. If the student faces tension or arguments in their rooms, it may cause their grades and social development to suffer.

#3: What is the ratio of residential/live-in counselors to students? How many hours a day are they required to be available to the students? How are they chosen and by what criteria are they evaluated?

Residential advisers (RAs) are the first line of defense in ensuring your child's physical and emotional health. They should be trained to spot signs of trouble such as depression, tension among students and eating disorders, and they should know basic first aid. They should also be people that students feel comfortable with.

#4: What are the hours at the student health clinic? What about 24-hour emergency care? What does the college's health insurance cover, and are pre-existing conditions included in the coverage?

Get the answers before taking your son or daughter off your own insurance.

#5: What kind of psychological counseling or support groups are available? What resources are available for students dealing with stress or emotionally difficult situations?

During the college years, students often have some big issues to deal with. Find out who will be there when you're far away.

#6: What is the crime rate on campus?

The Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990 requires all colleges and universities to produce an annual report of their safety and security procedures, as well as statistics relating to criminal offenses reported to the police. Request a copy and read it.

#7: Does the school provide student escorts to accompany students walking home late at night?

Students sometimes have evening classes or study sessions. Make sure that the college or university offers some way for students to get home safely after a long night at the library. If they don't, it could be a sign that the school doesn't take the necessary measures to ensure students' safety and welfare.

#8: What is the average increase in tuition and when are tuition increases next expected? Does the school have provisions to help students and parents cover the increases?

By asking these questions, you can plan your finances appropriately and not be hit with unpleasant surprises.

#9: Can you pick your academic advisor? How do current students feel about the advising system?

Students often change majors several times. A good advisor can help a student plan their classes, make career-planning decisions and graduate on time. "I didn't expect to have my hand held," says Kristan Lunardini, 21, a senior at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "But I never realized I'd be totally on my own. Like, there's this timetable and requirements, they're always changing, and there's no one to help you figure it out."

#10: How competitive is the school and is it an environment your son or daughter can handle?

Too much stress can cause illness and depression, lead to poor performance and even cause students to

drop out. Talk to current students at the school. Ask them how many all-nighters they pulled last semester. Ask them to rate the level of competitiveness on a scale of 1 to 10. Do they have time for themselves? Do they spend their weekends in the library? A competitive school isn't necessarily bad and can often inspire students to further achievement. The important thing is to ask whether it's the kind of environment in which your child thrives.

Choosing the right college can be one of the most important decisions a student makes, and can set the foundation for their post-graduate success. Help your student make an informed decision that will lead to an enriching and enjoyable college experience.

10 Questions to Ask Before Accepting a College Offer *by Melissa Bearns, Chris Diehl*

The college you're considering offers your major, a variety of extracurricular activities and the ideal social mix. You've done your research and checked out the school's location, class size, teacher/student ratio and dozens of other factors. You're ready to accept their offer to attend. However, before you mail the deposit, make sure you ask some questions that are frequently overlooked in the decision-making process.

1. Is the office of residential life accessible to students? Can students switch if they get a terrible roommate, and how long does that process take?

You're going to eat, hang out and study in your room. It needs to be a place where you feel comfortable. If you face tension or arguments in your room, it may cause your grades and social life to suffer.

2. Does the school provide student escorts to accompany students walking home late at night?

You may occasionally have evening classes or study sessions. Make sure the college or university offers some way for students to get home safely after a long night at the library. If not, the school might not have other security measures that ensure students' safety and welfare.

3. What is the average increase in tuition, and when are tuition increases next expected?

By asking this, you can plan your finances appropriately and not be hit by unexpected tuition hikes.

4. What are the hours at the student health clinic? What about 24-hour emergency care? What does the college's health insurance cover, and are pre-existing conditions included in the coverage?

Get these answers before your parents take you off their insurance.

5. How does the college handle leaves of absence?

If you should need personal time off for a week, month or semester, will you be penalized academically for the time missed? Will you be able to obtain a tuition refund if you're gone for longer than a term?

6. Can you pick your academic advisor? How do current students feel about the advising system?

Students often change majors several times. A good advisor can help a student plan their classes, make career-planning decisions and graduate on time.

7. Does the school offer storage facilities? How much does it cost?

If you accumulate a lot of furniture, books and personal items, it's a big hassle to transport it all home, only to haul it back in the fall. Ask your college if they have secure storage facilities for use during the summer or winter months.

8. What is the crime rate on campus?

The Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990 requires all colleges and universities to produce an annual report of their safety and security procedures, as well as statistics relating to criminal offenses reported to the police. Request a copy and read it.

9. What is a school's policy on dorm room wear and tear? Are you responsible for compensating the school?

A lot of things in a dorm room can break - chairs, desks, dressers, etc. And don't forget about the walls and floor - holes from hanging pictures, coffee stains and scuff marks. If damage occurs - and it will - what expenses are you responsible for?

10. What kind of food does the cafeteria offer? What are the options when the cafeteria is closed?

At home, available food might be something you take for granted. However, it can become an issue when you're living at college. Will the cafeteria fit your dietary needs? How late does it stay open? Get the answers so you can budget for food outside your meal plan.

What You Need to Know Before You Go *the National Survey of Student Engagement* [<http://nsse.iub.edu>]

Picking the right college is a big decision, one of the more important you'll ever make. You will need to ask many questions when making a college choice. In addition, consider taking a campus tour, attending a class or two, eating a meal on campus, and looking through recent issues of the student newspaper. To get a sense of how much you are likely to learn, grow, and develop at a given institution, there are some key questions to ask of the people you'll meet — the tour guide, admissions staff, an overnight host, faculty members, and currently enrolled students. Some of the most important questions can be found below.

Academic Challenge

Seek demanding intellectual and creative academic work.

- What does faculty expect of students?
- In what ways does faculty challenge students to leave their comfort zone in order to excel?
- How much time do students spend on homework each week?
- What types of assignments are given (papers, exams, problem sets, rehearsals, research projects, etc.)?
- How much writing is expected?
- How much reading is assigned per class?
- What are exams like?
- In what ways are students given the opportunity to express themselves creatively in assignments?
- What types of tutors or tutoring opportunities exist on campus?

Active Learning

Become intensely involved in your education.

- How and when are majors selected and can they be self-designed?
- How do students receive help selecting classes?
- How often are things learned in class discussed outside of the classroom?
- In what ways do students work together on solving problems in and out of class?
- How frequently do students make class presentations?
- How many courses require community-service?
- What types of internships are available and are they required to graduate?

Student-Faculty Interaction

Communicate; the more contact students have with faculty the better.

- How often do faculty meet with students outside of class?
- How many students do research with faculty?
- What does the institution do to promote student-faculty contact?
- What kind and how often do students get feedback on coursework?
- Who do students talk to about career plans?
- In what ways do students, faculty, and staff work together on campus committees?
- How well do students get along with faculty, administrators, and staff?

Campus Environment

Focus on your social and academic development.

- What do students like about this campus?
- What do students dislike or complain about on campus?
- What services are available to help students adjust to or help cope with non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)?
- What do students do on the weekends and what percentage of students commute?
- What do students do for fun?
- What types of public transportation are available on campus or in the area?
- What opportunities are available for spiritual expression and growth?
- What types of support services (academic and non-academic) are available?

Out-of-Class Experience

Discover positive out-of-class activities that will deepen learning.

- What activities are available to help students apply classroom learning to real life?
- What percentage of students study in other countries?
- What percentage of students do community service?
- What types of student organizations are on campus and how active are they?
- What kinds of leadership opportunities are available?
- What kinds of special projects, seminars, or other experiences are offered or required of seniors?

Diversity

Engage in diverse cultural experiences.

- In what ways are students exposed to multiple cultures or diverse perspectives?
- How is diversity incorporated into the curriculum?
- Where are students from and how many are from other countries?

Technology

Get connected.

- How is technology used in the classroom?
- What types of computers, technology, online information and courses, and support services are available?
- How many students have their own computers?

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Other things to think about

Campus activities

- What kinds of activities are students involved in outside of the classroom?

Intercollegiate and intramural athletics

- What types of athletic and intramural activities are available?

Study abroad programs

- What types of programs are available to study in other countries?

Musical, performing and fine arts

- What kinds of events come to campus?

Summer school/summer programs

- What types of summer classes or summer internship programs are available?

Special academic programs

- What types of honors courses, learning communities, weekend or night programs, or other unique academic offerings are offered?

Financial aid/work study

- What types of financial aid or scholarships are available? What percentage of students work on and off campus?

Library services

- How extensive are the library services, such as books, magazines, reference materials, computers, and other online resources?

Security and personal safety

- What safety services are available to students?

Health and counseling services

- What types of services are available for students on campus?

Career planning and job placement

- What types of services and programs are available? Where are recent graduates employed?

Living arrangements

- Where do students live? Residence halls? Other campus housing? How long does it take to get to class?

Food services and dining options

- Where do students eat and are there flexible meal plans?

Reprinted with permission from "College. What you need to know before you go,"
from the National Survey of Student Engagement.

Campus Cost of Living *by Bridget Kulla*

Starting college is your time to move away from home, but the location of your dream school may have unexpected costs. Not all campus locations are created equally. How far your dollar will stretch could depend on the cost of living at your college's location. For example, the cost-of-living calculator on Salary.com shows that living in San Francisco, costs 93.3 percent more than living in Cedar Falls, Iowa, home to the University of Northern Iowa. That impacts everything from the price of printer paper to how expensive pizza is. An online cost-of-living calculator [<http://swz.salary.com>] is a useful tool to help you compare how much different college locations will set you back. Cost of living is especially important to consider if you plan to live off campus during college. Rentnet.com reports that the average price for a one-bedroom apartment in New York City is \$2,788, while the average price for a one-bedroom apartment in Tampa is \$623. That difference in rent could pay for your textbooks (and then some). Many colleges only have enough housing to accommodate a portion of their students. Research the housing policies of schools you are interested in so that you're not surprised by the cost of having to rent an apartment for your second year. San Francisco State University (SFSU), for example, has limited on-campus housing options that are reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. Only SFSU freshmen under the age of 20 are guaranteed a dorm room. If you don't meet those criteria, you may be on your own.

Another cost to keep in mind while evaluating college locations is sales tax. If you attend Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon, where there is no state or city sales tax, you'll never have to pay more than the sticker price. Students at the University of Chicago, however, need to pony up an extra 9 percent to cover the tax on their purchases. Nine percent may not seem like a big number, but if you spend \$750 on groceries over the course of a year in Portland, add on another \$67.50 to get those same items in Chicago. Price tags don't always show how much you'll end up paying.

The cost of being a student is not all buying printer paper and paying rent. Between exams and term papers, you'll probably squeeze in some fun. Take a look at how much different entertainment options will cost. Are you a movie buff? A night out watching movies and eating pizza will cost over two dollars more in Los Angeles than the same ticket in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Into tennis? New tennis balls and an orange juice after the match will set you back \$7 in Boston but only \$5 in Miami. In general, living expenses tend to be highest in California and in the Northeast. Costs of living in the South or the Midwest are usually lower. Conventional wisdom implies that cities are more expensive places to live than small towns or the country. While this often holds true, many medium- and small-sized cities have their share of bargains. According to Bankrate.com, if you attend the University of Connecticut in Stamford, Connecticut, you'll pay an average of \$1.44 for a loaf of bread. In Austin, where the University of Texas is located, a loaf of bread costs an average of \$.74. Austin may be five times the size of Stamford, but living there can cost you significantly less. Don't assume that prices will go up along with a city's population. Before you pack up and move, tally up the prices of things like groceries, entertainment, laundry, public transportation and sales tax of your new home. There's more to your college expenses than tuition alone. If you know where you want to go to school, research the cost of living there as well.

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