



Developing A University List – Part of the University Guide – Part 1

Hamilton Gregg
How to Start the Process

Harrow International School of Beijing

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. Introduction: The College Selection Process
- II. The Goal
- III. Getting Started
- IV. The College Calendar
 - a. Junior Year
 - b. Senior Year

Developing Your College List

- V. Self Assessment
 - a. Goals and Values
 - b. Academic
 - c. Activities, Interests and Aspirations
 - d. Personality and Relationships with Others
 - e. Essay Assignment
- VI. College Research
 - a. College Representatives at Our Schools
 - b. College Guides, Catalogs, View books, Internet
 - c. College Visits
 - d. College Interviews
 - e. Research Questions
 - 1. What's it like?
 - 2. Can I get in?
 - 3. What will become of me?
 - 4. How much does it cost?

I. INTRODUCTION: THE COLLEGE SELECTION PROCESS

Finding the right college is a decision-making process. It seems hard because there are so many choices and trying to figure out where to apply is overwhelming. Most people choose schools that they have heard of, thinking – “they are famous, they must be good. Harvard must be good, it’s famous so I will apply there.” But did you know that Harvard only accepts 7% of its applicants? And if you are an international student, less than 3% and if you are from China, they might take 3 students. Wow! That is hard; maybe even impossible. So, how to figure out what to do?

The purpose of this guide is to help you sort out how to find the best school for you. If you want the best school, there are thousands of best schools. Each university or college is good at something. They would not exist if they were not. So, the real question is “what school is best for you?”

Now, it is true that everyone has an opinion on colleges and universities. They all want to share in your success or at very least share their opinion with you. Most people mean well when they tell you X University is a great school and you should apply. But the fact is, X University may be a fabulous school, but it may be the worst school for you or the major you want to study at that university is the worst in the country.

We have heard people tell us that where they go to school will determine their future. We all know this is not true, but it sure sounds reasonable. Bill Gates as everyone knows did not even graduate from university. People like Warren Buffett went to University of Nebraska, but later to Columbia University for graduate school. In fact, most Chief Executive Officers

(CEO's) of the top 500 corporations did not; I repeat, DID NOT attend an Ivy League college as an undergraduate student.

Let's look at China since this is where we are at the moment. Did you know that this year 98,000 Chinese students are studying in the US? That's a lot of students. Most universities accept on average 5-10% international students. When I say international that is a general term for all students coming from outside the US. If Harvard is only taking 3 students from China and all the other Ivy League or top schools are accepting more or less the same then where are all these other students going? To be gracious, let's just say that 100 Chinese students are at the top 10 schools – that leaves 97,900 students going to all sorts of different schools. So where are they all going? Lots of different schools.

I cannot tell you how many students come to me and say, "I have to go to a Top 50 school". Well, that's nice and I want to win a million dollars! The competition for places at those schools is very stiff. Everyone wants to go to these schools because they think they are the best. But remember, admission to US Universities is not like in China. The process is very different and there is no guarantee ever that you will get in to a school, particularly the Top 50, whatever that means.

Rankings drive us nuts. There are so many rankings out in the media it is hard to keep them straight. There is US News and World Report, Forbes, Business Week, World Rankings etc... and every one of them is different. We really wish there were no rankings. That schools were valued on teaching style and quality, community development, internship access, percentage of

students accepted to great graduate programs and many other qualities. Unfortunately, people who do the rankings use different criteria and many of those criteria have nothing, absolutely nothing to do with the quality of education.

So why do people rank? Because there are people out there who want to say they go to the US News and World Report Best School. It's easy to look at a list and say, "I want that school?" It is harder to do the research and find the best school for you. If we can agree you are the most important person in your life, then you deserve what is best for you. If we can further agree that you know you better than anyone else, then we can agree that you need to determine where to go to school. Besides, this may be the very first time you have chosen where you will go to school. If we can agree on all of these things, then, let's get to work! Because even though everyone is interested in where you go to university, the ultimate choice of where you attend is yours alone.

I hope we can agree on one more thing before we move forward. While it is important to choose a major, did you know that most people change majors 6-7 times before they graduate? And did you know that most people will change careers 6-7 times before they retire? Did you know that many people work in a field that has absolutely nothing to do with what they studied in university? Of course, there are exceptions, but for the most part this is true. Now, while students study their majors or while they are learning at school, what are the essential things they are learning? I will give you some time to think about it... By the way it is not just math, science. History... Come on... Ok, I will tell you – students are learning the following skills: critical and

analytical thinking, solid communication skills (reading, writing and oral communication skills) and they are learning to be good citizens. If you do not have these important skills when you graduate from university, it does not matter what career you have, you will struggle and most likely get fired. If we can agree that the main purpose of going to university is to learn these skills then it really does not matter where we go to university. I know that there is no school better at teaching math or science than any other school. The Ivy League schools do not teach them any better than any other school. French is French and math is math no matter where you study them. What is important is choosing a school that matches your learning style, has a community where you can grow – academically, personally and eventually professionally. The schools you choose should engage you in and provide you with opportunities to do research, get internships and prepare you for your future. But, they better be teaching you those most important skills – critical and analytical thinking and communication.

One can argue that the BEST schools teach those skills. I am sure they do. Here are two things you may not know. First, the Ivy League is for sports. Period. Yes, it is true; the Ivy League is for football, American Football. Second, Ivy League schools are much better known for their graduate programs than they are for their undergraduate ones. Finally, if the best of the best students are attending those schools, why are some of the top people in their fields teaching, doing research and working with bright young students at thousands of other schools?

Over the next year you are going to learn a lot about yourself as you go through the college selection process. Take your time, but hurry. There is not

much time left. There is much you need to do – go to school, keep your grades up or improve them, take SAT I and possibly SAT II, TOEFL, research schools, visit schools, get lots of materials together, ask teachers to write letters of recommendation, create a resume, write essays and apply. Wow! That is a lot to do.

II. THE GOAL

The goal of any good college advising program is to help you understand the college selection process so that you can make sound educational decisions. You will learn how to evaluate yourself, research colleges accurately and to communicate those things to the colleges. Throughout the college selection process, the focus will be on you - a particular student looking for a special college.

While there are lots of people who can help, it is your responsibility, however, to research the colleges, complete online college applications, take the proper tests, meet your deadlines, meet with college representatives, and arrange your college visits and interviews. It is your responsibility to make appointments with your college advisor to talk over what you are learning about yourself, how you evaluate your special talents, and what you are learning about the colleges on your list.

Our goal then is to help you keep on track, stay focused and help you through the process.

III. GETTING STARTED

What are some of the things you can do immediately to narrow the number of schools down to something manageable? With thousands of colleges and universities it is hard to sort through them all. But there are things you can do to sift through all of them.

First of all, you need to know what kind of student you are. Most of you have been in large classes in a very large high school. You may not know whether you would like smaller classes, know your teacher better because that is not something you are used to. But when it comes to choosing a university, the size of the school is important.

We can all agree that you know your current school. You have been there for a few years. Most of you know many other students at your school and they know you. They know lots about you. Your teachers know you. You probably even like your school! So, you may want the same style of community when you go off to university. However, you may want to have a larger community, with more diverse people, more options for courses etc... Choosing the school community is just as important as where the school is located.

Size matters in some ways. Most students think that a large university is better because it is bigger. But that is not always true. In a large university it is hard to get noticed. No one really knows you. If you are used to joining up with friends at school for study groups or social activities, it will be much harder at a large university. Consider for a moment what it would be like attending a school with 25,000 or 40,000 students. That is a lot of people! How are you going to manage in a community that big? Some students are independent and focused enough to cope with a place that large, but if you are shy, quiet, like to know your teachers, you will find a school of that size

really challenging.

Another thing to consider are the opportunities to get internships and research positions: the larger the school, the more competition. Sure, once you are a Junior there are more opportunities, but what about before then, in Freshman and Sophomore years? You want to be able to maximize your college experience because after four short years, you are on your own. So consider what you want to gain besides an education, because university is about so much more.

While it is important to think about size, some students don't really care. They can be happy and successful no matter what kind of school they are in. They just go about their business. Others need to think about their personal learning style. If you are okay with being a number, and I mean a number (a student ID number or for Americans, typically their Social Security number) and the bureaucracy that comes with a large school, then that is the type of school you should consider. If you would like a more intimate place, where professors know you, and you can be noticed then considering a smaller college maybe more appropriate. It is and should be a personal choice. But in order for it to be a personal choice it is important to consider what type of student you are and what kind of environment is going to bring out the best in you.

Okay, so now you have thought about size. It is time to think about location. The US is a large country with several time zones and climates. Not only should you think about weather but you should think about where the school is located – city, suburbia or out in the country. If you grew up in a large city

and like the excitement of nightclubs, museums and other cultural events, you may want to attend school in a city. If you like the outdoors, think about that as a location, if you don't like snow – go to Texas! Just kidding, but it is important to consider where you are going. In addition, how easy or hard is the school to get to. Is there an international airport nearby? Do you have friends or family nearby? There is a lot to think about.

The next step is to talk about College vs. University. The difference confuses most people. It is hard to remember which school is a college and which is a university. Generally speaking a university has two main differences – 1. A university is made up of different colleges (e.g. College of Arts and Sciences, College of Business etc...) and 2. A university has graduate programs. Did you know that when you apply to Harvard, you are applying to Harvard College, not Harvard University?

In reality there is no real difference between the two. There are great colleges just as there are great universities. Middlebury College is one of the top schools in the US as is Williams or Amherst. University Pennsylvania and many others like it are also well renowned. Now the problem may be that your parents, may not know the difference. Just point out some of these schools just mentioned and perhaps they will get a better idea of what we are talking about.

Now there are some other differences of which you should be aware. There are research schools, collegiate schools, Liberal Arts schools and specialty schools. Research schools do not take much explaining – big institutions whose primary focus is not only on education but also on research. They get

money from the federal government to conduct all sorts of research in all kinds of areas (science, economics, engineering etc...). Collegiate schools are big into sports like American Football, basketball etc... Liberal Arts schools may take a whole paragraph to discuss.

What is a Liberal Arts college? Generally speaking Liberal Arts is the study of English, Math, History, and Science. But it is much more than that. Remember, when we talked about the most important skills you need to be successful – well, Liberal Arts expressly teaches you those skills (critical and analytical thinking and communication). It is based on general knowledge rather than specific. If you want to be an engineer, Liberal Arts probably is not what you want to study but if you are interested in business, the arts, medicine, then you should focus on the Liberal Arts.

Specialty schools are schools that do one specific thing like business or engineering. For example – Babson College is a top business school. Cooper Union only teaches Art and Engineering. Many schools like Rhode Island School of Design and Savannah College of the Arts are specialists in art. The list goes on. For students who know exactly what they want to study and what they want to do for a career, and then a school of this type is an excellent choice.

One last thing - Throughout this guide there will be mention of college and university. In the US people typically do not distinguish between university and college. When people talk they often use “college” when talking about university and vice versa. In the US, the word or concept of “college” does not have the same meaning as it does in other countries. In Canada for

instance, college means Community College i.e. two year school, not a four-year school. This is true in other countries as well, where the idea of college is not the same as in the US. As mentioned earlier, some of the best schools in the US are colleges. So, the important thing to figure out is, which one is best for you.

Thus far you've had lots to think about. Not only do you have lots to think about, you have lots to do. Remember what follows is your responsibility. But you are not alone. We are here to help. All you need to do is ask. This college-planning guide will help you develop your own list of colleges with your academic record and your interests and goals in mind. So even though we can help provide information about colleges, make sure your list is appropriate for your academic record, submitting your applications, writing clear and interesting essays, reporting your SATs, and knowing and meeting all your deadlines has to be your responsibility. It is important to plan ahead, be prepared and refer to this guide often.

Let's move to some practical issues you should keep in mind:

IV. THE COLLEGE CALENDAR

Below is a schedule to help you plan ahead for the next two years. We strongly recommend that you follow it completely:

a. The Second to Last Year of High School

October PSAT - for all juniors

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| October-December | Begin to learn college research methods, meet with visiting college representatives |
| January | US College/University Trip or vacation |
| February - June | College conferences with college advisor begin to collect materials for the application, think about teacher recommendations, and check out some of the applications and essay questions |
| Chinese New Year | A great time to visit colleges |
| March 16-30 | Spring break – consider some college visits |
| May | SAT Reasoning for all juniors |
| June | SAT II Subject Tests |
| June - August | Visit colleges, write college essays |

b. The Last Year of High School

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| September | College Application Seminar |
| September | Finalize college list with college advisor |
| Sept.-December | Meet with college representatives; |
| September | Deadline for notifying College Advising Office and teachers |
| | of early application plans |
| November 1, 15 | Many Early applications are due |
| NOVEMBER 15 | Deadline for College applications for all regular college applications |
| January 1 or 15 | Deadline for most college applications |
| February 1 | Deadline for many college applications |
| April 1 | Common college notification date |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| May 1 | Common reply date, deposit required |
| June | Time to begin the Visa application process |

Developing Your College List

V. SELF ASSESSMENT

As mentioned there is a lot of choice when it comes to college or university. It is unmanageable! But there are things you can do to make it easier. Below are some tools to help you figure some things out about yourself. Self-knowledge is very important. By knowing yourself you can hopefully avoid falling into what other people think about what is good for you. Lots of people think they know what is best for you, but if you take the time to learn about what is important to you, then you will be sure to find what is important for you.

Below are some questions to get you thinking. Take your time on this section; come back to them as you go through the process of thinking about what you want out of your future educational experience.

a. Goals and Values

What kind of student am I?

What kind of student would I like to become?

What aspects of school have I enjoyed the most?

What part of school do I like least?

How do I define success?

Do I have ideas about a career?

Do I have short or long term goals?

b. Academic

What are my favorite and least favorite courses?

What do I choose to learn when I learn on my own?

Do my grades reflect my ability and potential? Why?

How well has my school prepared me for college?

Are my SAT/TOEFL scores an accurate measure of my ability?

What is the average number of hours I study each night?

In what kind of atmosphere do I study best?

Do I like to study with friends?

Am I easily distracted? By Facebook? Computer games? Yahoo Messenger?

c. Activities, Interests and Aspirations

What activities do I enjoy most outside of the classroom?

What activities do I plan to pursue in college?

What do my parents expect of me?

What do my friends expect of me?

Who has influenced me the most?

What kinds of surroundings are essential to my well-being?

Am I a leader? How have I demonstrated my leadership abilities?

d. Personality and Relationship to Others

What adjectives do I use to describe myself?

How would my best friend describe me?

Which relationships are most important to me? Why?

How free do I feel to make my own decisions?

How do I feel about going to a college where the other students are quite different

from me?

How do I feel about going to a college very different from my current school?

e. Essay Assignment

Use the assessment questions above to write, "What Kind of a Student Am I?"

This is an important exercise. Remember you will have lots of voices in your head as you write this – the voices of your parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents, teachers and other people. Try to think about who you are when you write this. Keep it simple and be realistic. This essay is about the kind of student you are now, NOT the kind of student you want to be! If you do not love researching or doing scientific experiments, then don't claim them to be something you like. Be honest with your self.

What you write here can possibly help you become a better student as you consider your strengths and weaknesses. Once you have done this essay and answered these questions, you should have a better idea about what you want out of your college experience. So, now it is time to begin the next step - Researching schools.

VI. COLLEGE RESEARCH

Now we are at the most challenging part – finding schools. If you have followed the advice about it will be a bit easier. But there are still some things to think about and definitely some things not to think about. It is VERY, VERY important to keep an open mind in this next step. Lots of students

“fall in love” with specific schools for all the wrong reasons, keep an open mind, being objective and remaining true to who you are will certainly help you sort through all of the choices.

With so many choices it is easy to get distracted, that is why it is important to remember what you want out of school and out of life. Some people will tell you this is the most important decision you will ever make. While important, I don't really agree. Who you marry may have more long-term effects. It is also easy to let other people tell you where to go and what to study. I will say that this is probably the first time you will make a “big” decision. So make it right and do it for you.

As you go through the process of looking into schools there are lots of tools to use – books, the Internet, your college advisor, college representatives and so forth. If you keep important facts about yourself in mind as you read, listen and see, you will begin to find key aspects of schools. Remember there are lots of schools and every college has something to offer. There would not be so many choices if they all offered the same thing. The object is finding schools where you want to go, to go live, learn and mature.

Over the next several months you should be taking the time to learn about colleges. So how do you go about doing it? First thing you should do is to throw away any “Ranking” list. At very least ranking lists are used to sell magazines, not education. They are trying to sell you on something that most likely has no relevance to who you are or what you want. So start simply, read some college guides. Here are a few books to get you started:

The Fiske Guide by Edward Fiske

The Best 371 Best Colleges by Princeton Review

Colleges That Change Lives

Eight First Choices by Joyce Slayton Mitchell

We will talk more about some of these later. But first consider these things:

When you read or hear about a college, notice who said it. Was it the college rep? What's his bias? Was it a student, what's his/her bias? Was it a college guide? Was the guide written by an educator or by students? What's in it for them? Why do they have a particular view of their college? One senior came back after a Northwestern presentation at a New York City hotel and said, "I'm in love with Northwestern; I just have to apply there!" Good for the college rep, he did his job well. THE real question is, why did that student come away feeling that and how can you find the same sort of feelings toward a list of schools?

Putting together your list of colleges should be based on your current academic performance, not where you want to be or where you think you should be. Lots of people make this mistake and end up miserable or with no acceptances. It is important to be realistic, because colleges are looking at what your record says now.

They definitely are not interested in "why" your record isn't better than it is. Colleges are interested in the record as you have built during high school, and where your academic record can take you now that you are a junior or senior. They want to make sure that if you are accepted, you will be academically successful in their school. That is why you have to apply to schools that fit your academic range. Remember, you are not the only

student applying. There maybe other more qualified candidates you are competing against. Your job is to stand out in this applicant pool. You cannot stand out if your grades and scores do not meet the schools basic requirements.

The point is don't plan to apply to the most competitive colleges with a B average in a minimum program with 600 SATs and expect to get in. There is no such thing as a “Just Try Application”. Students get accepted to schools because they have the academic record to get in. Schools look first at Grades (A-F, IGCSE, AS-Level, IB, AP, or whatever your school uses for a grading system), then SAT/ACT scores. If you do not have what they are looking for, your application will stop right there! Activities and sports count only if you have the grades and rigorous classes the college is looking for. Even though you may hear more about SATs than you hear about a demanding course load; how you do everyday in school is worth more than how you do on a three-hour test. Your SAT scores should support your academic record.

a. College Representatives

Each year, colleges send out representatives to “present” their schools to prospective students and parents. Representatives are a great resource. Many of the reps graduated from the school they represent or they graduated from similar schools. Some are long-term professionals. The main point is that they literally travel around the world telling students and parents about their schools and the programs they offer. They want to get you excited and interested. Just like the student we talked about before who went to the Northwestern presentation and came away wanting to apply.

Many times I hear students say, “Why should I go hear about THAT school, I have never hear of it before?” First off, that is EXACTLY why you should go hear about it – you have never heard of it before. Just because you have not heard about that school does not mean it is not a good school or more importantly, a good school for you. By choosing not to listen to the presentation, you are missing an opportunity to find out whether or not that school is right for you. Even if you leave the presentation thinking. “No WAY”, at least you know it is not the right school for you. AND, you now have a clearer idea about what you do want. Every presentation should help you find qualities in schools you want and do not want. That is research. Do yourself a favor; go to these information sessions.

Sometimes representatives travel in small or large groups. They usually travel together because they are either similar types of schools or they are very different. Sometimes you might be interested in only one of the schools. That is okay. Go listen to why they are the same or why they are different. In the end, you will know more leaving than when you entered the presentation.

Finally, another and very important reason to go to these presentations is this. If you find out that you really like this school, or the presentation reconfirms what you already know, you now have a link to the school. The representative will leave their business card with their email address. They don’t leave their card just to be nice; they do so because they are offering you a service. If you have questions, want clarification or just want some advice, contact the person. There are lots of rumors out there about college admission. I once heard a student say that a certain school had no financial

aid money for international students. He had “heard” it from some friends. We told him to contact the school and ask. This student found out that not only did the school have financial aid; they offered more aid to international students than most schools. Unless you have heard it from the source, don’t believe it.

The representative is your contact at the school. But don’t contact them about things you can find on the schools webpage or their view book. That makes you look silly. If you decide to apply, it is possible that they will be supporting your application in the admission committee. You will want them to know that you are interested. Lots of students think that by just applying, their application shows interest. But you apply in the fall and they read your application in the winter. Good things may have happened to you that are important to your application – you got the best grades ever, you finally made the varsity basketball team, you received an award at the Talent Show or your English teacher loved your essay on *Huckleberry Finn*. Just make sure you are contacting them about appropriate things you are proud to share. But, remember, they are not your friends. They are professionals. When you write them, remember to do so with respect.

b. College Guides, Catalogs, View books and Internet

Now we are back to talking about books and other research tools.

1) *The Fiske Guide to Colleges*. Edward Fiske, Time Books, latest edition.

This essay-style guide describes interesting information and evaluations for 350+ of the most competitive and most interesting undergraduate colleges.

College life and environment is the most crucial component of the college, if you don't fit in, you won't stay. Be sure to get an idea of "what it's like" to be on campus from this guide. It's the best... study it! It is available in the Counseling or Guidance Office.

2) *Eight First Choices*, by Joyce Slayton Mitchell, Here's the "how to get into college" guide written by one of your college advisors. It's the college guide that college admissions deans like best.

3). *The Insider's Guide to the Colleges*, The Yale Daily News, latest edition, published by students for students. It is student-biased and it's definitely the next best thing to being there.

4) *The College Handbook*, The College Board, 2008. One of the most accurate and up-to-date college guides available; the College Board collects the data each year from their own membership. Every college in the country is in this guide.

5) *The 371 Best Colleges*, Princeton Review, 2010. This guide sets out some of the best schools in the country by looking at both factual data and student survey responses. It will tell you "what is hot" and "what is not" in terms of courses, majors, campus life, food and other essential information. It also gives you a section to find out where students who liked that particular school also applied.

If you have any other special interests, check in the College Advising Office and bookstores for special guides for other types of colleges. And of course, you will always check out Google for any specifics that interest you.

There are loads of tools to assist you in finding information about colleges, universities and programs on the Internet. Here are a couple you might find useful:

1. College Confidential: www.collegeconfidential.com this is a great resource to find out not only what professionals say about a school but also what current and prospective students are talking about.
2. University GO: www.unigo.com is an other student focused search tool
3. Of course, College Board: www.collegeboard.com is a one stop site with information not only about PSAT, SAT I and II but also has some search capabilities
4. Family Connection: the web address will be given to you, but this is a great resource for schools around the world. There are a variety of tests: personality inventories, career tests and connections to *The Fiske Guide*.
5. UCAN: <http://www.ucan-network.org/> as they say “Get the Facts for a smart college choice!”
6. NACAC: www.nacacnet.org NACAC stands for the National Association for College Admission Counseling. They set the standards by which colleges and universities must abide as well as counselors. There is a whole Student Section to help guide you through the application process.

If you are considering the UK then you must go to:

1. UCAS: www.ucas.com UCAS is the University Central Application Service. You can not only find information about all of the universities and course numbers but this is where you will apply to university.

If you are thinking about Canada, each province has their own website to assist you.

c. College Visits

Living on the other side of the ocean makes it a challenge to actually visit colleges and universities. But this should not hold you back. There are a number of ways to visit colleges without actually flying to the US. Check out some of these websites:

1. www.YouiversityTV.com
2. www.campustours.com

These are two excellent websites where you may take virtual tours of most of

the campuses in the US. They are also good research tools.

If you can go to the US either on a sponsored trip or with your parents the campus visit will probably have the greatest impact on your college choice. For that reason, it's one of the most important parts of college research. An official tour of the campus, joining a group tour from the admissions office, or just hanging out in the student union can be worthwhile to you. Almost all of you have never seen a university in the US. It is important to get a sense of the academic environment, the social scene and the atmosphere before applying.

There are good times and not such good times to visit colleges. Chinese New Year is a wonderful time to begin visiting colleges since most colleges are in session with students running around going to class, hanging out in the Student Union etc.. Although regular classes are not in session, summer vacation is another good time for visits. In addition, if the school requires or recommends interviews you can more easily request a personal interview during this time. It is important to learn as much about the school as you can so try to get a feeling for the environment and the facilities of the college you are visiting. You can always return for a visit after you are accepted if you feel you need to meet more students and visit classes.

When planning a college visit, do not make the mistake of trying to visit too many colleges on one trip. Do, however, visit a variety of different types of colleges; this should help you clarify your thoughts in the decision-making process.

Before you fly half way around the world contact the school and arrange a campus tour, check the website first to see how the school organizes visiting the campus. If you plan ahead, the admission office will often take you to class. When on the campus tour, be sure to ask the student guide as many questions as you can think of. Students are often the best sources of information about a college that you can get.

Here are some questions to consider and get you started:

- 1) What is your largest class? Smallest? What is the average class size?**
- 2) Who teaches you, can you get help from the professor? How well do you know your professors?**
- 3) Who teaches the lab sections?**
- 4) Do you ever study in the library? Where do you study?**
- 5) Who grades your exams?**
- 6) Do students talk a lot about grades?**
- 7) Have you ever been in a faculty home? How often?**
- 8) Do you talk much about national politics and issues?**
- 9) Where are the granolas and nerds? What do you think of them?**
- 10) Where can I get a copy of the campus newspaper?**
- 11) What do you like best/worst about being a student here?**
- 12) Where do most of the students hang out?**
- 13) Why did you choose this school?**
- 14) Where else did you apply?**
- 15) If you could change anything about this school, what would it be?**

d. College Interviews

Some schools require an interview as part of the application process. The value of the interview is to get a better sense of who you are. It helps them, the admission folks, put a person to the application. Even though colleges vary on the value of an interview, many of the colleges to which you might apply consider an interview valuable in the college selection process. At the least, interviews on the college campus are a wonderful way for you to learn more about a college. Check the school's application policy to see if they offer interviews then write or phone for an interview appointment at least two weeks in advance. Ask for an interview, even though you may not be sure that you will apply.

Here are some important things to consider before you leave home and visit schools:

1. It is important to know important things about the college *before* you have the interview. Read the college guides and catalog ahead of time. Have some questions in mind that are specific for that college, your major or interests. Know your strengths and weaknesses, interests and special talents. Remember that interviews are a two-way exchange, a conversation about you and why you are interested in that particular school.
2. Don't chew gum! You want the interviewer to have a good impression.
3. Watch your language! Avoid words such as "like," "cool," "whatever." At least cut down on the numbers of times you repeat these words.
4. Dress appropriately since first impressions are important. A skirt or pants and sweater or any informal school clothes are suitable. Look neat and mature, you're visiting a university. Be sure to arrive on time, shake hands firmly, sit and stand straight, and in general act confident and happy to be there.

5. Admissions interviews are your opportunity to sell yourself. Make a friend of the interviewer. Look him/her in the eye. Be straightforward and relaxed in your conversation.

- a. Don't try to tell them "what they want to hear." Be confident that there are no "right" answers.**
- b. They want to know you better.**
- c. Your attitude toward learning is what they want to know most.**
- d. Do you have a sense of humor?**
- e. Do you have the ability to overcome tough situations?**
- f. How will you manage your time and life when you get away from home and you are on your own?**
- g. What are your values?**

The more you like you, the more the interviewer (and others) will, too! Practice makes perfect. Your first college conference with your college advisor is a great opportunity for you to practice a campus interview. Also, have clear goals that you are able to discuss honestly. Some common questions they may ask or you may initiate are:

- 1. Why are you interested in this college?**
- 2. What things are most important to you in a college?**
- 3. What are your educational goals?**
- 4. Why should we accept you? What do you expect to contribute to our college community?**
- 5. Don't give excuses for your grades and tell what you're going to do next year (wishful thinking). Talk about your strengths (not reasons why, or if only I...). For example, your love for reading, for sports, for a beautiful campus, for Latin, for computers, for politics, your pride in your family, your achievements, your dog training, your summer school experience.**

6. Take time to listen to the questions, and answer them directly. It's hard, but try not to worry about silence. Collect your thoughts and be sure you understand the question being asked. If you are unsure of the question, ask the interviewer to repeat the question. Tell the admissions person that you are eager to go to college and what you like about *this* college.

e. Your Teachers

College alumni are a valuable resource for learning more about a specific college. Ask your teacher to tell you about the colleges they attended or the colleges they know about. Besides, they know you pretty well; they know your academic strengths and weaknesses so they can make suggestions about schools where you might fit.

f. Research Questions

Here are some questions to consider when you are researching schools:

- 1. What's it like?**
- 2. Can I get in?**
- 3. What will become of me?**
- 4. How much does it cost?**

l) Research Question Number One: What's it Like?

Size, environment, location, number of students, geographical and international percentages, percent of residential students, diversity on campus, beauty of campus, types of programs offered, what sports division are they in, who do I know there, how do Chinese students do there? How large are the freshmen classes? Who teaches freshmen? How accessible are the college's computers? Do I have to take math or foreign language to

graduate? Is there an internship program? How many freshmen graduate from this college? What is the average amount of time it takes a student to graduate? What's the percentage of students in sororities and fraternities on this campus?

These are all questions you should be thinking about when you look at schools. Many students just hear the name of a school and they want to apply without ever thinking about the answers to these questions.

2) Research Question Number Two: Can I get in?

How selective are they? Do my courses show that I took the most challenging and appropriate courses? Are my courses more demanding than most of the admitted students? Is my record as good or better than most admitted? Disregard the general numbers (SATs, GPA or Grades as mentioned earlier, rank) that are listed in the college guides for selectivity because while those are important, if your courses are too easy and you are getting A+ in every subject, it is because your courses are too easy or your really are a genius.

This has been said before but how you do in school every day is the most important factor in admission. SAT scores are important, but they should support or be in align with the grades you earn. GPA only means something to your school. There are lots of different grading systems and thus different GPA's. Numbers are just numbers until one looks at what is behind them.

Transcripts – let's talk a moment about this very important document. Depending on the type of school you are attending there is some form of Official Grades issued. Some schools use A, B, C, D; some schools use 100-

90%. 89-80%, 79-70%, some use an IB Model – 1-7 and there is a whole mix in between. Official grades are those used at the end of each marking period i.e. semester, trimester. Grades from mid marking period points are not considered official. Many schools have semester exams and the add in other factors such as in class participation, homework, tests and essays. All of this information comes together to be put on the Official School transcript.

The transcript is used for a variety of purposes, but generally speaking transcripts are sent to schools when you apply for a seat at that institution whether is it s boarding school, another school or university. This is the record by which schools determine what kind of student you are, what kinds of courses you have taken and the grades you earned in those courses.

Many schools use these grades to determine GPA or Grade Point Average. The GPA is a calculation of all of your grades over your high school career. Lots of students moan about their GPA, but rest assured that the GPA calculation is only pertinent to your school and the students within your school.

There are a number of schools that do not calculate GPA. For instance. If you attend a British school that offers A-Levels. There is no such thing as a GPA because it is not a part of the school system or philosophy. At a British school what becomes important are IGCSE, AS Level and A-Level predicted grades. IGCSE and AS Level grades are important because they are externally moderated, meaning everyone takes the same test and an outside of school group (EDEXCEL, AQA for example) grade the tests. The same is true for IB.

Typically when you look at university acceptance data, the GPA you find there is based on a simple calculation of grades. This simple calculation is what we call un-weighted, meaning there is no weight applied to courses like AP, IB, A-Level. Therefore, an A = 4.0, B = 3.0, C = 2.0, D = 1.0 and an F = 0.0. So how is GPA actually calculated?

Let's say you have the following grades:

| Grade 9 | Semester 1 | Semester 2 | | Grade 10 | Semester 1 |
|------------|------------|------------|--|----------|------------|
| Semester 2 | | | | | |
| English | A | A | | B | A |
| Math | B | A | | A | A |
| Science | B | B | | B | B |
| History | C | B | | B | C |
| Language | A | B | | A | B |

For the sake of this example I have not included A+ or A- since this is an example of un-weighted GPA.

Take all of the grades:

$$A = 8 \times 4.0 = 32$$

$$B = 10 \times 3.0 = 30$$

$$C = 2 \times 2.0 = 4$$

$$D = 0$$

$$F = 0$$

$$\text{Total} = 66 \text{ (} 32+30+4 \text{ divided by (the total number of grades) } 20 \text{) } = 3.3 \text{ un-}$$

weighted GPA . There it is, your un-weighted GPA. In order to get the most accurate calculation you must go through this whole process after each semester.

Some schools will want you to do this calculation for the application. Others will ask the school to send the GPA. But since you now know how to calculate it, you can provided in the appropriate space on applications that ask.

Another reason schools ask for a GPA calculation is so that they can get a sense of your class strength. At the beginning of each year the counselors at your school will break down your class, usually at the end of Junior year, into Quintiles or fifths. This way the schools can get a sense of where you lie amongst your peers in the class. Most international schools do not report Class Rank. The reason being that students in international schools come and go throughout the year. Once, there was a very bright student who came into a school and took the IB Diploma. By the end of Junior year she had the top GPA in her class. Was she Ranked #1? Sure. Was it fair since many of the other students had been at the school for one or two previous years? No, it was not fair and hence why international schools typically do not rank students. But, they do tell universities that they do not rank and the colleges know and understand the reasoning behind the decision.

So while everyone is worried about the numbers, what they should really worry about is making good appropriate choices in course selection and doing well in those courses.

3) Research Question number three: What will become of me?

What do the graduates do? How many go on to graduate school? What kinds of jobs do the students get when they graduate? What graduate schools do they go to? What percent go to med school, business school, law school, education, and Ph.D. programs? These are very important questions to get answers too. Going to school is about your future and how well the school you attend prepares you for that future. You would be surprised to know that the Ivy League does NOT always do the best in these categories. There are lots of schools that send significant numbers of students to the top Graduate programs, or have better job placement in good companies. So, please, please keep an open mind.

4) Research Question number four: How much does it cost?

Money for tuition is a concern. While it may be nice to attend Swarthmore College, can your family afford the \$50,000 annual tuition? Do I have a minimum amount I can spend? Are the "public Ivies" Honors Programs (Indiana, Michigan, UVA, Wisconsin) a better value than a private college? Making choices has certain realities. While we may "want" something, we really need to focus on what we "need". Many people want an Ivy or Top education. But what does that really mean? There may be certain realities that cannot be overcome and family finances may be one of them. That does not mean you cannot go to a great school. You just need to be realistic.

Where can I find out more about international financial aid? Most schools talk about their Financial Aid on their websites. Be sure you are looking at the International section. Now, it is important to know that not every school offers aid to International students so you should always check to see what the policy states.

In the current financial situation, students are changing how they think about college. They have to since many families can no longer afford the high cost of private schools. So, where are they going - like any good consumer, they are looking at options that have always been there, great schools, offering great programs that are not Ivy League and do not cost as much.