Beginning the Search

Research, Record, Reevaluate

One of your tasks during your meetings with your college counselor is to create a college list that reflects the characteristics you are looking for in a college, such as size, location, and quality of academic or extracurricular programs, lifestyle, and so forth. You may come into your early meetings with some colleges already in mind. Your counselor will also make suggestions. You might also add names discovered through reading or conversations with relatives or classmates.

Colleges and universities suggested by your counselor or a trusted source may include institutions unfamiliar to you. Research them nonetheless. Never let yourself be guided by name recognition alone. Perhaps, in your counselor's opinion, a college that might be unfamiliar to you actually fits your academic and/or extracurricular needs well, or a recent BB&N graduate with whom you have a good deal in common had a great experience there. It costs nothing to explore!

Researching colleges is among the most important tasks you will perform. The goal of your research is to develop a list of colleges that you know well. To that end, you will need to use several sources to determine what makes each college unique and why each one on the list is appealing to you. From this list you will choose institutions to visit during spring break and holidays, and over the summer and, ultimately, to apply to in the fall. Use the workbook sheets in this book to record your thoughts, research, and observations along the way. In the end, these research notes will prove invaluable when it comes time to choose a college and write your applications.
RESEARCHING COLLEGES

1. General College Guides: Remember that these contain someone else’s assessments and views of a given college; do not let one source make a decision for you. We recommend that you research each college in several sources, both online and in print, before moving on to the next college. You should consider acquiring your own personal copies of at least one of published guide. Some of our favorites include: Edward B. Fiske’s The Fiske Guide to Colleges and Colleges that Change Lives, by Loren Pope.

2. Naviance, College Kickstart, Web-based Searches, College Websites: Using college databases, including the ones found on Naviance and College Kickstart, you can filter your search by location, size, major, and cost to find the right matches for you. On a college’s own website, you can request materials, take a virtual tour, and browse the curriculum.

Here is a short, and by no means complete, list of useful websites. Stay alert for particularly great college sites; jot down the Internet address and let us know what you have found so that we can update our list. Have fun, but be wary of websites like College Confidential that regularly post inaccurate information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholarship Info</th>
<th><a href="http://WWW.SCHOLARSHIPS.COM">WWW.SCHOLARSHIPS.COM</a></th>
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<tr>
<td>Naviance</td>
<td><a href="http://WWW.FASTWEB.COM">WWW.FASTWEB.COM</a></td>
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<td>College Kickstart</td>
<td><a href="http://WWW.COLLEGE-KICKSTART.COM">WWW.COLLEGE-KICKSTART.COM</a></td>
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<td>Peterson’s Guide</td>
<td><a href="http://WWW.PETERSONS.COM">WWW.PETERSONS.COM</a></td>
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<td>Big Future :</td>
<td><a href="http://WWW.BIGFUTURE.COLLEGEBOARD.ORG">WWW.BIGFUTURE.COLLEGEBOARD.ORG</a></td>
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<td>Roadtrip Nation</td>
<td><a href="HTTPS://ROADTRIPNATION.COM/">HTTPS://ROADTRIPNATION.COM/</a></td>
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<td>CollegeNet</td>
<td><a href="http://WWW.COLLEGENET.COM">WWW.COLLEGENET.COM</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>MyCollegeGuide</td>
<td><a href="http://WWW.MYCOLLEGEGUIDE.ORG">WWW.MYCOLLEGEGUIDE.ORG</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Common Application</td>
<td><a href="http://WWW.COMMONAPP.ORG">WWW.COMMONAPP.ORG</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Association for</td>
<td><a href="http://WWW.NACACNET.ORG">WWW.NACACNET.ORG</a></td>
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<td>College Admission Counseling (NACAC)</td>
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3. College Admissions Officers Visiting BB&N: Over a hundred colleges send representatives to BB&N in the fall to answer questions and meet with groups of students. An up-to-date schedule of these visits will be available online in Naviance, and will also be posted outside the College Counseling Office and in other visible places in the school. Often, these visitors are the same people who will be reading applications from BB&N just a few weeks after their visits. Don’t miss the opportunity to connect directly with this invaluable source.

4. Friends: You may have friends who are either in college or who have already gone through the college process. They are an excellent resource if used with care. Question them about their reasons for choosing certain colleges and avoiding others. See if those reasons fit your idea of preferred colleges; never cross a college off your list merely because a friend did not like it. Think for yourself!
5. Requesting Materials: You can often request materials directly from a college’s website. Admission officers will send appropriate materials and may also ask coaches, drama directors, orchestra conductors, and others to get in touch with you. The more information you provide, the more specific the response is likely to be.

6. Books about college admission you might enjoy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Looking Beyond the Ivy League</em></td>
<td>Loren Pope</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Colleges that Change Lives</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pope discusses colleges that provide excellent educational opportunities for a variety of students and helps frame what defines a “good” college.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The College Admission Mystique</em></td>
<td>Bill Mayher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Since its publication, many of the colleges discussed have become more selective. However, this is still a great introduction to the college process written by a veteran independent school college counselor.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Letting Go, A Parents’ Guide to Understanding the College Years</em></td>
<td>Karen Coburn and Madge Treeger</td>
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<tr>
<td>This book discusses the joys and challenges of parenting a college-age child.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Gatekeepers: Inside the Admission Process at a Premier College</em></td>
<td>Jacques Steinberg</td>
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<td>This book was written by a New York Times reporter who spent a year following an admission officer and several applicants through the admission process at Wesleyan University.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Where You Go is Not Who You’ll Be: An Antidote to the College Admissions Mania</em></td>
<td>Frank Bruni</td>
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<tr>
<td>A new addition to the must-read catalog of our suggestions, NYT writer Frank Bruni provides a refreshing take on this complicated process.</td>
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RECORD YOUR RESEARCH

Use these pages as a note-taking opportunity to help define your preferences as you research. Cross out descriptors you don’t want or need and highlight elements that are important to your selection of colleges.

CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING A COLLEGE

These are criteria that can be used to evaluate and ultimately choose a college, though some may be more pertinent than others in your search.

1. STUDENT ENROLLMENT:
   - **ENROLLMENT** – Small (1,000-3,000), medium (3,000-7,000), large (10,000-15,000). Freshman class size. % Undergraduate students.
   - **RETENTION** - % of freshmen that eventually graduate or return for their sophomore year.
   - **BACKGROUND** - Male/female ratio. % Commuter / resident. Geographic origin. % minority. % on financial aid.

2. LOCATION and SURROUNDINGS:
   - **LOCATION** - New England, West Coast, Middle Atlantic states, the South, a foreign country. Distance from home. Travel costs and convenience.

3. COLLEGE TYPE and PHILOSOPHY:
4. CURRICULUM:

- **ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS** - Proportion of study dedicated to core requirements/major/electives. Required freshman courses.
- **ACADEMIC OFFERINGS** – Majors/minors offered in your areas of interest. Breadth and depth of courses offered in your areas of interest. Interdisciplinary courses. Strong departments.
- **INDEPENDENT STUDY** - Individual tutorials. Seminars. Research opportunities.
- **COURSE DESCRIPTION** - Introductory/advanced/specialized courses. Courses for majors/non-majors. Number of courses required for major/Course availability.

5. ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT:

- **ACADEMIC DEMANDS** - Workload. Course expectations. Type of assignments. Academic pressure/competition.
- **INTELLECTUAL VITALITY** - Student attitude toward learning. Flexibility/structure for learning. Exchange of ideas. Interest in political, social, or world issues.
- **CAREER PREPARATION** - Pre-professional programs. Career advising and information programs. % who go on to graduate school. Graduate school and job placement.
- **INSTRUCTION** - What types of teaching/learning situations exist? If I know my field of interest, what courses and faculty are available in it? Do full professors teach undergraduates? Is there an advisor system?

6. CAMPUS and STUDENT LIFE:

- **TYPES OF STUDENTS** - Diversity and response to differences. Typical/offbeat student. Importance of money/material possessions/social appearances.

• **CAMPUS ACTIVITIES** - Activities related to your interests. Emphasis on social life, fraternities or sororities, sports, or other dominant interests. Clubs and organizations traditional/creative/competitive issue oriented. Presence of religious, ethnic or cultural groups. Cultural opportunities on campus or in community.

7. **ADMISSIONS:**

• **DEADLINES** - Application. Notification of decision. Deadline to reply to offer of admission.


• **SAT/ACT/SUBJECT TESTS** - What are the college’s testing requirements?

• **ADMISSION SELECTIVITY** - % of applicants offered admission. Average SAT/ACT scores of freshmen. % of freshmen ranked in top 10% of high school class. Freshman class profile.

• **FINANCIAL** – Need blind or need aware?

8. **COSTS and FINANCIAL AID:**

• **COSTS** - Minimum-maximum total costs per year. Student budget for tuition and fees/room and board/books and personal expenses/travel costs. Admission and enrollment fees.

• **FAMILY RESOURCES** - What can your family pay toward college expenses? Your earnings and savings.

• **AWARDS** - % of students receiving aid. Range of awards. Average award.

• **FINANCIAL AID** - Based on need/merit/or funds available. Loan and job expectations. Off-campus work opportunities.

• **APPLICATION** - Which forms are required? Deadlines.

9. **INTANGIBLES:** Does the atmosphere of the institution appeal to me? Trust your gut.
REEVALUATE & BALANCE YOUR LIST

The final goal of the college search is to create a balanced list of colleges that fall into four categories. The terms we use – likely, possible, unlikely/reach, highly unlikely/far reach– are relative, not absolute. In helping you determine where a given college falls in that spectrum, we use our best judgment based on experience with recent BB&N graduates, national trends, and institutional changes. Changes in academic performance during the junior and senior year may well move certain colleges into a different category, and better standardized test scores taken in the senior year can also increase the likelihood of acceptance. We offer frank advice to help you evaluate your chances of admission at a particular college – not as a judgment of your performance during your time at BB&N or your potential as a college student. Ideally, your final list should be constructed so that you will be admitted to most of the colleges on your college list. In the “worst” case, you should still have at least two or three good choices. BB&N keeps extensive statistical data on college results and stays in close contact with admission offices to present students with an accurate assessment of competitiveness.

Here are the definitions of the four major categories we use:

**Likely:** BB&N students with comparable test scores and grades are usually offered admission and an offer of admission is at least 70% certain. However, it is important to apply to several “likely” colleges as the admission picture changes annually. Note that we do not use the term “safety.” We believe the term “safety” suggests a guarantee that does not exist and sounds like an “also-ran.” We want students to apply to likely colleges that they like!

**Possible:** BB&N students with similar grades and test scores are sometimes admitted, sometimes waitlisted, and occasionally denied. Chance of admission is roughly 50%.

**Unlikely:** Labeled “Reach” in Naviance, BB&N students with similar grades and test scores are not often admitted, except in cases where extenuating circumstances, such as strong coach support or active alumni connections, affect the decision. There is usually a 10% - 20% rate of admission.

**Highly Unlikely:** Labeled “Far Reach” in Naviance, BB&N students with similar grades and test scores have almost never been admitted in the past.

We recommend that your final list of colleges includes at least two colleges in the Likely category, and no more than three colleges in the Unlikely or Highly Unlikely categories. The majority of your colleges should be in the Possible category. It’s also important to note that the most selective colleges in the country will be in the Unlikely category for almost all of BB&N’s students. In addition, because these colleges have so many qualified applicants, they're not concerned with whether a student can do the work - the majority of applicants can do so quite successfully - rather they are focused on creating a class of students who will bring unique talents to their colleges to supplement their stellar academic performance. Your counselor will be able to help you understand why certain colleges fall in a particular category. Remember that the selectivity of a college often has little bearing on the quality of the education and experience that it can offer you!
One of the most important tools you will use in the college counseling process is the Family Connection page on Naviance. Naviance is a database that stores all of the academic and college information for each student in your class, but it is a powerful program for your use. At the beginning of the college process, we provide students with a registration code for the Family Connection website. These are just some of the things you can do on the Family Connection site:

- Fill out the Junior Questionnaire.
- Search for colleges using the College Search, College Lookup, College Match, and College Compare tools.
- View your college list.
- Search for scholarships.
- Find college counseling updates.

You may also explore, alongside your college counselor in the office, scattergrams, or graphs that display the admission statistics for all BB&N applicants to a particular college within specified years. These graphs allow us to show a student or parent the anonymous grade point average and SAT scores for each student who has applied to a particular college from BB&N, and the decision rendered by the college. The scattergrams are helpful when searching for colleges that are within the appropriate admission range for a particular student.
JUNIOR YEAR CHECKLIST
TO BE COMPLETED BEFORE THE END OF THE JUNIOR YEAR

☐ Junior Questionnaire & Resume: At the start of the process, it is extremely important to take a personal inventory of your academic and non-academic experiences. The junior questionnaire is the best tool to practice writing about yourself and record your thoughts on these topics. The questionnaire and resume are located in the Family Connection site on Naviance. This document is seen only by your college counselor and must be completed before your first meeting. Schedule a meeting soon to create your own deadline.

☐ Parent Questionnaire: Parents can provide valuable insight into their child’s performance at BB&N. Therefore, it is critical that all parents complete the parent questionnaire prior to the first family college counseling appointment. This PDF form is for download available on the college counseling page on the BB&N website.

☐ First College Counseling Appointment: After completing and submitting the student questionnaire and resume, you may have your first college counseling appointment.

☐ Sign up for tests: Be sure to sign up for all standardized tests early. The school will not register you for the ACTs, SATs, or Subject Tests—that is your responsibility.

☐ Family Appointment: After you have met once with your counselor, and your parents have completed their parent questionnaire, they are welcome to join you for a family appointment or meet with your college counselor separately.

☐ Second College Counseling Appointment: At the second appointment, you and your counselor will discuss the specific colleges you have researched, refine your testing plan, and balance your research list with colleges from a variety of levels of selectivity and colleges that may meet the criteria you have identified but which you may not know much about. Please know that colleges and admissions criteria frequently change. Time to research!

☐ Course selection: Talk to your college counselor about your courses for senior year.

☐ Diagnostic Visits: Plan to visit some colleges during the spring. Try to see a range of colleges, including a large institution and a small college, a rural and an urban college.

☐ Additional College Counseling Appointments: It will be important to try and make regular appointments with your college counselor during your junior and senior years. The first trimester of senior year will be very busy with the process of finalizing your list, completing your applications and your essays. Your college counselor will help you through this process so be sure to keep in close contact with him/her.

☐ Teacher recommendations: You must talk to teachers that you want to write for you before the end of the school year.