

Choosing the Right College for You!

Colleges, like people, have different personalities. Their personalities are shaped by their location, size, programs, faculty, services, and diversity of their student body. Look for characteristics that are important to you and are a good fit academically and socially. Keep your college list fairly broad to start; it can be narrowed down later as you make choices.

Know Yourself!

- Is learning about other people and their cultures and values important to me?
- Do I want to experience living in a totally different part of the country?
- What activities do I enjoy doing most?
- Am I comfortable in a large or small setting?
- Do I need specific services?
- Do I know what I want my major to be?

Know the Types of Colleges!

Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) – The State System consists of 14 publicly-owned universities across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. They are Bloomsburg, California, Clarion, Cheyney, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock, and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania.

State-Related Universities – State-related universities receive a significant amount of support from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. They include three large research institutions: Penn State University, Temple University, and University of Pittsburgh, as well as Lincoln University.

Private Colleges and Universities – These independent institutions are privately supported and can range in size from very small (<1000 students) to extra large (20,000+ students). Classes tend to be smaller than in many of the public schools and boast excellent student-to-faculty ratios. While these schools typically cost more than public institutions, they tend to have larger endowments and can offer attractive financial aid packages to students who apply. Examples of these schools are Elizabethtown College, Lebanon Valley College, Messiah College, and York College of PA.

Private schools can be affordable. Apply for admission and give the school the opportunity to create a financial aid package for you.

Know the Characteristics of Colleges!

- **Academic programs** – Does the college offer a degree in the major you want to study?
- **Size of school** – Would you prefer going to a school that is very small (<1000 students), small (1000-5999 students), medium (6000-7999 students) or large (8000+ students)? Do you prefer small class sizes? Do you mind being taught by a graduate student instead of a professor?
- **Geographical location** – Do you want to go to school in a large city, suburban, or rural setting? Consider your living arrangements (i.e., dorm, apartment with roommate(s), or living at home and commuting to college). What kind of weather do you prefer? Do you care how far away from home you will be?
- **Cost and financial aid opportunities** – What kinds of financial aid/scholarships are available? Tuition (money charged to cover the cost of instruction) and Room and Board (lodging and food) varies for each school. Also consider the cost of books, fees, and transportation.
- **Student body population** – What is the makeup of the student population? What is the campus environment? Will you feel comfortable on campus?
- **Social atmosphere** – Is there a Greek system, college athletics, or a club that interests you? Does the local community support the college?
- **Academic reputation** – How important is the college's reputation to you? Colleges and universities earn their academic reputation based upon factors that include the quality of their faculty and resources, research opportunities, graduation rate, and job placement for graduates.

Know the College Facts!

There are many resources to help you find specific information about colleges and universities. Each HACC campus is visited by admission representatives from 4-year colleges. To find their visitation schedules, go to www.hacc.edu, (Student Services, Transfer Services, Events), or inquire at your HACC campus. Talk to the college representatives to find out where their colleges are located and what majors they offer. Pick up a view book or catalog and financial aid information. Visit their web sites or use the college handbooks in the transfer area of your HACC campus for more details. Talk to your advisor and professors and then begin to develop your list of favorite colleges. **Accreditation** by one of the six regional accrediting agencies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation is important.

Transfer resources and advising are available at these HACC locations:

HACC Gettysburg Campus: Student Services Office
HACC Harrisburg Campus: Advising and Transfer Center, C213
HACC Lancaster Campus: Career and Transfer Center, Room 221, Main Building
HACC Lebanon Campus: See your academic advisor.
HACC York Campus: Counseling and Advising, Y102

Know your Favorites!

Make a list of the colleges that have the characteristics you want. Then use their admission criteria* to categorize them in these three varying degrees of selectivity:

Safe schools – colleges that *almost always* admit applicants with your profile

Probable schools – colleges that *usually* accept applicants with your profile

Reach schools – colleges that are the *most selective* and may deny you admissions

A virtual campus tour can't take the place of a personal visit to the colleges you are interested in attending.

It is recommended you apply to 1-2 Safe schools, 2-4 Probable schools, and 1-2 Reach schools. Then plan to visit the colleges on your list. Make an appointment with someone in your major's department. Visit when classes are in session and make a point to talk to the students. Ask them if the professors are available when they need to talk to them and if they get most of the classes they want to take. Ask what social activities are available to students at the college and in the surrounding community and about anything else that is important to you (i.e., campus security, meals, housing, student services).

* Admissions criteria may include the number of applications received and the number actually accepted, their transfer student profile, their basis for selection, and their admissions requirements (GPA, SAT or ACT scores, course requirements) for transfer students (or high school students, when applicable).

Know the Application Process!

Many colleges prefer you apply on line. Go to their web site for information. Complete your application carefully since it is the primary document by which the colleges will come to know you. Apply for financial aid paying attention to the deadline. Request an official HACC transcript be sent to each college at the time of application. After your *last* HACC course, have a *final* transcript sent to those schools you are still interested in attending. Transcripts are usually sent institution-to-institution; however, follow the application instructions for their preferred method of receiving transcripts.

Follow up by telephone to make sure your online application went through!

In Summary

The college admissions process is competitive, and your chances of being admitted to your "Reach" school may increase if you successfully complete more than the minimum requirements. Most selective colleges look for students who have taken a challenging course load. Talk to your advisor to make sure you are taking the classes that colleges look for when they examine college transcripts. Take advantage of HACC's transfer fair programs by asking the college representatives which courses they recommend for admittance to the academic program that interests you.